DEUTERONOMY

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



Moses' last words on the edge of the promised land: remember what God has done, love Him with all your heart, and choose life

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of Deuteronomy. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

If I had to name one thing God did that I never want to forget, it is His forgiveness. Deuteronomy is Moses telling Israel to remember. I need that reminder too. Forgiveness and the blessings that followed it are what I want to keep in front of me.

Deuteronomy is the book of remembering. Forty years after the exodus, Moses stands on the plains of Moab with a new generation of Israel and tells them what God has done, what God requires, and what will happen if they forget Him. It holds the Ten Commandments, the great command to love the LORD with all your heart, and the promise of a Prophet like Moses. Jesus quoted it more than once, and He used it to answer Satan in the wilderness. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Deuteronomy. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and learn to love Him with my whole heart. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in Deuteronomy. It picks up where Numbers ends, with Israel camped east of the Jordan River across from Jericho. The generation that came out of Egypt has died in the wilderness because they would not trust God at Kadesh-barnea. Their children are about to cross over into the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Moses will not go with them. Most of the book is Moses preaching to these people in the last weeks of his life. So when you read a command in Deuteronomy, remember who is hearing it: a nation God has

already rescued, standing at the edge of the land, about to lose the only leader they have ever known. The Law was given to a people God had already saved. It was never the way to be saved. Deuteronomy is also history, written as history. Jesus quoted it as the Word of God (Matthew 4:4-10), and Peter and Stephen pointed to its promise of a Prophet like Moses as fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 3:22-23; 7:37).

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate

context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Deuteronomy is real history, and this study takes Moses at his word: he really did stand on the plains of Moab and speak these words to Israel, God really had spoken the Ten Commandments from the fire at Horeb, and the blessings and curses he set before Israel really did come to pass in the centuries that followed. When Deuteronomy gives a law, I try to ask three questions: what it meant for Israel then, how Christ fulfilled it, and what it teaches us now about God and about loving our neighbor. A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "the LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, YHWH, often written Yahweh, which He made known to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God. Deuteronomy uses the phrase "the LORD your God" again and again, and it is worth noticing every time: the God who rules all things has bound Himself to His people.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Deuteronomy has thirty-four chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: thirty-four weeks, most of a school year. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.
- Two chapters a week: about seventeen weeks. This works well for the review of the journey (chapters 1 to 3) and for many of the laws in chapters 12 to 26. Take the Ten

Commandments (chapter 5), the Shema (chapter 6), the blessings and curses (chapter 28) and the Song of Moses (chapter 32) one at a time, because they need the time.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of Deuteronomy are hard. The destruction of Sihon's and Og's cities (chapters 2 and 3) and God's command to devote the nations of Canaan to destruction (chapters 7 and 20) raise honest questions about God's justice. So do the laws on the death penalty (chapters 13, 17, 21 and 22), the laws about servants and captives (chapters 15, 21 and 23), the laws about women, marriage and divorce (chapters 21, 22, 24 and 25), and the curses of chapter 28, which describe the horrors of siege and exile. The study handles each one plainly and with care, and points to what the rest of Scripture says. Some people in your group may have lived through war, abuse, a hard divorce or a harsh religious home, and these chapters can stir that up. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Deuteronomy. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Bible and the last of the five books of Moses, often called the Law or the Torah. The name Deuteronomy comes from a Greek word meaning "second law." It is not a new law. It is the Law given a second time, explained and pressed home to the new generation before they crossed the Jordan (17:18 speaks of a "copy of this law," and the Greek translators took their title from that verse). The Hebrew title comes from the book's first words, "These are the words," and it is often shortened to Devarim, which means words.

Numbers ends with Israel on the plains of Moab. Deuteronomy does not move. The whole book takes place there, in the last weeks of Moses' life, and it is mostly made up of his sermons. In the first, Moses looks back over the forty years from Mount Horeb (another name for Mount Sinai) to the edge of the land, and he calls Israel to obey (chapters 1 to 4). In the second and longest, he repeats the Ten Commandments, calls Israel to love the LORD with all their heart, and then explains the laws they were to live by in the land (chapters 5 to 26). Then come the blessings and the curses (chapters 27 and 28), a call to renew the covenant and choose life (chapters 29 and 30), and Moses' last acts: he hands leadership to Joshua, writes the Law down, teaches Israel a song, blesses the tribes, and dies on Mount Nebo (chapters 31 to 34).

The theme of Deuteronomy is love and loyalty to the LORD, the one God who chose Israel and redeemed them. Everything in the book flows out of this:

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (SLB)

"Hear, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD ***is*** one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Deuteronomy has 34 chapters and 959 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Moses' First Sermon: Remember What God Has Done (chapters 1 to 4)

- Chapter 1: From Horeb to Kadesh-barnea
- Chapter 2: Past Edom, Moab and Ammon to Sihon
- Chapter 3: The Defeat of Og and Moses at Pisgah
- Chapter 4: Obey the LORD and Make No Idols

Part Two: Moses' Second Sermon: The Heart of the Law (chapters 5 to 11)

- Chapter 5: The Ten Commandments Again
- Chapter 6: Hear, O Israel
- Chapter 7: A Holy People Chosen in Love
- Chapter 8: Do Not Forget the LORD
- Chapter 9: Not Because of Your Righteousness
- Chapter 10: New Tablets and What the LORD Requires

- Chapter 11: Love the LORD and Choose the Blessing

Part Three: Moses' Second Sermon: The Laws for Life in the Land (chapters 12 to 26)

- Chapter 12: The Place the LORD Will Choose
- Chapter 13: False Prophets and the Pull to Other Gods
- Chapter 14: Clean Food and the Tithe
- Chapter 15: The Year of Release
- Chapter 16: Passover, Weeks and Booths
- Chapter 17: Justice and the King
- Chapter 18: Priests, Levites and the Prophet Like Moses
- Chapter 19: Cities of Refuge and True Witnesses
- Chapter 20: Laws for War
- Chapter 21: Laws on Blood, Family and the Hanged Man
- Chapter 22: Laws of Kindness and Purity
- Chapter 23: The Assembly of the LORD and a Clean Camp
- Chapter 24: Divorce, Pledges and Care for the Poor
- Chapter 25: Fair Justice and the Brother's Widow
- Chapter 26: Firstfruits and the Tithe

Part Four: Blessings and Curses (chapters 27 and 28)

- Chapter 27: The Altar on Mount Ebal and the Curses
- Chapter 28: Blessings and Curses

Part Five: Moses' Third Sermon: The Covenant Renewed (chapters 29 and 30)

- Chapter 29: The Covenant in the Land of Moab
- Chapter 30: Choose Life

Part Six: The Last Days of Moses (chapters 31 to 34)

- Chapter 31: Joshua Appointed and the Law Written
- Chapter 32: The Song of Moses
- Chapter 33: Moses Blesses the Tribes
- Chapter 34: The Death of Moses

Where this book points to Christ: the New Testament itself makes the links. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus answered him three times from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:16; 6:13; Matthew 4:1-11). Where Israel failed in the wilderness for forty years, Jesus stood firm for forty days. When He was asked which commandment is the greatest, Jesus answered with Deuteronomy 6:5 (Matthew 22:37-38). Moses promised that God would raise up a Prophet like him (18:15-18), and Peter preached that Jesus is that Prophet (Acts 3:22-26). The law that a man

hanged on a tree is cursed (21:23) is the verse Paul uses to show that Christ became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). Paul also takes the words of 30:12-14 and applies them to "the word of faith" about Christ (Romans 10:6-8). Deuteronomy shows us what it means to love God with everything we are, and it shows that Israel could not do it. Only Christ has loved the Father that way, and through Him God gives a new heart to those who believe (30:6; Ezekiel 36:26).

Background of the Book

Author: Jewish and Christian tradition have long held that Moses wrote Deuteronomy, along with the other books of the Law. The book itself says, "Moses wrote this law" (31:9), and that he finished writing its words in a book (31:24). Jesus and the apostles quoted Deuteronomy as the words of Moses (Mark 10:3-5; Acts 3:22; Romans 10:19). The account of Moses' death in chapter 34 was likely added by Joshua or another faithful writer soon after. Many modern scholars believe Deuteronomy was written centuries later, often tying it to the book of the Law found in the temple in the days of King Josiah (2 Kings 22, in the 620s B.C.). I take the book at its word and hold that Moses wrote it, with the last chapter and perhaps a few later notes, such as updated place names, added by others.

Who it was written to: The new generation of Israel, the children of those who came out of Egypt, camped on the plains of Moab and about to enter Canaan. It was also meant for every generation after them. The king was to write his own copy of it and read it all his life (17:18-19), and the priests were to read it to the whole nation every seven years (31:10-13).

Setting: The plains of Moab, on the east side of the Jordan River, across from Jericho (1:1-5; 34:1). Israel had just defeated Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings who ruled the land east of the Jordan (chapters 2 and 3). Moses could see the promised land from the mountains of Moab, but God had told him he would not cross over (3:23-27).

When it was written: In the fortieth year after the exodus, in the eleventh month (1:3), in the last weeks of Moses' life. With the exodus about 1446 B.C., that places Deuteronomy about 1406 B.C., just before Joshua led Israel across the Jordan.

When the events happened: The book itself covers only a few weeks. Moses began speaking on the first day of the eleventh month (1:3). After his death Israel mourned thirty days (34:8), and Joshua crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month (Joshua 4:19). But in his sermons Moses looks back over the forty years from Horeb, and he looks ahead to Israel's life in the land, their future exile among the nations, and their return to the LORD in the last days (4:25-31; 30:1-10).

Form of the book: Deuteronomy is shaped like a covenant. It opens with who is speaking and what God has done (chapters 1 to 4), sets out the commands Israel was to keep (chapters 5 to 26), lists the blessings and curses (chapters 27 and 28), calls heaven and earth as witnesses (30:19), and provides for the Law to be kept and read again (chapter 31). Many scholars have pointed out that this pattern is much like the treaties great kings in the ancient Near East made with the peoples under them. The LORD is the great King, and Israel is His people.

Purpose: To call the new generation to remember what the LORD had done for them, to love Him with all their heart, and to obey Him in the land He was giving them. Deuteronomy warns again and again against forgetting God in times of plenty and against the idols of Canaan. It sets before Israel a clear choice between life and death, blessing and curse (30:15-20), and it promises that even if Israel fails and is scattered, God will not forget His covenant with their fathers (4:31).

Chapter 1: From Horeb to Kadesh-barnea

Scripture

1:1-8 These ***are*** the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan, in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab. ***It is*** eleven days from Horeb ***by*** the way of the mountain of Seir to Kadesh-barnea. And it was in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month, Moses spoke to the sons of Israel according to all that the LORD had commanded him for them, after he had struck Sihon king of the Amorite, who ***was*** dwelling in Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who ***was*** dwelling in Ashtaroth, in Edrei. On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook ***to*** explain this law, saying, "The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, '***It is*** enough for you to remain at this mountain. Turn and set out for yourselves, and go ***to*** the hill country of the Amorite and to all its neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the Shephelah and in the Negeb and on the coast of the sea, the land of the Canaanite, and the Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. See, I have set the land before you; go in and take possession of the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their seed after them.'

1:9-18 And I said to you at that time, saying, 'I am not able by myself to bear you. The LORD your God has multiplied you, and look, you ***are*** today like the stars of the heavens for multitude. May the LORD, the God of your fathers, add to you a thousand times ***as many*** as you ***are***, and may He bless you just as He spoke to you! How will I bear by myself your burden and your load and your strife? Provide for yourselves men, wise and understanding and known, for your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads.' And you answered me and said, 'The thing which you have spoken to do ***is*** good.' And I took the heads of your tribes, men wise and known, and I appointed them heads over you, leaders of thousands and leaders of hundreds and leaders of fifties and leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes. And I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear between your brothers, and you shall judge ***with*** righteousness between a man and his brother and his sojourner. You shall not show regard to faces in judgment; you shall hear the small as the great. You shall not be afraid of any man, for the judgment is God's. And the matter which is too hard for you, you shall bring near to me, and I will hear it.' And I commanded you at that time all the things which you shall do.

1:19-33 And we set out from Horeb, and we walked ***through*** all that great and fearsome wilderness which you saw, ***on*** the way of the hill country of the Amorite, just as the LORD our God had commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. And I said to you, 'You have come to the hill country of the Amorite, which the LORD our God is giving to us. See, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up, take possession, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed.' And all of you drew near to me and said, 'Let us send men before us, and let them spy out the land for us and bring back word to us ***of*** the way on which we shall go up and the cities to which we shall come.' And the thing was good in my eyes, and I took twelve men from you, one man for a tribe. And they turned and went up into the hill country, and they came to the wadi of Eshcol, and they spied it out. And they took in their hand some of the fruit of the land and brought ***it*** down to us, and they brought back word to us and

said, 'The land which the LORD our God is giving to us ***is*** good.' And you were not willing to go up, and you rebelled against the mouth of the LORD your God. And you murmured in your tents and said, 'In the LORD's hatred of us He has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorite, to destroy us. Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our heart melt, saying, "The people ***is*** greater and taller than we; the cities ***are*** great and fortified to the heavens; and also we have seen the sons of the Anakim there."' And I said to you, 'You shall not be terrified, and you shall not be afraid of them. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all that He did with you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you saw that the LORD your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you walked until you came to this place.' And in this thing you ***were*** not believing in the LORD your God, who went before you on the way to seek out for you a place for you to camp, in fire by night to show you the way in which you should go, and in the cloud by day.

1:34-46 And the LORD heard the sound of your words, and He was angry, and He swore, saying, 'Not one man among these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him I will give the land on which he has trodden, and to his sons, because he has followed fully after the LORD.' Also with me the LORD was angry on account of you, saying, 'Also you shall not go in there. Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there; strengthen him, for he will cause Israel to inherit it. And your little ones, of whom you said, "They shall become plunder," and your sons, who today do not know good and evil, they shall go in there, and to them I will give it, and they shall take possession of it. And you, turn for yourselves and set out toward the wilderness ***by*** the way of the Red Sea.' And you answered and said to me, 'We have sinned against the LORD; we will go up and we will fight, according to all that the LORD our God commanded us.' And you girded on, each man, his weapons of war, and you regarded ***it*** as easy to go up into the hill country. And the LORD said to me, 'Say to them, "You shall not go up, and you shall not fight, for I ***am*** not in your midst, so that you will not be defeated before your enemies."' And I spoke to you, and you did not listen, and you rebelled against the mouth of the LORD, and you acted presumptuously and went up into the hill country. And the Amorite who ***was*** dwelling in that hill country came out to meet you, and they pursued you just as the bees do, and they crushed you in Seir as far as Hormah. And you returned and wept before the LORD, and the LORD did not listen to your voice, and He did not give ear to you. And you remained in Kadesh many days, according to the days that you remained.

Chapter 1 Preview

Deuteronomy opens with an old man speaking to a young nation. It is the fortieth year since Israel left Egypt. The generation that came out has died in the wilderness, and their children are camped east of the Jordan. Moses begins his first sermon by looking back. He reminds them how God told Israel to leave Mount Horeb and go take the land, how Moses appointed leaders to judge the people, and how Israel came to Kadesh-barnea, at the very edge of the land, in less than two years.

Then Moses tells the painful part. The spies said the land was good, but the people refused to go in. They believed God hated them. God swore that none of that generation would see the land

except Caleb and Joshua. When the people tried to go up anyway, without God, they were crushed. Moses tells this story to their children so they will not make the same mistake. The lesson is simple, and it is for us too: unbelief keeps us out of what God has promised.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1-2 *These **are** the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan, in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab. **It is** eleven days from Horeb **by** the way of the mountain of Seir to Kadesh-barnea.*

"These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan." The place names tell us where Israel is: east of the Jordan River, in the Arabah, the low valley that runs down from the Sea of Galilee through the Dead Sea. Some of the names are hard to place on a map today. The point is plain enough. Israel is at the edge of the land.

Verse 2 is a quiet rebuke. "It is eleven days from Horeb by the way of the mountain of Seir to Kadesh-barnea." Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, where God gave the Law. Kadesh-barnea was an oasis on the southern border of Canaan. The trip took eleven days. It ended up taking Israel forty years. Why? Moses is about to tell them. How many of our own wilderness years come from the same place, from not trusting what God has said?

1:3-5 *And it was in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month, Moses spoke to the sons of Israel according to all that the LORD had commanded him for them, after he had struck Sihon king of the Amorite, who **was** dwelling in Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who **was** dwelling in Ashtaroth, in Edrei. On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook **to** explain this law, saying,*

"In the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month." Moses dates his sermon carefully. This is near the end of his life. He spoke "according to all that the LORD had commanded him." What follows is not just an old man's memories. It is God's Word through His prophet.

Verse 4 reminds them of the recent victories over Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan (chapters 2 and 3). God had already started giving them the land.

Then "Moses undertook to explain this law." That is what Deuteronomy is: the Law given at Sinai, explained and pressed home to a new generation. Moses did not just repeat the rules. He told them why, and he pleaded with them to obey from the heart. Good teaching still does both.

1:6-8 *"The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, '**It is** enough for you to remain at this mountain. Turn and set out for yourselves, and go **to** the hill country of the Amorite and to all its neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the Shephelah and in the Negeb and on the coast of the sea, the land of the Canaanite, and the Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. See, I have set the land before you; go in and take possession of the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their seed after them.'*

"It is enough for you to remain at this mountain." Israel camped at Horeb about a year (Numbers 10:11-12). It was a holy year. They heard God's voice, received His covenant and built the tabernacle. But God never meant for them to stay there. Sinai was a place to be prepared, not a place to settle.

God named the whole land, from the southern desert to the Lebanon mountains and "as far as the great river, the river Euphrates." These were the borders He promised Abraham (Genesis 15:18). "See, I have set the land before you; go in and take possession." The land was a gift. They still had to walk in and take it. That is how God often works with us. He gives, and He calls us to trust Him enough to step forward.

1:9-12 *And I said to you at that time, saying, 'I am not able by myself to bear you. The LORD your God has multiplied you, and look, you **are** today like the stars of the heavens for multitude. May the LORD, the God of your fathers, add to you a thousand times **as many** as you **are**, and may He bless you just as He spoke to you! How will I bear by myself your burden and your load and your strife?*

Moses now steps back to a scene from the time at Horeb. "I am not able by myself to bear you." The people had grown "like the stars of the heavens for multitude," just as God promised Abraham (Genesis 15:5). God's blessing had made the job too big for one man.

Moses does not complain about the blessing. He prays a blessing over them: "May the LORD, the God of your fathers, add to you a thousand times as many as you are." But he is honest about the "burden" and the "load" and the "strife." Leading God's people is heavy work. Exodus 18 tells how Moses' father-in-law Jethro first gave him the advice to share the load. Every pastor and leader needs to learn what Moses learned: you cannot carry God's people alone, and God never asked you to.

1:13-15 *Provide for yourselves men, wise and understanding and known, for your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads.' And you answered me and said, 'The thing which you have spoken to do **is** good.' And I took the heads of your tribes, men wise and known, and I appointed them heads over you, leaders of thousands and leaders of hundreds and leaders of fifties and leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes.*

"Provide for yourselves men, wise and understanding and known." The people chose men from their own tribes, and Moses appointed them. Notice what was required. They had to be wise, they had to have understanding, and they had to be "known," that is, men with a proven name among their people.

The leaders were set over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Small matters were handled close to home, and only the hardest cases came up the line. The early church followed the same pattern when the apostles had the believers choose seven men "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" to care for the widows (Acts 6:3). God cares about order among His people, and He cares about the character of those who lead.

1:16-18 *And I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear between your brothers, and you shall judge **with** righteousness between a man and his brother and his sojourner. You shall not show regard to faces in judgment; you shall hear the small as the great. You shall not be afraid of any man, for the judgment is God's. And the matter which is too hard for you, you shall bring near to me, and I will hear it.' And I commanded you at that time all the things which you shall do.*

Moses charged the judges with three things. First, judge with righteousness "between a man and his brother and his sojourner." A sojourner was a foreigner living among Israel. He was to get the same justice as anyone born an Israelite.

Second, "You shall not show regard to faces in judgment; you shall hear the small as the great." Do not favor the rich or the powerful, and do not ignore the poor. James says the same thing to the church (James 2:1-4).

Third, "You shall not be afraid of any man, for the judgment is God's." A judge sat in God's place. He answered to God, not to the crowd. That is a good word for anyone who has to make a hard call. Do what is right, and leave the results with God.

1:19-21 *And we set out from Horeb, and we walked **through** all that great and fearsome wilderness which you saw, **on** the way of the hill country of the Amorite, just as the LORD our God had commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. And I said to you, 'You have come to the hill country of the Amorite, which the LORD our God is giving to us. See, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up, take possession, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed.'*

"And we set out from Horeb, and we walked through all that great and fearsome wilderness." Moses does not soften it. The wilderness of the Sinai was harsh, dry and dangerous. But God brought them through it to Kadesh-barnea.

There Moses said, "See, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up, take possession." Then he added, "Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed." Moses knew what was in their hearts. Fear was the real enemy at Kadesh, not the Amorites. God's command and God's comfort came together. When God tells us to go, He also tells us not to be afraid, because He is going with us.

1:22-25 *And all of you drew near to me and said, 'Let us send men before us, and let them spy out the land for us and bring back word to us **of** the way on which we shall go up and the cities to which we shall come.' And the thing was good in my eyes, and I took twelve men from you, one man for a tribe. And they turned and went up into the hill country, and they came to the wadi of Eshcol, and they spied it out. And they took in their hand some of the fruit of the land and brought **it** down to us, and they brought back word to us and said, 'The land which the LORD our God is giving to us **is** good.'*

"Let us send men before us, and let them spy out the land." Numbers 13:1-2 tells us God told Moses to send the spies. Here we learn that the idea started with the people, and God allowed it. Moses says, "the thing was good in my eyes." There was nothing wrong with looking the land over.

The twelve spies went up as far as "the wadi of Eshcol." A wadi is a valley or stream bed that runs with water in the rainy season and is dry the rest of the year. They brought back fruit, and their report started out true: "The land which the LORD our God is giving to us is good." God had not lied. The land was as good as He said. The problem was not the land. It was what came next.

1:26-28 *And you were not willing to go up, and you rebelled against the mouth of the LORD your God. And you murmured in your tents and said, 'In the LORD's hatred of us He has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorite, to destroy us. Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our heart melt, saying, "The people **is** greater and taller than we; the cities **are** great and fortified to the heavens; and also we have seen the sons of the Anakim there."'*

"And you were not willing to go up, and you rebelled against the mouth of the LORD your God." This is the heart of the story. They did not just hesitate. They rebelled.

Listen to what they said in their tents: "In the LORD's hatred of us He has brought us out of the land of Egypt." That is a terrible thing to say about the God who split the sea for them. Unbelief does this. It twists everything God has done into proof that He is against us.

The spies' report had made their "heart melt." The people were "greater and taller," the cities "fortified to the heavens," and there were "sons of the Anakim," a race of very tall men. Everything they said about the enemy was true. What they forgot was how big their God was.

1:29-31 *And I said to you, 'You shall not be terrified, and you shall not be afraid of them. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all that He did with you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you saw that the LORD your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you walked until you came to this place.'*

Moses pleaded with them. "The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you." They did not have to win this war on their own. God had already fought for them in Egypt "before your eyes."

Then Moses gives one of the tenderest pictures in the book. In the wilderness "the LORD your God carried you, just as a man carries his son." Think of a father carrying a tired child down a long road. That is how God had cared for Israel every step of the way. They were not being led by a cold

master. They were being carried by a Father. Do you see God that way? If you belong to Christ, that is what He is to you.

1:32-33 *And in this thing you **were** not believing in the LORD your God, who went before you on the way to seek out for you a place for you to camp, in fire by night to show you the way in which you should go, and in the cloud by day.*

"And in this thing you were not believing in the LORD your God." Here is the root of it all. Not the giants, not the walls. Unbelief.

And Moses reminds them of what they had seen every single day: God "went before you on the way to seek out for you a place for you to camp, in fire by night to show you the way in which you should go, and in the cloud by day." The pillar of cloud and fire was right in front of them while they said God hated them. Hebrews 3:19 says of that generation, "they were not able to enter in because of unbelief." Hebrews 3 and 4 use this very story to warn us. We can see God's faithfulness every day and still refuse to trust Him.

1:34-36 *And the LORD heard the sound of your words, and He was angry, and He swore, saying, 'Not one man among these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him I will give the land on which he has trodden, and to his sons, because he has followed fully after the LORD.'*

"The LORD heard the sound of your words, and He was angry, and He swore." God heard what they said in their tents. He hears what we grumble too.

"Not one man among these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land." The judgment matched the sin. They said they did not want to go in. God said, Then you will not.

There was one exception named here: "Caleb the son of Jephunneh," because "he has followed fully after the LORD." Caleb had seen the same giants and the same walls, but he trusted God (Numbers 14:24). Forty-five years later he would claim his mountain in the land (Joshua 14:6-14). One man who follows God fully can stand apart from a whole generation that does not.

1:37-38 *Also with me the LORD was angry on account of you, saying, 'Also you shall not go in there. Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there; strengthen him, for he will cause Israel to inherit it.*

"Also with me the LORD was angry on account of you." Moses himself would not enter the land. Numbers 20:7-13 tells why: at Meribah he struck the rock in anger instead of speaking to it as God commanded, and he did not treat God as holy before the people. Moses says it happened "on account of you" because it was the people's constant complaining that pushed him to that moment. Both are true. The people provoked him, and Moses was still responsible for what he did (Psalm 106:32-33).

God named the next leader: "Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you." Joshua had served at Moses' side for forty years. Now Moses was told, "strengthen him." The old leader's last job was to build up the new one. Every generation of leaders should be doing the same.

1:39-40 *And your little ones, of whom you said, "They shall become plunder," and your sons, who today do not know good and evil, they shall go in there, and to them I will give it, and they shall take possession of it. And you, turn for yourselves and set out toward the wilderness* ***by*** *the way of the Red Sea.'*

At Kadesh the parents said their little ones would "become plunder." They used their children as an excuse not to obey. They said their kids would be killed. God turned it around. The very children they feared for were the ones who would go in.

These children "today do not know good and evil." They were too young to be held responsible for the rebellion. God did not punish them for their parents' sin. He kept His promise through them. The people listening to Moses on the plains of Moab were those children, now grown. Moses was telling them their own story.

Then God sent the older generation back into the wilderness, "the way of the Red Sea." It was a long walk back in the wrong direction.

1:41-43 *And you answered and said to me, 'We have sinned against the LORD; we will go up and we will fight, according to all that the LORD our God commanded us.' And you girded on, each man, his weapons of war, and you regarded* ***it*** *as easy to go up into the hill country. And the LORD said to me, 'Say to them, "You shall not go up, and you shall not fight, for I* ***am*** *not in your midst, so that you will not be defeated before your enemies."' And I spoke to you, and you did not listen, and you rebelled against the mouth of the LORD, and you acted presumptuously and went up into the hill country.*

Now the people changed their minds. "We have sinned against the LORD; we will go up and we will fight." It sounds like repentance. It was not. God had already said the door was shut, and now they decided to do it their own way.

God warned them plainly: "You shall not go up, and you shall not fight, for I am not in your midst." They went anyway. Moses says they "acted presumptuously." Presumption is acting as if God must bless what we decide to do. Saying "We have sinned" is not the same as surrendering to God. Real repentance does what God says now, not what we wish we had done yesterday.

1:44-46 *And the Amorite who* ***was*** *dwelling in that hill country came out to meet you, and they pursued you just as the bees do, and they crushed you in Seir as far as Hormah. And you returned and wept before the LORD, and the LORD did not listen to your voice, and He did not give ear to you. And you remained in Kadesh many days, according to the days that you remained.*

"They pursued you just as the bees do, and they crushed you." Anyone who has stirred up a hive knows the picture. They were driven back all the way to Hormah.

"And you returned and wept before the LORD, and the LORD did not listen to your voice." Their tears came too late to change the sentence. This is sobering. There is a time when God's patience with a hard heart comes to an end for a certain thing. That does not mean God stopped loving Israel. He fed them and led them for thirty-eight more years. But that generation lost the land.

"You remained in Kadesh many days." The road that should have taken eleven days became forty years. Paul says these things "happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). God is speaking to us through Kadesh. When He says go, trust Him and go.

Chapter 1 Summary

Moses spoke to Israel east of the Jordan in the fortieth year after the exodus, explaining the Law to the new generation. He reminded them that God told Israel to leave Horeb and take the land He promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Because the people had grown so many, Moses appointed wise and known men from each tribe as leaders and judges, and he charged them to judge fairly, to treat the small and the great alike, and not to fear any man. Israel came to Kadesh-barnea, and twelve spies brought back fruit and said the land was good. But the people refused to go up, said the LORD hated them, and would not believe the God who had carried them like a son. The LORD swore that none of that generation would see the land except Caleb and Joshua, and that their children would go in. Moses also would not enter. When the people tried to go up anyway, the Amorites chased them like bees and crushed them, and Israel stayed many days in Kadesh.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. How long was the trip from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea, and how long did it actually take Israel? (1:2-3)

2. What kind of men did Moses tell the people to choose as leaders? (1:13)

3. What three charges did Moses give the judges? (1:16-17)

4. What did the spies say about the land, and what did the people say about the LORD? (1:25-27)

5. What picture does Moses use for how God cared for Israel in the wilderness? (1:31)

6. What was the real reason Israel did not enter the land? (1:32; Hebrews 3:19)

7. Why was Caleb allowed to enter the land? (1:36)

8. What is the difference between the people's "We have sinned" in verse 41 and real repentance?

9. Where in your life are you looking at the giants instead of at the God who goes before you?

10. Is there something God has clearly told you to do that you have been putting off? What would it look like to trust Him and go?

Chapter 2: Past Edom, Moab and Ammon to Sihon

Scripture

2:1-15 And we turned and set out into the wilderness ***by*** the way of the Red Sea, just as the LORD had spoken to me, and we went around the mountain of Seir many days. And the LORD said to me, saying, '***It is*** enough for you to go around this hill country; turn for yourselves northward. And command the people, saying, "You ***are*** passing through the territory of your brothers, the sons of Esau, who dwell in Seir, and they will be afraid of you; and you shall be very careful. Do not contend with them, for I will not give to you ***any*** of their land, so much as a treading place for the sole of a foot, because I have given the mountain of Seir to Esau ***as*** a possession. Food you shall buy from them with money, and you shall eat; and also water you shall purchase from them with money, and you shall drink. For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand; He has known your walking through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God ***has been*** with you; you have not lacked a thing."' And we passed on from our brothers, the sons of Esau, who dwell in Seir, from the way of the Arabah, from Elath and from Ezion-geber. And we turned and passed on ***by*** the way of the wilderness of Moab. And the LORD said to me, 'Do not harass Moab, and do not contend with them ***in*** battle, for I will not give to you ***any*** of his land ***as*** a possession, because I have given Ar to the sons of Lot ***as*** a possession. The Emim formerly dwelt in it, a people great and numerous and tall like the Anakim. They also are regarded ***as*** Rephaim, like the Anakim, and the Moabites call them Emim. And in Seir the Horites dwelt formerly, and the sons of Esau dispossessed them, and they destroyed them from before them and dwelt in their place, just as Israel did to the land of his possession which the LORD gave to them. Now arise and pass over for yourselves the wadi of Zered.' And we passed over the wadi of Zered. And the days which we walked from Kadesh-barnea until we passed over the wadi of Zered ***were*** thirty-eight years, until all the generation, the men of war, was finished from the midst of the camp, just as the LORD had sworn to them. And also the hand of the LORD was against them, to throw them into confusion from the midst of the camp until they were finished.

2:16-25 And it was, when all the men of war had finished dying from the midst of the people, and the LORD spoke to me, saying, 'You ***are*** passing over today the border of Moab, Ar, and you will draw near opposite the sons of Ammon. Do not harass them, and do not contend with them, for I will not give to you ***any*** of the land of the sons of Ammon ***as*** a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot ***as*** a possession. It also is regarded ***as*** a land of Rephaim; Rephaim dwelt in it formerly, and the Ammonites call them Zamzummim, a people great and numerous and tall like the Anakim; and the LORD destroyed them from before them, and they dispossessed them and dwelt in their place, just as He had done for the sons of Esau, who dwell in Seir, in that He destroyed the Horite from before them, and they dispossessed them and have dwelt in their place until this day. And the Avvim, who dwelt in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim, who came out from Caphtor, destroyed them and dwelt in their place. Arise, set out, and pass over the wadi of Arnon. See, I have given into your hand Sihon the king of Heshbon, the Amorite, and his land; begin, take possession, and contend with him ***in*** battle. This day I will begin to put the dread of you and the fear of you on the face of the peoples under all the heavens, who will hear the report of you, and they will tremble and be in anguish because of you.'

2:26-37 And I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon the king of Heshbon ***with*** words of peace, saying, 'Let me pass through your land; on the road, on the road I will go; I will not turn aside ***to the*** right or ***to the*** left. Food you shall sell me for money, and I will eat; and water you shall give me for money, and I will drink; only let me pass through on my feet, just as the sons of Esau, who dwell in Seir, and the Moabites, who dwell in Ar, did for me, until I pass over the Jordan into the land which the LORD our God is giving to us.' And Sihon the king of Heshbon was not willing to let us pass through by him, for the LORD your God had hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to give him into your hand, as ***at*** this day. And the LORD said to me, 'See, I have begun to give over Sihon and his land before you; begin, take possession, to take possession of his land.' And Sihon came out to meet us, he and all his people, for battle at Jahaz. And the LORD our God gave him over before us, and we struck him and his sons and all his people. And we captured all his cities at that time, and we devoted to destruction every city of men, and the women and the little ones; we did not leave a survivor. Only the livestock we took as plunder for ourselves, and the spoil of the cities which we had captured. From Aroer, which ***is*** on the edge of the wadi of Arnon, and the city which ***is*** in the wadi, even as far as Gilead, there was not a town which was too high for us; the LORD our God gave over everything before us. Only to the land of the sons of Ammon you did not draw near, all the side of the wadi of Jabbok, and the cities of the hill country, and all that the LORD our God had commanded.

Chapter 2 Preview

Moses skips over most of the thirty-eight years in the wilderness with one line: "we went around the mountain of Seir many days." Then God tells Israel to turn north. On the way, they must pass by three peoples who were related to them: Edom, the descendants of Esau, and Moab and Ammon, the descendants of Lot. God tells Israel not to fight them or take any of their land, because He had already given those lands to them. Moses also tells us who lived in those lands before, tall peoples like the Anakim whom God drove out. If God could do that for Esau and Lot, He could do it for Israel.

By the time Israel crosses the wadi of Zered, the whole generation of fighting men from Kadesh has died. Then the story turns. Israel asks Sihon, king of the Amorites, for peaceful passage. Sihon refuses and comes out to fight, and God gives him into Israel's hand. This is the first victory of the conquest. It also brings us to one of the hard parts of Deuteronomy, the devoting of Sihon's cities to destruction, which we will look at with care.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1-3 *And we turned and set out into the wilderness **by** the way of the Red Sea, just as the LORD had spoken to me, and we went around the mountain of Seir many days. And the LORD said to me, saying, '**It is** enough for you to go around this hill country; turn for yourselves northward.*

"We turned and set out into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea, just as the LORD had spoken to me." Israel obeyed the sentence God gave at Kadesh (1:40). And then "we went around the mountain of Seir many days." Mount Seir is the mountain country south and east of the Dead Sea, where Edom lived.

Thirty-eight years are told in one sentence. Scripture does not tell us much about those years. They were years of waiting and dying. But they were not wasted years for God. He was raising up a new generation.

Then God said, "It is enough for you to go around this hill country; turn for yourselves northward." Just as God said "it is enough" at Horeb (1:6), He now says the wandering is over. God decides when a season ends. When He says turn, it is time to move.

2:4-6 *And command the people, saying, "You **are** passing through the territory of your brothers, the sons of Esau, who dwell in Seir, and they will be afraid of you; and you shall be very careful. Do not contend with them, for I will not give to you **any** of their land, so much as a treading place for the sole of a foot, because I have given the mountain of Seir to Esau **as** a possession. Food you shall buy from them with money, and you shall eat; and also water you shall purchase from them with money, and you shall drink.*

"You are passing through the territory of your brothers, the sons of Esau." Esau was Jacob's twin brother (Genesis 25:24-26), and his descendants were called Edom (Genesis 36:8). Israel was to remember they were family.

"They will be afraid of you; and you shall be very careful." Israel would be stronger, but they were not to use that strength. "Do not contend with them, for I will not give to you any of their land, so much as a treading place for the sole of a foot." God had given Mount Seir to Esau.

Even Israel's food and water were to be paid for. They were not to take anything by force. God's people are not to grab what belongs to others just because they can. Paul says, "so far as it is from you, being at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18).

2:7 *For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand; He has known your walking through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God **has been** with you; you have not lacked a thing."'*

"For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand." Why could Israel afford to pay? Because God had provided. "He has known your walking through this great wilderness." The word known here means more than being aware. God watched over every step.

"These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing." Forty years in a desert, and they never lacked what they needed. Their clothes did not wear out (8:4). Manna came every morning. Even in a season of discipline, God took care of them. Paul says, "my God will fill every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). God may not give us everything we want, but He never fails to give what we need.

2:8-9 *And we passed on from our brothers, the sons of Esau, who dwell in Seir, from the way of the Arabah, from Elath and from Ezion-geber. And we turned and passed on* ***by*** *the way of the wilderness of Moab. And the LORD said to me, 'Do not harass Moab, and do not contend with them* ***in*** *battle, for I will not give to you* ***any*** *of his land* ***as*** *a possession, because I have given Ar to the sons of Lot* ***as*** *a possession.*

Israel passed by Edom, by way of Elath and Ezion-geber, towns at the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba, and turned toward the wilderness of Moab.

God gave the same order about Moab: "Do not harass Moab, and do not contend with them in battle." Moab and Ammon came from Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:36-38). "I have given Ar to the sons of Lot as a possession." Ar was a city or region of Moab.

This shows us something important. God is not only the God of Israel. He rules all nations and gives each its land (Acts 17:26). Israel was not free to take any land it wanted. It could take only what God gave. The conquest of Canaan was not a general license for war. It was a limited command for one land at one time.

2:10-12 *The Emim formerly dwelt in it, a people great and numerous and tall like the Anakim. They also are regarded* ***as*** *Rephaim, like the Anakim, and the Moabites call them Emim. And in Seir the Horites dwelt formerly, and the sons of Esau dispossessed them, and they destroyed them from before them and dwelt in their place, just as Israel did to the land of his possession which the LORD gave to them.*

Moses adds a history note. "The Emim formerly dwelt in it, a people great and numerous and tall like the Anakim." These peoples were all counted as "Rephaim," a name used for very tall peoples of the land. Moab called them Emim.

In the same way, the Horites once lived in Seir, "and the sons of Esau dispossessed them." Why tell Israel this? Because Israel had been afraid of the Anakim at Kadesh (1:28). Moses is saying, Look, God gave Moab and Edom victory over giants just like these. If He did it for them, will He not do it for you, His own people? God's past faithfulness is meant to build present courage.

2:13-15 *Now arise and pass over for yourselves the wadi of Zered.' And we passed over the wadi of Zered. And the days which we walked from Kadesh-barnea until we passed over the wadi of Zered* ***were*** *thirty-eight years, until all the generation, the men of war, was finished from the midst of the camp, just as the LORD had sworn to them. And also the hand of the LORD was against them, to throw them into confusion from the midst of the camp until they were finished.*

"Now arise and pass over for yourselves the wadi of Zered." The Zered was the stream that marked the border between Edom and Moab, running into the south end of the Dead Sea. "And we passed over." Obedience, plain and simple.

Then Moses marks the moment: "thirty-eight years, until all the generation, the men of war, was finished." From Kadesh to the Zered, the old generation died, "just as the LORD had sworn to them." God keeps His word in judgment just as surely as He keeps it in blessing.

"Also the hand of the LORD was against them." Their dying was not just old age. It was God's hand. This is hard to read. But it reminds us that God means what He says. Hebrews 3:17-18 points to these very men whose "corpses fell in the wilderness" as a warning to us not to harden our hearts.

2:16-19 *And it was, when all the men of war had finished dying from the midst of the people, and the LORD spoke to me, saying, 'You **are** passing over today the border of Moab, Ar, and you will draw near opposite the sons of Ammon. Do not harass them, and do not contend with them, for I will not give to you **any** of the land of the sons of Ammon **as** a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot **as** a possession.*

"When all the men of war had finished dying from the midst of the people," God spoke again. It seems He waited until the last of them was gone. Now the new generation would move.

They were about to pass Moab and come near Ammon. The command was the same: "Do not harass them, and do not contend with them." Ammon was also given "to the sons of Lot as a possession."

Notice that God was faithful to Lot's family even though Lot made poor choices and Moab and Ammon would often be Israel's enemies. God's gifts are His own to give. He was not only keeping His word to Abraham. He was also showing kindness to Lot for Abraham's sake.

2:20-23 *It also is regarded **as** a land of Rephaim; Rephaim dwelt in it formerly, and the Ammonites call them Zamzummim, a people great and numerous and tall like the Anakim; and the LORD destroyed them from before them, and they dispossessed them and dwelt in their place, just as He had done for the sons of Esau, who dwell in Seir, in that He destroyed the Horite from before them, and they dispossessed them and have dwelt in their place until this day. And the Avvim, who dwelt in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim, who came out from Caphtor, destroyed them and dwelt in their place.*

Another history note. Ammon's land was also "a land of Rephaim," and the Ammonites called them "Zamzummim." But "the LORD destroyed them from before them." Moses says plainly that it was the LORD who did it, for Ammon, just as "He had done for the sons of Esau."

Verse 23 adds that the Avvim, who lived near Gaza, were destroyed by the Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor. Many scholars think Caphtor is the island of Crete, and that these were early Philistines (Amos 9:7).

The point of all these notes is the same. God is the One who moves nations and sets their borders. No people is too great for Him. That truth was meant to settle Israel's fear, and it can settle ours.

2:24-25 *Arise, set out, and pass over the wadi of Arnon. See, I have given into your hand Sihon the king of Heshbon, the Amorite, and his land; begin, take possession, and contend with him **in** battle. This day I will begin to put the dread of you and the fear of you on the face of the peoples under all the heavens, who will hear the report of you, and they will tremble and be in anguish because of you.'*

Now the command changes. "Arise, set out, and pass over the wadi of Arnon." The Arnon was the northern border of Moab. Beyond it lay the land of Sihon, an Amorite king.

"See, I have given into your hand Sihon the king of Heshbon, the Amorite, and his land." The Amorites were one of the peoples of Canaan whose land God had promised to Abraham. Four hundred years before, God told Abraham that his descendants would return to this land "for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). God had waited centuries. Now their time had come.

"This day I will begin to put the dread of you and the fear of you on the face of the peoples." Rahab later told the spies in Jericho how the news of Sihon and Og had melted the hearts of her people (Joshua 2:10-11).

2:26-29 *And I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon the king of Heshbon **with** words of peace, saying, 'Let me pass through your land; on the road, on the road I will go; I will not turn aside **to the** right or **to the** left. Food you shall sell me for money, and I will eat; and water you shall give me for money, and I will drink; only let me pass through on my feet, just as the sons of Esau, who dwell in Seir, and the Moabites, who dwell in Ar, did for me, until I pass over the Jordan into the land which the LORD our God is giving to us.'*

Before any battle, Moses "sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon the king of Heshbon with words of peace." This is worth noticing. Israel offered peace first.

The request was simple. "Let me pass through your land; on the road, on the road I will go; I will not turn aside to the right or to the left." Israel would buy food and water and stay on the main road. They asked nothing more than what Edom and Moab had given them. Their goal was to cross the Jordan "into the land which the LORD our God is giving to us."

Sihon had every chance to let Israel pass in peace. What happened next was his own choice.

2:30 *And Sihon the king of Heshbon was not willing to let us pass through by him, for the LORD your God had hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to give him into your hand, as **at** this day.*

"Sihon the king of Heshbon was not willing to let us pass through." Then Moses adds, "for the LORD your God had hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to give him into your hand."

How do we put those two things together? Sihon was not willing, and God hardened him. It is the same pattern we see with Pharaoh. Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and God hardened it too (Exodus 8:15; 9:12). God did not take a good man and make him evil. Sihon was a proud Amorite

king whose people's sin had long been building (Genesis 15:16). God gave him over to the stubbornness that was already in him, and used it to bring judgment. Scripture holds both truths together: people are responsible for their choices, and God rules over all of them.

2:31-33 *And the LORD said to me, 'See, I have begun to give over Sihon and his land before you; begin, take possession, to take possession of his land.' And Sihon came out to meet us, he and all his people, for battle at Jahaz. And the LORD our God gave him over before us, and we struck him and his sons and all his people.*

"See, I have begun to give over Sihon and his land before you; begin, take possession." God says He has begun. Israel must begin too. Victory was God's gift, and Israel still had to take hold of it.

"Sihon came out to meet us, he and all his people, for battle at Jahaz." Sihon attacked first (Numbers 21:23). Israel did not start this war.

"And the LORD our God gave him over before us." Moses gives God the credit. Israel had not fought a battle like this in forty years. The generation that feared the Amorites at Kadesh was gone, and their children now beat the Amorites on the very first try. The difference was not their strength. It was their trust in God.

2:34-35 *And we captured all his cities at that time, and we devoted to destruction every city of men, and the women and the little ones; we did not leave a survivor. Only the livestock we took as plunder for ourselves, and the spoil of the cities which we had captured.*

"We captured all his cities at that time, and we devoted to destruction every city of men, and the women and the little ones; we did not leave a survivor." This is a hard verse, and we should not rush past it.

To devote to destruction translates the Hebrew word herem. It means to give something wholly over to God, so that it is not kept for human use. In war, it meant that a people under God's judgment was destroyed and their goods were not taken as ordinary plunder (though here God allowed the livestock and spoil to be kept). We will see this word again in chapters 7 and 20.

How should we think about this? First, it was God's judgment on peoples whose sin He had put up with for four hundred years (Genesis 15:16). The rest of Scripture describes what that sin included, such as burning their children to their gods (12:31). Second, Sihon was offered peace and chose war. Third, this was a one-time command for one land and one time in Israel's history. It was never a pattern for God's people to follow, and no one today may use it to excuse violence. Fourth, God takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Even so, the deaths of women and children trouble us, and they should. Scripture does not ask us to be glad about them. It asks us to trust that "the Judge of all the earth" does justice (Genesis 18:25), and it shows us that one day all of us must stand before Him. The same God who judged the Amorites sent His Son to bear judgment for sinners, so that whoever turns to Him may live.

2:36-37 *From Aroer, which **is** on the edge of the wadi of Arnon, and the city which **is** in the wadi, even as far as Gilead, there was not a town which was too high for us; the LORD our God gave over everything before us. Only to the land of the sons of Ammon you did not draw near, all the side of the wadi of Jabbok, and the cities of the hill country, and all that the LORD our God had commanded.*

"There was not a town which was too high for us; the LORD our God gave over everything before us." Compare that with the report at Kadesh: "the cities are great and fortified to the heavens" (1:28). The cities had not gotten smaller. Israel's faith had gotten bigger. Their fathers said the walls were too high. Their children found that no wall was too high for God.

But there were limits. "Only to the land of the sons of Ammon you did not draw near." Israel stopped where God said stop. Faith does not only charge ahead when God says go. It also holds back when God says no.

Chapter 2 Summary

After many years going around Mount Seir, God told Israel to turn north. They were not to fight Edom, the descendants of Esau, or Moab and Ammon, the descendants of Lot, because God had given those peoples their lands, just as He had helped them drive out the giant peoples who lived there before. Israel bought food and water as they passed. God had been with them forty years, and they lacked nothing. By the time they crossed the wadi of Zered, the whole generation of fighting men from Kadesh had died, as God had sworn. Then God told them to cross the Arnon and take the land of Sihon, king of the Amorites. Moses offered Sihon peace, but Sihon, hardened in his own stubbornness and by God's judgment, came out to fight at Jahaz. God gave him into Israel's hand, and Israel devoted his cities to destruction. No city was too high for them, and they did not touch the land of Ammon.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. Why were the Israelites told not to fight Edom, Moab or Ammon? (2:4-5, 9, 19)

2. What did Moses say about God's care for Israel during the forty years? (2:7)

3. Why do you think Moses included the notes about the Emim, the Horites and the Zamzummim? (2:10-12, 20-23)

4. How long was it from Kadesh-barnea to the wadi of Zered, and what happened during that time? (2:14-15)

5. What did Israel offer Sihon before the battle, and how did he respond? (2:26-32)

6. How does this chapter show both Sihon's choice and God's control? (2:30)

7. How does verse 36 compare with what the spies said at Kadesh? (2:36; 1:28)

8. What does God's care for Edom, Moab and Ammon tell us about His rule over all nations?

9. How do you handle hard passages like 2:34 in your own reading? What helps you trust God when you do not understand everything?

10. Is there a "wall" in your life that seems too high? What has God done in the past that can give you courage now?

Chapter 3: The Defeat of Og and Moses at Pisgah

Scripture

3:1-11 And we turned and went up ***by*** the way of Bashan, and Og the king of Bashan came out to meet us, he and all his people, for battle at Edrei. And the LORD said to me, 'Do not fear him, for into your hand I have given him and all his people and his land, and you shall do to him just as you did to Sihon the king of the Amorite, who ***was*** dwelling in Heshbon.' And the LORD our God gave into our hand also Og the king of Bashan and all his people, and we struck him until not a survivor was left to him. And we captured all his cities at that time; there was not a town which we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All these ***were*** cities fortified ***with*** a high wall, gates and bar, besides the cities of the open villages, very many. And we devoted them to destruction, just as we had done to Sihon the king of Heshbon, devoting to destruction every city of men, the women and the little ones. And all the livestock and the spoil of the cities we took as plunder for ourselves. And we took at that time the land from the hand of the two kings of the Amorite who ***were*** on the other side of the Jordan, from the wadi of Arnon to the mountain of Hermon (the Sidonians call Mount Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir), all the cities of the plain and all Gilead and all Bashan as far as Salecah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan. For only Og the king of Bashan remained of the remnant of the Rephaim. Look, his bed ***was*** a bed of iron; ***is*** it not in Rabbah of the sons of Ammon? Approximately 13.5 feet (nine cubits) ***was*** its length, and approximately 6 feet (four cubits) its width, by the cubit of a man.

3:12-22 And this land we took possession of at that time; from Aroer, which ***is*** by the wadi of Arnon, and half the hill country of Gilead and its cities, I gave to the Reubenites and to the Gadites. And the rest of Gilead and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh, all the region of Argob, with all Bashan; that is called the land of Rephaim. Jair the son of Manasseh took all the region of Argob as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and he called them, Bashan, by his own name, Havvoth-jair, until this day. And to Machir I gave Gilead. And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites I gave from Gilead even as far as the wadi of Arnon, the middle of the wadi and ***its*** border, and as far as the Jabbok, the wadi, the border of the sons of Ammon, and the Arabah and the Jordan and ***its*** border, from Chinnereth even as far as the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, under the slopes of the Pisgah eastward. And I commanded you at that time, saying, 'The LORD your God has given to you this land to take possession of it. Armed you shall pass over before your brothers, the sons of Israel, all sons of valor. Only your wives and your little ones and your livestock (I know that you have much livestock) shall remain in your cities which I have given to you, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as to you, and they also take possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving to them on the other side of the Jordan; and you shall return, each man to his possession which I have given to you.' And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, 'Your eyes ***are*** the ***ones*** seeing all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings; thus the LORD will do to all the kingdoms to which you are passing over. You shall not fear them, for the LORD your God, He ***is*** the ***One*** fighting for you.'

3:23-29 And I sought favor from the LORD at that time, saying, 'Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand; for who ***is*** a god in the heavens and on

the earth who does according to Your works and according to Your mighty deeds? Let me pass over, please, and let me see the good land which ***is*** on the other side of the Jordan, this good hill country and the Lebanon.' And the LORD was furious with me on account of you, and He did not listen to me; and the LORD said to me, '***It is*** enough for you; do not continue to speak to Me again about this matter. Go up ***to*** the top of the Pisgah, and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward, and see with your eyes, for you shall not pass over this Jordan. And command Joshua, and strengthen him and make him courageous, for he shall pass over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see.' And we remained in the valley opposite Beth-peor.

Chapter 3 Preview

Moses finishes his look back at the journey. After Sihon, Israel turned north toward Bashan, a rich land east of the Sea of Galilee, and Og its king came out to fight them. Og was the last of the giant Rephaim, and his iron bed was more than thirteen feet long. God said, "Do not fear him," and He gave Og and his sixty walled cities into Israel's hand. Moses then gave this land east of the Jordan to Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh, on one condition: their fighting men must cross the Jordan with their brothers and help them take the rest of the land.

The chapter ends on a tender and painful note. Moses tells how he begged God to let him cross over and see the good land. God said no, and told him not to ask again. Instead, Moses would see the land from the top of Pisgah, and he would strengthen Joshua to lead the people in. Here is a great man of God who did not get what he asked for, and who accepted it. There is much in this for us.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1-3 *And we turned and went up **by** the way of Bashan, and Og the king of Bashan came out to meet us, he and all his people, for battle at Edrei. And the LORD said to me, 'Do not fear him, for into your hand I have given him and all his people and his land, and you shall do to him just as you did to Sihon the king of the Amorite, who **was** dwelling in Heshbon.' And the LORD our God gave into our hand also Og the king of Bashan and all his people, and we struck him until not a survivor was left to him.*

"We turned and went up by the way of Bashan, and Og the king of Bashan came out to meet us." Bashan was the high, fertile land east of the Sea of Galilee, famous for its cattle and oak trees (Psalm 22:12; Isaiah 2:13). Like Sihon, Og came out to fight.

God's word to Moses was short: "Do not fear him, for into your hand I have given him." Notice the tense. God spoke as if it was already done. When God has promised something, it is as good as finished, even before we see it.

"You shall do to him just as you did to Sihon." The first victory became the pattern for the second. God often builds our faith this way. What He did yesterday is the reason to trust Him today. And He did it: "the LORD our God gave into our hand also Og the king of Bashan and all his people."

3:4-7 *And we captured all his cities at that time; there was not a town which we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All these **were** cities fortified **with** a high wall, gates and bar, besides the cities of the open villages, very many. And we devoted them to destruction, just as we had done to Sihon the king of Heshbon, devoting to destruction every city of men, the women and the little ones. And all the livestock and the spoil of the cities we took as plunder for ourselves.*

"There was not a town which we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argob." These were "cities fortified with a high wall, gates and bar," plus many open villages. Think back to Kadesh again. These were exactly the kind of walled cities the spies said Israel could never take (1:28).

"And we devoted them to destruction, just as we had done to Sihon." The same hard word, herem, appears again (see 2:34). Og's kingdom was under the same judgment as Sihon's. Both kings chose to fight against Israel, and both peoples were Amorites, whose long-building sin God had warned of in Abraham's day (Genesis 15:16). As with Sihon, Israel kept the livestock and the goods.

We hold these verses with care. They were God's judgment in one place and time, carried out at His command. They were never a pattern for later wars, and they give no one permission to harm others in God's name.

3:8-11 *And we took at that time the land from the hand of the two kings of the Amorite who **were** on the other side of the Jordan, from the wadi of Arnon to the mountain of Hermon (the Sidonians call Mount Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir), all the cities of the plain and all Gilead and all Bashan as far as Salecah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan. For only Og the king of Bashan remained of the remnant of the Rephaim. Look, his bed **was** a bed of iron; **is** it not in Rabbah of the sons of Ammon? Approximately 13.5 feet (nine cubits) **was** its length, and approximately 6 feet (four cubits) its width, by the cubit of a man.*

Moses sums up the land taken east of the Jordan, "from the wadi of Arnon to the mountain of Hermon." The Arnon ran into the Dead Sea from the east. Mount Hermon is the high, snowy mountain far to the north. Moses notes that other peoples had their own names for Hermon: Sirion and Senir.

Then comes an unusual detail. Og "remained of the remnant of the Rephaim," the last of those tall peoples. "Look, his bed was a bed of iron." It was nine cubits long and four wide, about 13 and a half feet by 6 feet. And it was still on display in Rabbah, the chief city of Ammon, where you could go and see it.

Why include this? Because it tells Israel how big their enemy was. Og was not an ordinary man. If the spies had seen him, they would have said, We are like grasshoppers (Numbers 13:33). Yet God gave him into Israel's hand. The bigger the enemy, the clearer it is that the victory belongs to God.

3:12-17 *And this land we took possession of at that time; from Aroer, which **is** by the wadi of Arnon, and half the hill country of Gilead and its cities, I gave to the Reubenites and to the Gadites. And the rest of Gilead and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh, all the region of Argob, with all Bashan; that is called the land of Rephaim. Jair the son of Manasseh took all the region of Argob as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and he called them, Bashan, by his own name, Havvoth-jair, until this day. And to Machir I gave Gilead. And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites I gave from Gilead even as far as the wadi of Arnon, the middle of the wadi and **its** border, and as far as the Jabbok, the wadi, the border of the sons of Ammon, and the Arabah and the Jordan and **its** border, from Chinnereth even as far as the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, under the slopes of the Pisgah eastward.*

Now Moses tells how he divided the land east of the Jordan. To the Reubenites and Gadites he gave the southern part, from Aroer by the Arnon through half of Gilead. To the half-tribe of Manasseh he gave the rest of Gilead and all of Bashan. Numbers 32 tells how these tribes asked for this land because they had a great deal of livestock and the land was good for grazing.

Jair, a son of Manasseh, took the region of Argob and named its villages after himself, "Havvoth-jair," which means the villages of Jair. Machir, another clan of Manasseh, received Gilead. The southern border ran along the Arnon, the northern border reached the Jabbok and beyond, and the western edge was the Jordan valley, from the Sea of Galilee (called Chinnereth) down to "the Salt Sea," the Dead Sea, below the slopes of Pisgah.

Why does Scripture list all these places? Because the land was real. God's promises were not vague ideas. They were fields, towns and rivers that real families received. God keeps His promises in the real world, down to the borders of a pasture.

3:18-20 *And I commanded you at that time, saying, 'The LORD your God has given to you this land to take possession of it. Armed you shall pass over before your brothers, the sons of Israel, all sons of valor. Only your wives and your little ones and your livestock (I know that you have much livestock) shall remain in your cities which I have given to you, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as to you, and they also take possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving to them on the other side of the Jordan; and you shall return, each man to his possession which I have given to you.'*

Moses gave these two and a half tribes a charge. "Armed you shall pass over before your brothers, the sons of Israel, all sons of valor." They had their land, but their job was not finished. Their wives, children and livestock could stay behind in the cities, "until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as to you."

This is a lesson in love for God's people. These tribes could have settled down and let the others fight their own battles. Moses said no. You do not rest until your brothers have rest too. Numbers 32:6 puts it sharply: "Shall your brothers go to the battle, and you, shall you sit here?" And they kept their word. Joshua sent them home only after the land was taken (Joshua 22:1-4).

In the church, too, we do not stop caring once our own needs are met. We stand with our brothers and sisters until they have rest as well (Galatians 6:2).

3:21-22 *And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, 'Your eyes **are** the **ones** seeing all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings; thus the LORD will do to all the kingdoms to which you are passing over. You shall not fear them, for the LORD your God, He **is** the **One** fighting for you.'*

"I commanded Joshua at that time." Moses turns to the man who would take his place. "Your eyes are the ones seeing all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings; thus the LORD will do to all the kingdoms to which you are passing over."

Joshua had been at Kadesh. He had seen the people's fear. Now he had also seen Sihon and Og fall. Moses told him to let what he had seen shape what he expected. "You shall not fear them, for the LORD your God, He is the One fighting for you."

God would say the same to Joshua after Moses died: "Be strong and be bold" (Joshua 1:9). A leader's courage does not come from his own strength. It comes from knowing that God fights for His people.

3:23-25 *And I sought favor from the LORD at that time, saying, 'Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand; for who **is** a god in the heavens and on the earth who does according to Your works and according to Your mighty deeds? Let me pass over, please, and let me see the good land which **is** on the other side of the Jordan, this good hill country and the Lebanon.'*

"And I sought favor from the LORD at that time." Now Moses tells something personal. He prayed. He begged.

Listen to how he prays. He begins with worship: "Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand." Lord GOD here is Adonai YHWH, master and LORD. Moses has seen God's power at the Red Sea, at Sinai, and against Sihon and Og, and he says it is only the beginning. "For who is a god in the heavens and on the earth who does according to Your works?"

Then his request: "Let me pass over, please, and let me see the good land." After forty years of leading a grumbling people through the desert, Moses longed to stand in the land God promised. It is an honest and humble prayer. There is nothing wrong with asking God for what our hearts long for.

3:26-27 *And the LORD was furious with me on account of you, and He did not listen to me; and the LORD said to me, '**It is** enough for you; do not continue to speak to Me again about this matter. Go up **to** the top of the Pisgah, and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward, and see with your eyes, for you shall not pass over this Jordan.*

"And the LORD was furious with me on account of you, and He did not listen to me." God's answer was no. Moses again says "on account of you." The people had provoked him at Meribah, but it was still his own sin of not treating God as holy that kept him out (Numbers 20:12; see 1:37).

"It is enough for you; do not continue to speak to Me again about this matter." That is a hard word to hear. God's no was final. Paul also prayed three times for his thorn to be removed, and God said, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Yet even in His no, God was kind. "Go up to the top of the Pisgah, and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward, and see with your eyes." Moses would not walk the land, but he would see it all (34:1-4). And centuries later Moses did stand in the land, on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured, talking with Him (Matthew 17:3). God's no to Moses was not the end of the story.

3:28-29 *And command Joshua, and strengthen him and make him courageous, for he shall pass over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see.' And we remained in the valley opposite Beth-peor.*

"And command Joshua, and strengthen him and make him courageous, for he shall pass over before this people." God did not let Moses sit and grieve. He gave him one more job: to build up the next leader. Moses would see the land. Joshua would lead them into it.

This is what faithful people do when God says no. They do not quit. They pour themselves into those who will carry on the work. Moses spent his last days preaching, writing and preparing Joshua. That is a good way to finish.

"And we remained in the valley opposite Beth-peor." Beth-peor was near the place where Israel had sinned with the Baal of Peor (Numbers 25), and it is near where Moses would be buried (34:6). Here Moses stands, ready to preach the sermons of this book.

Chapter 3 Summary

Israel turned north to Bashan, and Og its king came out to fight them at Edrei. God told Moses not to fear him, and He gave Og and all his people into Israel's hand. Israel took sixty walled cities in the region of Argob and devoted them to destruction as they had done to Sihon. Og was the last of the Rephaim, and his iron bed was about 13 and a half feet long. Moses gave the land east of the Jordan to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and he charged their fighting men to cross over and fight beside their brothers until God gave them rest too. Moses told Joshua that the LORD would do to all the kingdoms what He had done to these two kings, because the LORD fights for Israel. Moses then begged God to let him cross the Jordan and see the good land. The LORD said no and told him not to ask again, but He let Moses see the land from Pisgah, and He told him to strengthen Joshua, who would lead the people in.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. What did God tell Moses about Og before the battle? (3:2)

2. How many cities did Israel take in Argob, and what were they like? (3:4-5)

3. What detail does Moses give about Og's bed, and why do you think it is included? (3:11)

4. What did Moses require of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh? (3:18-20)

5. What did Moses tell Joshua to remember, and why? (3:21-22)

6. How did Moses begin his prayer, and what did he ask for? (3:24-25)

7. What was God's answer, and what kindness did He still show Moses? (3:26-28)

8. What do you learn from Moses about how to respond when God says no?

9. Is there someone in your life you can strengthen and encourage the way Moses was told to strengthen Joshua?

10. Have your needs been met while others in your church or family are still struggling? What would it look like to "pass over" and stand with them?

Chapter 4: Obey the LORD and Make No Idols

Scripture

4:1-14 And now, Israel, listen to the statutes and to the judgments which I am teaching you to do, so that you may live, and you shall go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving to you. You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, and you shall not take away from it, so as to keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I am commanding you. Your eyes ***are*** the ***ones*** seeing what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for every man who walked after Baal-peor, the LORD your God destroyed him from your midst. And you who ***were*** clinging to the LORD your God ***are*** alive, all of you, today. See, I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, to do thus in the midst of the land to which you are going to take possession of it. And you shall keep ***them*** and do ***them***, for that ***is*** your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and they will say, 'Surely this great nation ***is*** a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation ***is there*** which has a god near to it like the LORD our God in all our calling to Him? And what great nation ***is there*** which has righteous statutes and judgments like all this law which I am setting before you today? Only take heed to yourself, and guard your soul very carefully, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; and you shall make them known to your sons and to your sons' sons, the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, and let Me make them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they ***are*** alive on the ground, and that they may teach their sons.' And you drew near and stood under the mountain, and the mountain ***was*** burning with fire to the heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. And the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; the voice of words you ***were*** hearing, and a form you ***were*** not seeing, only a voice. And He declared to you His covenant, which He commanded you to do, the ten words; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, for you to do them in the land to which you are passing over to take possession of it.

4:15-24 And you shall guard your souls very carefully, for you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image, the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that ***is*** on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the heavens, the likeness of any moving thing on the ground, the likeness of any fish that ***is*** in the waters under the earth; and lest you lift up your eyes toward the heavens, and you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of the heavens, and you are drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under all the heavens. And you the LORD has taken, and He brought you out from the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people of inheritance to Him, as ***at*** this day. And the LORD was angry with me on account of your words, and He swore that I would not pass over the Jordan, and that I would not go into the good land which the LORD your God is giving to you ***as*** an inheritance. For I am dying in this land; I am not passing over the Jordan; and you are passing over, and you shall take possession of this good land. Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with

you, and make for yourselves a carved image, the form of anything ***about*** which the LORD your God has commanded you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire; He ***is*** a jealous God.

4:25-40 When you father sons and sons' sons, and you have grown old in the land, and you act corruptly and make a carved image, the form of anything, and you do the evil in the eyes of the LORD your God, to provoke Him to anger, I call the heavens and the earth to witness against you today that you will surely perish quickly from the land to which you are passing over the Jordan to take possession of it; you shall not prolong ***your*** days on it, for you will surely be destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of the hands of man, wood and stone, which do not see and do not hear and do not eat and do not smell. And from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find ***Him***, when you search for Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress, and all these things have come upon you, at the end of the days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. For a compassionate God ***is*** the LORD your God; He will not let you go, and He will not destroy you, and He will not forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them. For ask, please, about the former days which were before you, from the day that God created mankind on the earth, and from ***one*** end of the heavens even to ***the other*** end of the heavens, whether ***anything*** has happened like this great thing, or whether ***anything*** like it has been heard. Has a people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, just as you yourself have heard, and lived? Or has a god tried to come to take for himself a nation from the midst of a nation, by trials, by signs and by wonders and by war and by a strong hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? You were shown ***it***, to know that the LORD, He ***is*** God; there is no other besides Him. From the heavens He made you hear His voice to discipline you, and on the earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. And because He loved your fathers, and He chose his seed after him, and He brought you out by His presence, by His great power, from Egypt, to dispossess from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give to you their land ***as*** an inheritance, as ***at*** this day, and you shall know today, and you shall bring ***it*** back to your heart, that the LORD, He ***is*** God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. And you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am commanding you today, that it may go well with you and with your sons after you, and that you may prolong ***your*** days on the ground which the LORD your God is giving to you, all the days."

4:41-49 Then Moses set apart three cities on the other side of the Jordan, toward the rising of the sun, for a killer to flee there, who kills his neighbor without knowledge, and he ***was*** not hating him in time past; and he may flee to one of these cities and live: Bezer in the wilderness, in the land of the plain, for the Reubenites; and Ramoth in Gilead, for the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, for the Manassites. And this ***is*** the law which Moses set before the sons of Israel; these ***are*** the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which Moses spoke to the sons of Israel when they came out from Egypt, on the other side of the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon the king of the Amorite, who ***was*** dwelling in Heshbon, whom Moses and the sons of Israel struck when they came out from Egypt. And they took possession of his land and the land of Og the king of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorite, who ***were*** on the other side of the Jordan, ***toward*** the rising of the sun, from Aroer, which ***is*** on the edge of the wadi of Arnon, even as far as

the mountain of Sion, that ***is*** Mount Hermon, and all the Arabah on the other side of the Jordan eastward, even as far as the sea of the Arabah, under the slopes of the Pisgah.

Chapter 4 Preview

Moses has finished looking back. Now he says, "And now, Israel, listen." Chapter 4 closes his first sermon with a strong call to obey. He tells them not to add to God's Word or take away from it, and he reminds them what happened at Baal-peor to those who followed another god. He tells them that keeping God's laws will make them wise in the eyes of the nations, and that no other nation has a God so near.

Then Moses takes them back to Horeb. They heard God's voice from the fire, but they saw no form. So they must never make an image of God or bow to the sun, moon and stars. Moses warns that if they turn to idols in the land, God will scatter them among the nations. But he also promises that if they seek the LORD there with all their heart, they will find Him, because He is a compassionate God who will not forget His covenant. The chapter ends with Moses setting apart three cities of refuge east of the Jordan and a short heading that opens the second sermon.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1-2 *And now, Israel, listen to the statutes and to the judgments which I am teaching you to do, so that you may live, and you shall go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving to you. You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, and you shall not take away from it, so as to keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I am commanding you.*

"And now, Israel, listen to the statutes and to the judgments which I am teaching you to do, so that you may live." The history lesson had a purpose. Because God has been faithful, Israel must now obey. Statutes are fixed rules. Judgments are rulings that show how to apply the law to real cases. Together they cover all that God required.

"So that you may live." For Israel, obedience meant life in the land. It was not how they became God's people. They were already His people. It was how they would enjoy what God gave them.

"You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, and you shall not take away from it." This is one of the most important rules in the Bible. We cannot make God's Word say more than He said, and we cannot cut out the parts we do not like. The same warning comes at the end of the Bible (Revelation 22:18-19). The Pharisees added rules and Jesus rebuked them for it (Mark 7:8-9). Many today take away what is hard. Both are dangerous.

4:3-4 *Your eyes **are** the **ones** seeing what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for every man who walked after Baal-peor, the LORD your God destroyed him from your midst. And you who **were** clinging to the LORD your God **are** alive, all of you, today.*

"Your eyes are the ones seeing what the LORD did at Baal-peor." Baal was the name of the chief god of the Canaanites, a god of storm and fertility. The Baal of Peor was the form of Baal

worshiped at Peor in Moab. Just before this, many Israelite men had joined in Moab's worship of him, along with sexual sin with Moabite women, and God sent a plague in which twenty-four thousand died (Numbers 25:1-9).

"Every man who walked after Baal-peor, the LORD your God destroyed him." But "you who were clinging to the LORD your God are alive, all of you, today." The people listening had seen it with their own eyes. Those who clung to the LORD lived. Those who walked after another god died. To cling means to hold tight, like a man holding on to a rope. That is what faith looks like when temptation pulls hard.

4:5-8 *See, I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, to do thus in the midst of the land to which you are going to take possession of it. And you shall keep* ***them*** *and do* ***them****, for that* ***is*** *your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and they will say, 'Surely this great nation* ***is*** *a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation* ***is there*** *which has a god near to it like the LORD our God in all our calling to Him? And what great nation* ***is there*** *which has righteous statutes and judgments like all this law which I am setting before you today?*

"Keep them and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the peoples." God's Law was not only for Israel's good. It was meant to be a witness to the nations. When other peoples saw how Israel lived, they would say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

Then Moses asks two questions. "For what great nation is there which has a god near to it like the LORD our God in all our calling to Him?" Other nations had gods that were far away, silent or made of stone. Israel's God was near and heard them when they called.

"And what great nation is there which has righteous statutes and judgments like all this law?" The laws of other ancient nations often favored the rich and treated the poor harshly. God's Law protected the weak, the widow, the orphan and the foreigner.

This is still God's plan for His people. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). People should look at how Christians live and see the wisdom and nearness of our God.

4:9-10 *Only take heed to yourself, and guard your soul very carefully, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; and you shall make them known to your sons and to your sons' sons, the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, and let Me make them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they* ***are*** *alive on the ground, and that they may teach their sons.'*

"Only take heed to yourself, and guard your soul very carefully, lest you forget." Forgetting is the great danger in Deuteronomy. Moses will warn about it again and again. It is not that they would lose the memory. It is that the things they had seen would "depart from your heart." We can know a story and still let it stop shaping our lives.

The cure is to pass it on: "you shall make them known to your sons and to your sons' sons." Faith is to be handed down from parents to children to grandchildren.

Moses points them back to "the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb." God said He gathered them so "that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they are alive." To fear God means to stand in awe of Him, to take Him so seriously that we want to please Him above all. It is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).

4:11-14 *And you drew near and stood under the mountain, and the mountain **was** burning with fire to the heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. And the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; the voice of words you **were** hearing, and a form you **were** not seeing, only a voice. And He declared to you His covenant, which He commanded you to do, the ten words; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, for you to do them in the land to which you are passing over to take possession of it.*

Moses describes the scene: "the mountain was burning with fire to the heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud, and thick darkness." The people standing before him had been children or young people then, but some had seen it, and all had heard it told.

"The LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; the voice of words you were hearing, and a form you were not seeing, only a voice." That is the key point for what follows. God spoke. He did not show a shape.

"And He declared to you His covenant, which He commanded you to do, the ten words." A covenant is a solemn, binding agreement. Here it is God's covenant with Israel, made at Sinai, with the Ten Commandments at its heart. God "wrote them on two tablets of stone." Then He told Moses to teach the rest of the statutes for life in the land. Deuteronomy is that teaching.

4:15-18 *And you shall guard your souls very carefully, for you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image, the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that **is** on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the heavens, the likeness of any moving thing on the ground, the likeness of any fish that **is** in the waters under the earth;*

"You did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb." Because God showed no form, Israel must not make any image to stand for Him or any other god.

Moses lists the possibilities: the likeness of a man or woman, any animal, any bird, any creeping thing, any fish. The nations around Israel made gods of all these shapes. Egypt had gods with the heads of birds and animals. Canaan had male and female idols.

Why is this so serious? Because an image always shrinks God down. It turns the Creator into something like His creatures. Paul says this is exactly what mankind has done: they "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into a likeness of an image of corruptible man and of birds and of four-footed animals and of creeping things" (Romans 1:23). God is spirit (John 4:24). The only true image of God is His Son, "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

4:19-20 *and lest you lift up your eyes toward the heavens, and you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of the heavens, and you are drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under all the heavens. And you the LORD has taken, and He brought you out from the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people of inheritance to Him, as **at** this day.*

Moses adds another warning: do not "see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of the heavens," and bow down to them. Worship of the sun, moon and stars was common in the ancient world. The stars are beautiful and great, but they are creatures. God "allotted" them to all peoples, to give light to all mankind (Genesis 1:14-18). They are gifts, not gods.

"And you the LORD has taken, and He brought you out from the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people of inheritance to Him." Egypt was like a furnace for melting iron, a place of crushing heat and suffering. God pulled them out of it to be His own "inheritance," His treasured possession. Why would a people God had rescued like that turn to worship the stars He made? Yet people still look to the stars through horoscopes and astrology. God's people should look to the One who made them.

4:21-24 *And the LORD was angry with me on account of your words, and He swore that I would not pass over the Jordan, and that I would not go into the good land which the LORD your God is giving to you **as** an inheritance. For I am dying in this land; I am not passing over the Jordan; and you are passing over, and you shall take possession of this good land. Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image, the form of anything **about** which the LORD your God has commanded you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire; He **is** a jealous God.*

Moses speaks personally again. "The LORD was angry with me on account of your words, and He swore that I would not pass over the Jordan." "I am dying in this land." He would not go in, but they would.

Then the warning that follows is all the more urgent. "Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant." It is as if Moses is saying, I won't be there to remind you. You must remember on your own.

"For the LORD your God is a consuming fire; He is a jealous God." Fire is a picture of God's holiness. It burns up what is impure. Jealous here is not petty envy. It is the holy love of a husband who will not share his wife's heart with another. Hebrews 12:29 repeats this for Christians: "our God is also a consuming fire." God's love does not make Him soft on idolatry. His love is the very reason He will not share us with idols.

4:25-28 *When you father sons and sons' sons, and you have grown old in the land, and you act corruptly and make a carved image, the form of anything, and you do the evil in the eyes of the LORD your God, to provoke Him to anger, I call the heavens and the earth to witness against you today that you will surely perish quickly from the land to which you are passing over the Jordan to take possession of it; you shall not prolong **your** days on it, for you will surely be destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of the hands of man, wood and stone, which do not see and do not hear and do not eat and do not smell.*

Now Moses looks into the future. "When you father sons and sons' sons, and you have grown old in the land, and you act corruptly and make a carved image." Notice the word "when," not if. Moses knew the human heart.

"I call the heavens and the earth to witness against you today." Heaven and earth are called as witnesses to the covenant, as in a court case. If Israel turned to idols, "you will surely perish quickly from the land." "And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples."

This is exactly what happened. The northern kingdom of Israel was taken into exile by Assyria in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6-18), and Judah was taken to Babylon after Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25). Moses spoke this seven to eight hundred years ahead of time.

There, Moses says, "you will serve gods, the work of the hands of man, wood and stone, which do not see and do not hear." The punishment fits the sin. If they wanted idols, they would get a land full of them, and those idols would not be able to help them at all.

4:29-31 *And from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find **Him**, when you search for Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress, and all these things have come upon you, at the end of the days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. For a compassionate God **is** the LORD your God; He will not let you go, and He will not destroy you, and He will not forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.*

But Moses does not end with judgment. "And from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him, when you search for Him with all your heart and with all your soul." Even in exile, the door would be open. Jeremiah repeated this promise to the exiles in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:13).

"When you are in distress, and all these things have come upon you, at the end of the days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice." The phrase "at the end of the days" points far ahead. Israel did return from Babylon, but the prophets speak of a greater return still to come. Hosea says Israel will seek the LORD "at the end of the days" (Hosea 3:5). Jeremiah speaks of "a time of distress for Jacob," from which Jacob "will be saved" (Jeremiah 30:7). I believe this points to the Tribulation, the time of great trouble before Christ returns, when Israel as a nation will turn to the Lord, and "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

Why will God do this? "For a compassionate God is the LORD your God; He will not let you go, and He will not destroy you, and He will not forget the covenant of your fathers." God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still stands. He has not cast off His people (Romans 11:1-2).

4:32-34 *For ask, please, about the former days which were before you, from the day that God created mankind on the earth, and from **one** end of the heavens even to **the other** end of the heavens, whether **anything** has happened like this great thing, or whether **anything** like it has been heard. Has a people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, just as you yourself have heard, and lived? Or has a god tried to come to take for himself a nation from the midst of a nation, by trials, by signs and by wonders and by war and by a strong hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?*

Moses now asks Israel to search all of history. "Ask, please, about the former days which were before you, from the day that God created mankind on the earth." Has anything like this ever happened?

"Has a people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, just as you yourself have heard, and lived?" No other nation could say this.

"Or has a god tried to come to take for himself a nation from the midst of a nation, by trials, by signs and by wonders and by war and by a strong hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors?" No god of any nation ever did what the LORD did in Egypt. He reached into the middle of the world's greatest power and pulled out a nation of slaves for Himself.

Christians can ask the same kind of question. What other God came down Himself, took on flesh, died for His enemies and rose again? There is none.

4:35-36 *You were shown **it**, to know that the LORD, He **is** God; there is no other besides Him. From the heavens He made you hear His voice to discipline you, and on the earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire.*

Why did God do all of this? "You were shown it, to know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him." The exodus was a lesson in who God is. There is one God. All the others are nothing (1 Corinthians 8:4).

"From the heavens He made you hear His voice to discipline you." Discipline here means training and correction, the way a father trains a son. The fire, the voice and the fear at Sinai were all part of God shaping His people. God still trains His children, and "whom the Lord loves He disciplines" (Hebrews 12:6).

4:37-38 *And because He loved your fathers, and He chose his seed after him, and He brought you out by His presence, by His great power, from Egypt, to dispossess from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give to you their land **as** an inheritance, as **at** this day,*

Here is the reason behind everything: "because He loved your fathers, and He chose his seed after him." God did not choose Israel because they were great or good. He chose them because He loved

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and He chose their descendants. Moses will say this even more plainly in 7:7-8.

"He brought you out by His presence, by His great power." The Hebrew says by His face. God Himself went with them.

And He did it "to dispossess from before you nations greater and mightier than you." Everything Israel had, from freedom to land, came from God's love and power. Nothing came from their own goodness. The same is true for us. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

4:39-40 *and you shall know today, and you shall bring **it** back to your heart, that the LORD, He **is** God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. And you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am commanding you today, that it may go well with you and with your sons after you, and that you may prolong **your** days on the ground which the LORD your God is giving to you, all the days."*

"You shall know today, and you shall bring it back to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath; there is no other." This is the heart of chapter 4. There is one God. He rules above and below. There is no other.

Knowing it in your head is not enough. Moses says, "bring it back to your heart." Let it go deep. Let it change how you live.

"And you shall keep His statutes and His commandments," Moses says, "that it may go well with you and with your sons after you." Obedience was the path of blessing for Israel and for their children. For us, obedience does not earn salvation. But God's ways are still the best way to live, and the way we live still shapes the generations after us.

4:41-43 *Then Moses set apart three cities on the other side of the Jordan, toward the rising of the sun, for a killer to flee there, who kills his neighbor without knowledge, and he **was** not hating him in time past; and he may flee to one of these cities and live: Bezer in the wilderness, in the land of the plain, for the Reubenites; and Ramoth in Gilead, for the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, for the Manassites.*

Moses now does something practical. He "set apart three cities on the other side of the Jordan." These were cities of refuge. If someone killed his neighbor by accident, "without knowledge," and without any hatred beforehand, he could run to one of these cities and be safe from anyone seeking revenge (Numbers 35:9-15).

The three cities were "Bezer in the wilderness" for Reuben, "Ramoth in Gilead" for Gad, and "Golan in Bashan" for Manasseh. Three more would be set apart west of the Jordan (19:1-10; Joshua 20).

Why is this here? Perhaps because Moses wanted to finish this one piece of business himself while he still could. These cities show God's justice and mercy together. Hebrews 6:18 says that we "who have fled for refuge" hold on to the hope set before us. Christ is our refuge.

4:44-49 *And this **is** the law which Moses set before the sons of Israel; these **are** the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which Moses spoke to the sons of Israel when they came out from Egypt, on the other side of the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon the king of the Amorite, who **was** dwelling in Heshbon, whom Moses and the sons of Israel struck when they came out from Egypt. And they took possession of his land and the land of Og the king of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorite, who **were** on the other side of the Jordan, **toward** the rising of the sun, from Aroer, which **is** on the edge of the wadi of Arnon, even as far as the mountain of Sion, that **is** Mount Hermon, and all the Arabah on the other side of the Jordan eastward, even as far as the sea of the Arabah, under the slopes of the Pisgah.*

"And this is the law which Moses set before the sons of Israel." These verses are a heading for Moses' second and longest sermon, which begins in chapter 5. They name "the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments." Testimonies are God's solemn statements of His will, given as witness.

Moses again marks the place: "in the valley opposite Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon." And he again lists the land already taken east of the Jordan, from the Arnon in the south to "the mountain of Sion, that is Mount Hermon" in the north.

The place matters. Moses taught the Law on land God had already given them. Every time they looked around, they could see God's faithfulness. The commands came after the gift. That is always God's order: grace first, then obedience.

Chapter 4 Summary

Moses called Israel to listen to God's statutes and judgments so that they might live and take the land. They were not to add to God's Word or take away from it. They had seen how God destroyed those who followed the Baal of Peor and kept alive those who clung to Him. Keeping God's laws would show the nations Israel's wisdom, for no other nation had a God so near or laws so righteous. Moses warned them not to forget what they had seen at Horeb, where they heard God's voice from the fire but saw no form, so they must never make an image or worship the sun, moon and stars. God is a consuming fire and a jealous God. If Israel turned to idols, God would scatter them among the nations, but if they sought Him there with all their heart, they would find Him, and in the end of the days they would return to Him, because He is compassionate and will not forget His covenant. No other people had heard God's voice and lived, or been taken out of another nation by such signs. God did it because He loved their fathers, so that they would know there is no other God. Moses then set apart three cities of refuge east of the Jordan, and a heading introduced the law he was about to set before them.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. What did Moses say about adding to or taking away from God's Word? (4:2)

2. What happened at Baal-peor, and who survived? (4:3-4; Numbers 25)

3. What two questions did Moses ask to show that Israel was a great nation? (4:7-8)

4. Why were the Israelites not to make any image of God? (4:12, 15-18)

5. What did Moses say would happen if Israel turned to idols in the land? (4:25-28)

6. What promise did Moses give for when they were scattered? (4:29-31)

7. Why did God choose Israel and bring them out of Egypt? (4:37)

8. How can we be tempted to add to or take away from God's Word today?

9. Moses said not to let what you have seen depart from your heart (4:9). What has God done in your life that you need to remember and pass on to the next generation?

10. Are there "idols" in your life that shrink God down to something smaller than He is? What would it look like to "cling" to the LORD instead?

Chapter 5: The Ten Commandments Again

Scripture

5:1-21 And Moses called to all Israel, and he said to them, "Hear, Israel, the statutes and the judgments which I am speaking in your ears today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, we, these here today, all of us alive. Face to face the LORD spoke with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire, I ***was*** standing between the LORD and you at that time to declare to you the word of the LORD, for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up on the mountain, saying, 'I ***am*** the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves. There shall not be to you other gods before My face. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, any form that ***is*** in the heavens above, and that ***is*** on the earth beneath, and that ***is*** in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them, and you shall not be made to serve them; for I, the LORD your God, ***am*** a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of fathers on sons, and on the third ***generation*** and on the fourth ***generation*** of those who hate Me, and doing steadfast love to thousands, of those who love Me and of those who keep My commandments. You shall not take up the name of the LORD your God for emptiness, for the LORD will not hold guiltless ***the one*** who takes up His name for emptiness. Keep the day of the Sabbath, to sanctify it, just as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, and the seventh day ***is*** a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work, you and your son and your daughter and your slave and your female slave and your ox and your donkey and all your livestock and your sojourner who ***is*** within your gates, so that your slave and your female slave may rest like you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the day of the Sabbath. Honor your father and your mother, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that your days may be prolonged, and so that it may go well with you on the ground which the LORD your God is giving to you. You shall not murder. And you shall not commit adultery. And you shall not steal. And you shall not answer against your neighbor ***as*** a witness of falsehood. And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, and his slave and his female slave, his ox and his donkey, and anything that ***belongs*** to your neighbor.'

5:22-33 These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, ***with*** a great voice, and He added no more; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me. And it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain ***was*** burning with fire, that you drew near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders, and you said, 'Look, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and His voice we have heard from the midst of the fire; this day we have seen that God speaks with man, and he lives. And now, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we continue to hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we will die. For who ***is there*** of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire as we ***have***, and lived? You draw near and hear all that the LORD our God will say; and you

shall speak to us all that the LORD our God will speak to you, and we will listen and do ***it***.' And the LORD heard the sound of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, 'I have heard the sound of the words of this people which they have spoken to you; they have done well ***in*** all that they have spoken. Oh that they had this heart in them, to fear Me and to keep all My commandments all the days, so that it might go well with them and with their sons forever! Go, say to them, "Return to your tents." And you, stand here with Me, and let Me speak to you all the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them, and they shall do ***them*** in the land which I am giving to them to take possession of it.' And you shall be careful to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside ***to the*** right or ***to the*** left. In all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, you shall walk, so that you may live, and it may be well with you, and you may prolong ***your*** days in the land which you shall take possession of.

Chapter 5 Preview

Moses now begins his second sermon, the longest in the book. He starts where God started at Sinai, with the Ten Commandments. He tells the new generation that the covenant made at Horeb was made with them too, not only with their parents. Then he repeats the ten words God spoke from the fire. They are almost the same as in Exodus 20, with a few changes that fit a people about to enter the land. The biggest is the Sabbath: here Israel is told to keep it because they were slaves in Egypt and God set them free, so their own servants must rest as well.

In the second half Moses reminds them how terrified the people were at the mountain. The leaders asked Moses to go near to God and bring His words back, and God said they had spoken well. Then God said something that shows His heart: "Oh that they had this heart in them, to fear Me." The Law could tell Israel what was right, but it could not give them a new heart. That is what God would one day do through Christ.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1-3 *And Moses called to all Israel, and he said to them, "Hear, Israel, the statutes and the judgments which I am speaking in your ears today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, we, these here today, all of us alive.*

"Hear, Israel, the statutes and the judgments which I am speaking in your ears today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them." Moses gives four verbs: hear, learn, be careful, do. Hearing God's Word is where it starts, but it is not where it ends. James says to be doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:22).

"The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us." Many of the people listening were children at Horeb, and some were not yet born. Moses does not mean God made no covenant with their fathers. He means it was not only with them. The covenant was just as binding on this generation as on the last. Every

generation must take God's Word as spoken to them, "these here today, all of us alive." That is true for us as well. God's Word is not just a record of what He said to someone else.

5:4-5 *Face to face the LORD spoke with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire, I **was** standing between the LORD and you at that time to declare to you the word of the LORD, for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up on the mountain, saying,*

"Face to face the LORD spoke with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire." Face to face here means directly and personally. God did not send His words through a messenger that day. The whole nation heard His voice.

But verse 5 adds: "I was standing between the LORD and you at that time to declare to you the word of the LORD, for you were afraid because of the fire." Both are true. God spoke the ten words to all of them (5:22), and then, because they were afraid, Moses stood between them and God for everything else.

Moses was a go-between, a mediator. He points ahead to Jesus, the one "mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Moses could only stand between. Christ, who is both God and man, brings us all the way to God.

5:6 *'I **am** the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves.*

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves."

Just as in Exodus 20:2, God begins with who He is and what He has done before He gives one command. He is the LORD, the God who keeps His covenant. He is "your God," Israel's own. And He has already freed them.

This order matters more than anything else in the chapter. God did not say, Keep these commands and I will free you. He said, I have freed you, now live as My people. The commands come after the rescue. This is grace first, then obedience. We do not keep God's commands to be saved. We keep them because we have been saved (Ephesians 2:8-10).

5:7 *There shall not be to you other gods before My face.*

"There shall not be to you other gods before My face." The first commandment is the foundation of the rest. "Before My face" means in My presence, and since God is everywhere, there is no place where another god is allowed.

Israel was about to enter a land full of gods: Baal, Asherah, and many more. Each promised rain, crops or children. The temptation would be to keep the LORD and add a few others for good measure. God said no. Only Me.

We may not have shrines in our homes, but we still have gods. Anything we love, trust or fear more than God has taken His place. Paul calls covetousness "idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). What do you run to first when you are afraid or hurting? That can show you what you really worship.

5:8-10 *You shall not make for yourself a carved image, any form that **is** in the heavens above, and that **is** on the earth beneath, and that **is** in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them, and you shall not be made to serve them; for I, the LORD your God, **am** a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of fathers on sons, and on the third **generation** and on the fourth **generation** of those who hate Me, and doing steadfast love to thousands, of those who love Me and of those who keep My commandments.*

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image." The first commandment tells us whom to worship. The second tells us how. Israel was not to make any image of God or of any other god, from the heavens, the earth or the waters. Moses has just explained why in 4:15-18: they saw no form at Horeb, only a voice.

"For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God." This is the holy jealousy of a faithful husband who will not share his wife with another man. Idolatry is spiritual adultery, and God takes it that seriously.

"Visiting the iniquity of fathers on sons, and on the third generation and on the fourth generation of those who hate Me." This does not mean God punishes innocent children for their parents' guilt. Deuteronomy itself says children are not put to death for their fathers (24:16). It means that when children follow their parents in hating God, the effects of sin pass on and pile up.

But look at the other side: "doing steadfast love to thousands, of those who love Me." Steadfast love is the Hebrew word hesed, God's loyal, faithful covenant love. Judgment reaches three or four generations. His steadfast love reaches thousands, which Deuteronomy 7:9 says means a thousand generations. God's mercy is far bigger than His anger.

5:11 *You shall not take up the name of the LORD your God for emptiness, for the LORD will not hold guiltless **the one** who takes up His name for emptiness.*

"You shall not take up the name of the LORD your God for emptiness." To take up His name for emptiness means to use it in a false, empty or careless way. God's name stands for who He is. This command forbids swearing falsely by His name, using it to curse, making promises in His name that we do not intend to keep, and tossing it around without thought.

It also reaches to how we live. To call ourselves God's people and then live as if He does not matter is to carry His name in vain.

"For the LORD will not hold guiltless the one who takes up His name for emptiness." That is a serious warning. Jesus taught us to pray, "let Your name be sanctified" (Matthew 6:9), that is, treated as holy.

5:12-15 *Keep the day of the Sabbath, to sanctify it, just as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, and the seventh day* ***is*** *a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work, you and your son and your daughter and your slave and your female slave and your ox and your donkey and all your livestock and your sojourner who* ***is*** *within your gates, so that your slave and your female slave may rest like you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the day of the Sabbath.*

"Keep the day of the Sabbath, to sanctify it, just as the LORD your God commanded you." Sabbath means rest, or stopping. To sanctify it means to set it apart as holy. Exodus 20:8 says "Remember." Here Moses says "Keep," and adds "just as the LORD your God commanded you," because he is reminding them of a command already given.

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work." Work is good, and God commands it. But the seventh day belonged to the LORD. No one in the house was to work: sons, daughters, servants, animals, "and your sojourner who is within your gates."

Then comes the main change from Exodus. Exodus 20:11 grounds the Sabbath in creation: God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Here Moses gives a second reason: "so that your slave and your female slave may rest like you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out." In Egypt they had worked with no rest. Now that they were free, they were not to treat anyone the way Pharaoh treated them. The Sabbath was a weekly reminder of their freedom, and a gift of mercy to the weakest in the house.

How does this apply to Christians? This is the one commandment of the ten that the New Testament does not repeat as a command for the church. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for the sake of man, not man for the sake of the Sabbath," and that He is "Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). Paul calls Sabbaths "a shadow of the things coming, but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17), and he tells believers not to judge one another over days (Romans 14:5). The early church gathered "on the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7), the day Jesus rose. Believers differ here. Some hold that the Sabbath command now applies to Sunday, the Lord's day. Some keep the seventh day. Many see it fulfilled in the rest we have in Christ, "a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9), while still valuing a regular day of rest and worship. Whatever view we hold, God made us to need rest, and He wants a part of our time set apart for Him. And Deuteronomy adds a word we should not miss: our rest should never come at the cost of someone else's.

5:16 *Honor your father and your mother, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that your days may be prolonged, and so that it may go well with you on the ground which the LORD your God is giving to you.*

"Honor your father and your mother, just as the LORD your God has commanded you." Now the commands turn from God to people, and they start at home. To honor means to give weight to, to treat as important. Children honor parents by obeying them while they are young, respecting them always, and caring for them when they are old (Mark 7:10-13; 1 Timothy 5:4).

Deuteronomy adds a phrase to the promise in Exodus: "so that your days may be prolonged, and so that it may go well with you on the ground which the LORD your God is giving to you." Paul calls this "the first commandment with a promise" (Ephesians 6:2-3). A nation where families hold together is a nation that lasts.

Honor does not mean we must follow parents into sin, and it does not mean a person must stay under abuse. But how we treat our parents matters to God.

5:17 *You shall not murder.*

"You shall not murder." Human life is sacred because every person is made in God's image (Genesis 9:6). The Hebrew word, ratsach, means the unlawful killing of a person. The same Law allows killing in some cases, such as war and the death penalty for murder (19:11-13), so this command is not against every taking of life. It forbids the taking of innocent life.

Jesus went to the heart. He said that anyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to the judgment (Matthew 5:21-22). John says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). Murder starts with anger and hatred inside. By that measure, which of us is innocent?

5:18 *And you shall not commit adultery.*

"And you shall not commit adultery." Notice that from here on, each command in the Hebrew begins with "and," tying them together as one law. God made marriage, one man and one woman for life (Genesis 2:24). Adultery is sexual unfaithfulness by a married person. It breaks the covenant of marriage, wounds the spouse and children, and sins against God.

Jesus said that "everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). This command calls every one of us, married or single, to purity in thought and deed. Where we have failed, Christ forgives and cleanses those who confess (1 John 1:9).

5:19 *And you shall not steal.*

"And you shall not steal." God gives people the right to own things. Stealing takes what God has given to someone else. It includes cheating in business, holding back fair wages, not giving an honest day's work, and not paying what we owe.

Paul gives the Christian answer: "Let the one who steals no longer steal, but rather let him labor, working with the hands what is good, so that he may have something to share with the one who has need" (Ephesians 4:28). Grace turns a taker into a giver.

5:20 *And you shall not answer against your neighbor **as** a witness of falsehood.*

"And you shall not answer against your neighbor as a witness of falsehood." The first setting is a court of law, where a false witness could ruin a man or cost him his life. Later Moses requires two

or three witnesses for any charge (19:15), and a false witness was to receive the punishment he tried to bring on his neighbor (19:16-19).

But the command reaches all our words: lies, gossip, slander, and twisting the truth to hurt someone. Jesus Himself was condemned by false witnesses (Mark 14:56-57). Paul says, "speak truth each one with his neighbor, because we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25).

5:21 *And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, and his slave and his female slave, his ox and his donkey, and anything that* ***belongs*** *to your neighbor.'*

"And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field." Here Deuteronomy differs a little from Exodus 20:17. Exodus lists the house first, then the wife. Deuteronomy puts the wife first, in a line by herself, and then uses a second word, desire, for the house and the rest. It also adds "his field," which fits a people about to receive farmland in Canaan.

To covet means to want strongly what belongs to someone else. The first nine commands can be kept outwardly, at least in part. This one is all in the heart. No court can see it. Only God can.

This was the command that showed Paul his sin. He wrote that he "had not known covetousness except that the law was saying," and then he quoted this command (Romans 7:7). He could keep the outward rules, but he could not stop his desires. That is what the law does. It shows us that we are sinners who need a Savior (Galatians 3:24).

The cure for coveting is contentment. Paul learned "to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Philippians 4:11). If we have Christ, we have enough.

5:22 *These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness,* ***with*** *a great voice, and He added no more; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.*

"These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a great voice, and He added no more." The Ten Commandments stand apart. They alone were spoken by God's own voice to the whole nation. "He added no more" that day. The other laws came through Moses.

"And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me." Written in stone by God's own hand, they were meant to last. Many think the two tablets were two copies of all ten, one for each party to the covenant, as was common with covenants in that day.

The Law written on stone was holy and good. But it was outside of them. God later promised a new covenant in which He would write His law on their heart (Jeremiah 31:33).

5:23-27 *And it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain **was** burning with fire, that you drew near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders, and you said, 'Look, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and His voice we have heard from the midst of the fire; this day we have seen that God speaks with man, and he lives. And now, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we continue to hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we will die. For who **is there** of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire as we **have**, and lived? You draw near and hear all that the LORD our God will say; and you shall speak to us all that the LORD our God will speak to you, and we will listen and do **it**.'*

When the people heard the voice and saw the mountain burning, "all the heads of your tribes and your elders" came to Moses. They said, "this day we have seen that God speaks with man, and he lives." They were amazed to still be alive.

But they were also afraid. "And now, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us." "For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire as we have, and lived?"

So they asked Moses to go for them: "You draw near and hear all that the LORD our God will say; and you shall speak to us." And they made a promise: "we will listen and do it."

Their fear was right. Sinful people cannot stand before a holy God on their own. Hebrews 12:18-24 contrasts that terrifying mountain with the place believers now come to: not Sinai, but Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, and "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant."

5:28-29 *And the LORD heard the sound of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, 'I have heard the sound of the words of this people which they have spoken to you; they have done well **in** all that they have spoken. Oh that they had this heart in them, to fear Me and to keep all My commandments all the days, so that it might go well with them and with their sons forever!*

"The LORD heard the sound of your words." God approved: "they have done well in all that they have spoken." Asking for a mediator was the right response.

Then comes one of the most moving verses in the book. "Oh that they had this heart in them, to fear Me and to keep all My commandments all the days, so that it might go well with them and with their sons forever!"

Here we hear God's longing. He knew their words were good, but He also knew their hearts. They said, "we will listen and do it," but within weeks of first saying it at Sinai they had made the golden calf. The problem was never the Law. The problem was the heart.

And God would answer His own longing. Moses will say later that God will circumcise their heart so they can love Him (30:6). Ezekiel says God would give "a new heart" and put His Spirit within His people (Ezekiel 36:26-27). That is what God does for everyone who trusts in Christ. He gives us the heart He longed for Israel to have.

5:30-31 *Go, say to them, "Return to your tents." And you, stand here with Me, and let Me speak to you all the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them, and they shall do* ***them*** *in the land which I am giving to them to take possession of it.'*

God told Moses to send the people home: "Return to your tents." They went. "And you, stand here with Me, and let Me speak to you all the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them."

Moses stayed. He received the rest of God's Law and was given the job of teaching it. That is what he is doing in Deuteronomy, forty years later. The words he speaks on the plains of Moab are the words he heard on the mountain.

These laws were "in the land which I am giving to them." The Law was made for life in the land God gave. Many of its details, such as the sacrifices, the feasts and the food laws, were for Israel under that covenant and were fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:1-14). The moral heart of it, love for God and neighbor, is still God's will for us (Romans 13:8-10).

5:32-33 *And you shall be careful to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside* ***to the*** *right or* ***to the*** *left. In all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, you shall walk, so that you may live, and it may be well with you, and you may prolong* ***your*** *days in the land which you shall take possession of.*

"And you shall be careful to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left." Picture a straight road with a ditch on each side. One ditch is adding rules God never gave. The other is ignoring the ones He did give. God's people are to stay on the road.

"In all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, you shall walk, so that you may live, and it may be well with you." For Israel, walking in God's way meant long life in the land. For the Christian, Jesus Himself is "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). We walk in Him. Obedience does not earn our life with God. It is how that life is lived.

Chapter 5 Summary

Moses called all Israel to hear, learn and do God's statutes, and reminded them that the covenant made at Horeb was made with them, not only with their parents. The LORD had spoken with them from the fire, while Moses stood between them and God. Moses then repeated the Ten Commandments: I am the LORD your God who brought you out of slavery; have no other gods; make no carved image; do not take the LORD's name for emptiness; keep the Sabbath holy, so that your servants may rest, remembering that you were slaves in Egypt; honor your father and mother; do not murder, commit adultery, steal or bear false witness; and do not covet your neighbor's wife or desire anything that belongs to him. God spoke these words with a great voice, added no more, and wrote them on two tablets of stone. The people, afraid they would die, asked Moses to hear God for them, and they promised to obey. God said they had spoken well, and He longed for them to have a heart to fear Him and keep His commands always. He kept Moses on

the mountain to receive the rest of the Law, and Moses called the people not to turn to the right or left, but to walk in God's way so they might live.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. What four things did Moses tell Israel to do with God's statutes? (5:1)

2. What did Moses mean when he said the covenant was made "with us"? (5:3)

3. What does God say about Himself before He gives the commandments, and why does that order matter? (5:6)

4. What reason for the Sabbath does Deuteronomy give that Exodus 20 does not? (5:14-15)

5. How does the tenth commandment here differ from Exodus 20:17? (5:21)

6. Why did the people ask Moses to speak to God for them, and what did God think of their request? (5:24-28)

7. What did God long for His people to have, and how does He give it through Christ? (5:29; Ezekiel 36:26-27)

8. How do Jesus' words in Matthew 5:21-28 show that we have all broken these commandments?

9. Moses tells us not to turn to the right or the left (5:32). Which "ditch" are you more likely to fall into: adding rules or ignoring God's commands?

10. How does the reason for the Sabbath in verse 15 shape the way you treat people who work for you or under you?

Chapter 6: Hear, O Israel

Scripture

6:1-9 And this ***is*** the commandment, the statutes and the judgments, which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, to do in the land to which you are passing over to take possession of it, so that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I am commanding you, you and your son and your son's son, all the days of your life, and so that your days may be prolonged. And you shall hear, Israel, and be careful to do ***them***, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you, ***in*** a land flowing ***with*** milk and honey. Hear, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD ***is*** one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them to your sons, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

6:10-19 And it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to you, great and good cities which you did not build, and houses full of every good thing which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not hew, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, take heed to yourself, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves. The LORD your God you shall fear, and Him you shall serve, and by His name you shall swear. You shall not walk after other gods, of the gods of the peoples who ***are*** around you, for a jealous God ***is*** the LORD your God in your midst, lest the anger of the LORD your God burn against you, and He destroy you from the face of the ground. You shall not test the LORD your God, just as you tested ***Him*** at Massah. You shall surely keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do the right and the good in the eyes of the LORD, so that it may go well with you, and you may go in and take possession of the good land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to drive out all your enemies from before you, just as the LORD has spoken.

6:20-25 When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What ***are*** the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand. And the LORD gave signs and wonders, great and harmful, against Egypt, against Pharaoh, and against all his household, before our eyes. And us He brought out from there, in order to bring us in, to give to us the land which He swore to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good all the days, to keep us alive, as ***at*** this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us.'

Chapter 6 Preview

This chapter holds the most famous words in the Old Testament. "Hear, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Jewish people call this the Shema, from its first Hebrew word, which means hear. For many centuries faithful Jews have said it morning and evening. When Jesus was asked which commandment is the greatest, He answered with these words (Matthew 22:37-38). Moses tells Israel to keep these words on their hearts, to teach them to their children through the whole day, and to keep them always before their eyes.

Then Moses warns them about a danger they had never faced: plenty. In the wilderness they depended on God for every meal. In Canaan they would move into houses they did not build and eat from vines they did not plant. When you are full, Moses says, do not forget the LORD. Jesus quoted this chapter twice when Satan tempted Him. The chapter ends with a father answering his son's question about why they keep God's laws. The answer begins, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out."

Chapter 6 Study

6:1-3 *And this **is** the commandment, the statutes and the judgments, which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, to do in the land to which you are passing over to take possession of it, so that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I am commanding you, you and your son and your son's son, all the days of your life, and so that your days may be prolonged. And you shall hear, Israel, and be careful to do **them**, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you, **in** a land flowing **with** milk and honey.*

"And this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments, which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you." The word commandment here is singular. Moses is about to give the one great command that sums up all the rest.

Look at the purpose: "so that you may fear the LORD your God," and keep His commands, "you and your son and your son's son, all the days of your life." Three generations are in view. God was not just after one generation's obedience. He wanted a family line of faith.

"And you shall hear, Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly." The land is "flowing with milk and honey." Milk and honey describe a rich land, with good pasture for herds and plenty of flowers for bees. God's commands were not meant to take away Israel's joy. They were the path to it.

6:4 *Hear, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD **is** one.*

"Hear, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one." Every word here matters, so let's slow down.

"Hear." In Hebrew, shema. To hear in the Bible means more than to let sound into your ears. It means to listen and to obey. A child who hears his father does what his father says. Israel's whole relationship with God began with God speaking and Israel listening.

"The LORD our God." The LORD is YHWH, God's own name, the name He gave Moses at the burning bush. He is not a nameless force. He is a Person who made Himself known. And He is "our God." He bound Himself to Israel by covenant.

"The LORD is one." The Hebrew word for one is echad. The phrase can be read two ways, and both are true. It can mean the LORD is one, the only God there is. All the gods of Egypt and Canaan are nothing. It can also mean the LORD alone is our God, the only One we will worship. Moses has just said, "there is no other besides Him" (4:35). Israel was surrounded by nations with dozens of gods. This verse drew a line. There is one God, and He is ours, and we are His.

Some people ask, if God is one, how can Christians say He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit? The Shema does not deny that. The same word echad is used when a man and his wife "become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24): two persons, truly one. Christians do not believe in three gods. We believe in one God who is three Persons. Jesus Himself quoted this verse as true (Mark 12:29), and He also said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Paul takes the words of the Shema and writes, "to us there is one God, the Father," and "one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:6). The full truth about God's oneness is made known as the Bible unfolds, but it never contradicts this verse. And one day, Zechariah says, "the LORD will be King over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one, and His name one" (Zechariah 14:9).

James adds a warning: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder" (James 2:19). Knowing that God is one is not enough. That is why verse 5 follows.

6:5 *And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*

"And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Here is the great command. God does not first ask for sacrifices, rules or rituals. He asks for love. The Law was never meant to be cold rule-keeping. It was meant to flow out of love for the God who loved Israel first (4:37; 7:8).

"With all your heart." In the Bible the heart is the center of a person: what we think, choose and want, not only what we feel. To love God with all your heart is to love Him with your mind and your will, not just your emotions.

"With all your soul." The soul is your life, your whole self. To love God with all your soul is to love Him with your very life, even if it costs you your life.

"With all your might." The Hebrew word means muchness, everything you have. It includes your strength, your energy, your time and your goods. Nothing is held back.

Notice the word "all," three times. God does not ask for a part of the heart, or most of it. He asks for all of it. That is because He is the one God (6:4). If there is only one God, He deserves all of us. Divided love is not what He asked for.

When a teacher of the law asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest, He answered with this verse: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Then He said, "This is the first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38). He added the second, from Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And He said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:39-40). Every other command in Deuteronomy hangs on this one.

Here is the honest question: who has ever kept this command? Not one of us has loved God with all our heart for a single day. This command shows us our sin more than any other. Only one Man has ever loved the Father with everything He was, and that is Jesus Christ. He kept this command for us, and He died for every time we have broken it. And then He gives us a new heart so that we can begin to love God as we were made to (30:6; Romans 5:5). We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Jesus also said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Love comes first, and obedience flows from it.

6:6 *And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart.*

"And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart."

Before God's words go on doorposts or into children's ears, they must go on our own hearts. God's Word is not meant to stay in a book or on a wall. It is meant to live inside us. The psalmist says, "In my heart I have treasured Your word, so that I will not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11).

How do God's words get on our hearts? By reading them, thinking about them, memorizing them and living by them, day after day. Under the new covenant, God Himself writes His law on the hearts of His people (Jeremiah 31:33). But we still have a part: we keep coming to His Word. A parent cannot pass on what is not in his own heart first.

6:7 *And you shall repeat them to your sons, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.*

"And you shall repeat them to your sons." The Hebrew word for repeat means to sharpen, or to teach by going over again and again, the way you sharpen a blade with many strokes. Faith is passed on by repetition.

And where does this teaching happen? "When you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you rise up." In other words, all day long, in the normal flow of life. At the dinner table. In the car. At bedtime. In the morning.

God put the main responsibility for teaching children the faith on parents, not on priests or teachers. The church can help, but it cannot replace a mother and father who talk about God at home. Paul tells fathers to bring up their children "in the discipline and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Timothy learned the Scriptures from childhood through his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

What do your children or grandchildren hear you talk about most? If God comes up only on Sunday, they will learn that He belongs only to Sunday.

6:8-9 *And you shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

"And you shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes." "And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

The hand stands for what we do. The space between the eyes stands for what we think and look at. The doorposts and gates stand for the home and the town. God's Word was to shape their actions, their thoughts, their families and their public life.

In time, Jewish people came to keep these commands in an outward way too. They wear small leather boxes holding these verses, called tefillin or phylacteries, on the arm and forehead during prayer. And they fix a small case with these words, called a mezuzah, to the doorposts of their homes. Jesus mentioned phylacteries when He warned against those who "broaden their phylacteries" to be seen by men (Matthew 23:5). The problem was not the box. It was the pride.

Whether these verses were meant to be kept with real boxes and doorpost writing or as a picture, the point is clear. God's Word should be everywhere in our lives, in what we do, what we think, and what goes on in our homes. Is it?

6:10-12 *And it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to you, great and good cities which you did not build, and houses full of every good thing which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not hew, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, take heed to yourself, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves.*

Now Moses turns to a danger Israel had never faced. God would bring them into the land with "great and good cities which you did not build, and houses full of every good thing which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not hew, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant." A cistern was a pit cut in rock to store rain water, very hard work in a dry land. They would receive it all as a gift.

"And you eat and are satisfied, take heed to yourself, lest you forget the LORD." Hunger kept Israel close to God in the wilderness. Being full would tempt them to forget Him. That is exactly what happened. Hosea says, "they were satisfied, and their heart was exalted; therefore they forgot Me" (Hosea 13:6).

This is a warning for us, too, if we live with plenty. It is easy to pray when you are desperate. It is much harder to stay close to God when everything is going well. Remember who gave you what you have, and remember "who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves." For us that means remembering what Christ saved us from.

6:13 *The LORD your God you shall fear, and Him you shall serve, and by His name you shall swear.*

"The LORD your God you shall fear, and Him you shall serve, and by His name you shall swear." To fear God means to stand in awe of Him. To serve Him means to worship and obey Him alone. To swear by His name means to make your solemn promises before Him, not before any other god.

When Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down to him, Jesus answered, "Go away, Satan," and then He quoted this verse: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him alone you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10). Jesus was tempted to take a shortcut to the throne, the crown without the cross. He refused, and He used God's Word to do it. That is how we fight temptation too.

6:14-15 *You shall not walk after other gods, of the gods of the peoples who **are** around you, for a jealous God **is** the LORD your God in your midst, lest the anger of the LORD your God burn against you, and He destroy you from the face of the ground.*

"You shall not walk after other gods, of the gods of the peoples who are around you." The gods of Canaan would be right next door. Their worship promised good crops and fertility, and it was full of sexual sin.

"For a jealous God is the LORD your God in your midst." God was not far off. He lived among them. And because He was near, turning to other gods would be like a wife bringing another man into her husband's house. "Lest the anger of the LORD your God burn against you, and He destroy you from the face of the ground." God's love and His jealousy go together. He loves His people too much to share them.

6:16 *You shall not test the LORD your God, just as you tested **Him** at Massah.*

"You shall not test the LORD your God, just as you tested Him at Massah." Massah means testing. At Massah, early in the journey, Israel had no water, and they quarreled with Moses and said, "Is the LORD in our midst or not?" (Exodus 17:1-7). To test God is to demand that He prove Himself on our terms, as if His past faithfulness was not enough.

When Satan took Jesus to the top of the temple and told Him to throw Himself down, quoting Psalm 91 to say the angels would catch Him, Jesus answered from this verse: "You shall not test the Lord your God" (Matthew 4:7). Jesus did not need to force God's hand to prove God's care. He simply trusted Him. Do we? Or do we keep asking God to prove Himself again and again?

6:17-19 *You shall surely keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do the right and the good in the eyes of the LORD, so that it may go well with you, and you may go in and take possession of the good land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to drive out all your enemies from before you, just as the LORD has spoken.*

"You shall surely keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and His testimonies and His statutes." "And you shall do the right and the good in the eyes of the LORD."

Notice whose eyes matter: the LORD's. Not what seems right in our own eyes, or what is popular around us, but what is right and good in His sight. Later, in the days of the judges, "each man did what was right in his own eyes," and it led to disaster (Judges 21:25).

"So that it may go well with you, and you may go in and take possession of the good land." God promised to drive out their enemies "just as the LORD has spoken." Obedience and blessing went together for Israel in the land.

6:20-23 *When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What **are** the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand. And the LORD gave signs and wonders, great and harmful, against Egypt, against Pharaoh, and against all his household, before our eyes. And us He brought out from there, in order to bring us in, to give to us the land which He swore to our fathers.*

"When your son asks you in time to come." Moses expects children to ask questions. Why do we do these things? Why do we keep these laws? That is a good question, and God gave parents an answer.

The answer is not, Because I said so. It is a story. "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand." The father tells what God did: the signs and wonders against Pharaoh, which they saw "before our eyes," and then, "us He brought out from there, in order to bring us in." God brought them out so He could bring them in.

This is how we should pass on our faith too. Our children need more than rules. They need to know the story of what God has done, in the Bible and in our own lives. The rules make sense only when they know the Rescuer. The Christian story is the same shape: we were slaves to sin, and God brought us out through Christ to bring us into His family.

6:24-25 *And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good all the days, to keep us alive, as **at** this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us.'*

"And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good all the days, to keep us alive." God's commands were "for our good." They were not a burden laid on Israel to make life hard. They were a Father's instructions for a good life. John says, "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

"And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God." What does this mean? Was Israel saved by keeping the Law? No. Israel was already God's redeemed people when the Law was given. Righteousness here means living rightly within the covenant, the right way of life God expected of His people. Abraham was declared righteous by faith long before the Law (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3).

And there is a deeper truth here. No one has ever done "all this commandment" perfectly. Paul says that those who tried to make their own righteousness by the Law missed the righteousness God gives (Romans 10:3). The only righteousness that can stand before God is the one He gives

through faith in Christ (Philippians 3:9). Christ did all the commandment for us. When we trust Him, His righteousness becomes ours, and then we begin to obey out of love.

Chapter 6 Summary

Moses gave Israel the commandment so they and their children and grandchildren would fear the LORD and keep His statutes, and it would go well with them in a land flowing with milk and honey. Then he spoke the Shema: "Hear, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." These words were to be on their hearts, taught to their children through the whole day, bound on their hands and between their eyes, and written on their doorposts and gates. Jesus called this the great and first commandment. Moses warned that when God gave them cities, houses and vineyards they did not build or plant, they must not forget the LORD who brought them out of Egypt. They were to fear and serve Him alone, not follow other gods, and not test Him as they did at Massah. Jesus answered Satan with verses 13 and 16. When their children asked why they kept God's laws, they were to tell the story of how the LORD brought them out of slavery in Egypt to bring them into the land, and that He gave His commands for their good.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. What did Moses want the commandments to produce in Israel's children and grandchildren? (6:2)

2. What does the word "hear" mean in the Shema, and what does it mean that the LORD is one? (6:4)

3. What three words describe how we are to love God, and what does each one mean? (6:5)

4. What did Jesus call the command in 6:5, and what did He say hangs on it? (Matthew 22:37-40)

5. Where and when were parents to teach God's words to their children? (6:7)

6. What danger did Moses warn about when Israel would be full and satisfied? (6:10-12)

7. Which verses from this chapter did Jesus use against Satan, and what was each temptation? (6:13, 16; Matthew 4:7, 10)

8. How were parents to answer when their children asked about God's laws, and why do you think God gave a story instead of a rule? (6:20-23)

9. If you are honest, which part of you is hardest to give to God: your heart, your soul or your might? Why?

10. What is one practical way you can keep God's Word "on your heart" and before your family this week?

Chapter 7: A Holy People Chosen in Love

Scripture

7:1-11 When the LORD your God brings you into the land to which you are going to take possession of it, and He clears away many nations from before you, the Hittite and the Girgashite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and the LORD your God gives them over before you, and you strike them, you shall surely devote them to destruction; you shall not make a covenant with them, and you shall not show them favor. And you shall not intermarry with them; your daughter you shall not give to his son, and his daughter you shall not take for your son, for he will turn your son away from after Me, and they will serve other gods; and the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and He will destroy you quickly. But thus you shall do to them: their altars you shall tear down, and their pillars you shall shatter, and their Asherim you shall cut down, and their carved images you shall burn with fire. For a holy people ***are*** you to the LORD your God; you the LORD your God has chosen to be for Him a people of treasured possession out of all the peoples that ***are*** on the face of the ground. Not because you were more numerous than all the peoples did the LORD set His love on you and choose you, for you ***were*** the fewest of all the peoples; but because of the LORD's love for you, and because He kept the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD brought you out with a strong hand and ransomed you from the house of slaves, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And you shall know that the LORD your God, He God, the faithful God, who keeps the covenant and the steadfast love to those who love Him and to those who keep His commandments, to a thousand generations, and who repays those who hate Him, to his face, to make him perish; He will not delay with him who hates Him; to his face He will repay him. And you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them.

7:12-26 And it shall be, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep for you the covenant and the steadfast love which He swore to your fathers. And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; and He will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your new wine and your fresh oil, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your flock, on the ground which He swore to your fathers to give to you. Blessed you shall be above all the peoples; there shall not be among you a barren male or a barren female, and among your livestock. And the LORD will remove from you every sickness; and all the evil diseases of Egypt which you have known, He will not put them on you, and He will lay them on all who hate you. And you shall consume all the peoples whom the LORD your God is giving over to you; your eye shall not pity them, and you shall not serve their gods, for that ***will be*** a snare to you. If you say in your heart, 'These nations ***are*** more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?' you shall not be afraid of them; you shall surely remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, the great trials which your eyes saw, and the signs and the wonders and the strong hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out; thus the LORD your God will do to all the peoples of whom you ***are*** afraid. And also the hornet the LORD your God will send among them, until those who are left and those who hide themselves from before you perish. You shall not be terrified of them, for the LORD your God

is in your midst, a great and awesome God. And the LORD your God will clear away these nations from before you little ***by*** little; you will not be able to make an end of them quickly, lest the living things of the field increase against you. And the LORD your God will give them over before you, and He will throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed. And He will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under the heavens; no man shall take his stand before you until you have destroyed them. The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire; you shall not covet silver and gold on them and take ***it*** for yourself, lest you be ensnared by it, for it ***is*** an abomination to the LORD your God. And you shall not bring an abomination into your house, and become a thing devoted to destruction like it; you shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it ***is*** a thing devoted to destruction.

Chapter 7 Preview

This chapter brings us to one of the hardest commands in the Bible. When God brings Israel into Canaan, they are to devote the seven nations of the land to destruction, make no covenant with them, not marry them, and tear down every altar and idol. Many readers stop here and ask how a loving God could command such a thing. We will not rush past that question. We will look at what the text says, why God gave this command, what limits it had, and what it does and does not mean for us.

Right in the middle of these hard words is one of the most beautiful passages about God's love in the whole Old Testament. God did not choose Israel because they were many or great. They were the fewest of all peoples. He chose them simply because He loved them and kept His promise to their fathers. The chapter then promises blessing for obedience, tells Israel not to fear the nations, and warns them not to bring home even the silver and gold from an idol. The holiness of God and the love of God stand side by side in this chapter, and we need both.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1-2 *When the LORD your God brings you into the land to which you are going to take possession of it, and He clears away many nations from before you, the Hittite and the Girgashite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and the LORD your God gives them over before you, and you strike them, you shall surely devote them to destruction; you shall not make a covenant with them, and you shall not show them favor.*

"When the LORD your God brings you into the land," Moses says, "He clears away many nations from before you." Moses names seven: the Hittite, Girgashite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite and Jebusite. They were "more numerous and mightier than you." Israel could not win this on their own. God would clear them away.

Then comes the hard command. "You shall surely devote them to destruction; you shall not make a covenant with them, and you shall not show them favor." To devote to destruction is the Hebrew herem, which we met in 2:34. It means to give something wholly over to God, so that it is removed from human use. In war, it meant a people under God's judgment was destroyed.

How are we to understand this? I want to be careful and honest here. Here are several things Scripture itself tells us.

First, this was God's judgment, not Israel's hatred. God told Abraham four hundred years earlier that his descendants would not receive the land yet, "for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). God waited for centuries. Leviticus 18 lists the sins of Canaan, and Deuteronomy 12:31 says they even burned their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Leviticus says the land itself "vomited out its inhabitants" (Leviticus 18:25). This was a holy God acting as Judge of a culture that had gone on in deep evil after long patience.

Second, it was not about race. God warned Israel that if they did the same things, the land would vomit them out too (Leviticus 18:28), and at the end of the next chapter Moses says Israel would perish just like these nations if they followed their gods (8:19-20). God later did send Israel into exile for the same sins. And Canaanites who turned to the LORD were spared. Rahab of Jericho, a Canaanite, was saved with her family and lived among Israel (Joshua 6:25), and she is in the line of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

Third, the command was limited. It was for these seven nations in this one land at this one time in history. Chapter 2 showed that Israel was forbidden to touch Edom, Moab and Ammon. Chapter 20 will give different rules for cities far away, which were first to be offered peace (20:10-15). This was never a general command for Israel to make war, and it is never a command for anyone today.

Fourth, the goal was to remove idolatry from the land. Verses 3 to 5 make that plain: no marriages, no covenants, and every altar and idol destroyed, because these nations would "turn your son away from after Me" (7:4). The concern is worship, and the land was to be cleansed of the gods that demanded the sacrifice of children.

Fifth, the language seems to include driving out as well as destroying. God says He will clear the nations away "little by little" (7:22), and elsewhere He says He will send the hornet to drive them out (Exodus 23:28-30). Joshua and Judges show many Canaanites still living in the land afterward (Judges 1:28). Some Bible teachers believe the strong words of total destruction follow the way nations in that day spoke about war, and that the main goal was to break their power and drive them out. Others take the words more strictly. Either way, the command was real, and it was severe.

Even so, we should feel the weight of this. Scripture does not ask us to celebrate the death of anyone. God Himself says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11). What the Bible asks is that we trust the Judge of all the earth to do right (Genesis 18:25), and that we see in this a picture of how serious sin is. One day every person will stand before that same holy God. The good news is that the same God sent His Son to take the judgment we deserve. Jesus told His followers to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44), and He rebuked James and John when they wanted to call down fire on a village that rejected Him (Luke 9:54-55). The church does not fight with swords. "Our wrestling is not against blood and flesh" (Ephesians 6:12). Anyone who uses this chapter to justify violence against any people today has badly misread it.

7:3-4 *And you shall not intermarry with them; your daughter you shall not give to his son, and his daughter you shall not take for your son, for he will turn your son away from after Me, and they will serve other gods; and the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and He will destroy you quickly.*

"And you shall not intermarry with them; your daughter you shall not give to his son, and his daughter you shall not take for your son."

Why? The reason is given right away: "for he will turn your son away from after Me, and they will serve other gods." The issue was not race or blood. It was faith. Ruth was a Moabite who married into Israel and became the great-grandmother of King David, because she said, "your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Rahab married into Israel too. The ban was on marrying those who served other gods.

History proved Moses right. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, married many foreign wives, and "his wives turned aside his heart after other gods" (1 Kings 11:4). The whole kingdom paid the price.

The New Testament gives the same principle to believers: "Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Who you marry will shape your walk with God more than almost anything else. That is not a small matter.

7:5 *But thus you shall do to them: their altars you shall tear down, and their pillars you shall shatter, and their Asherim you shall cut down, and their carved images you shall burn with fire.*

"But thus you shall do to them: their altars you shall tear down, and their pillars you shall shatter, and their Asherim you shall cut down, and their carved images you shall burn with fire."

An altar was where sacrifices were made. The pillars were standing stones set up as objects of worship. The Asherim were wooden poles or trees set up for Asherah, a Canaanite goddess of fertility who was seen as Baal's partner. Her worship was tied up with sexual immorality.

Israel was not to leave any of it standing. They were not to keep it as a museum piece or to reuse it for the LORD. They were to destroy it.

There is a lesson here for us. When God frees us from sin, we should not keep the things that pulled us into it lying around. Get rid of them. The new believers in Ephesus burned their books of magic in public (Acts 19:19). Sometimes holiness means a clean break.

7:6 *For a holy people **are** you to the LORD your God; you the LORD your God has chosen to be for Him a people of treasured possession out of all the peoples that **are** on the face of the ground.*

"For a holy people are you to the LORD your God." Here is the reason for everything in verses 1 to 5. Holy means set apart, belonging to God and different from the world around. Israel was not to mix with the gods of Canaan because they belonged to the LORD.

"You the LORD your God has chosen to be for Him a people of treasured possession out of all the peoples." A treasured possession is a king's own private treasure, the things he holds most dear. That is how God saw Israel.

Peter uses this same language for the church: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession" (1 Peter 2:9). Believers in Christ share in this calling. This does not mean the church has replaced Israel. God's promises to Israel still stand (Romans 11:28-29). It means that through Christ, Gentile believers have been brought into God's blessing too.

7:7-8 *Not because you were more numerous than all the peoples did the LORD set His love on you and choose you, for you **were** the fewest of all the peoples; but because of the LORD's love for you, and because He kept the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD brought you out with a strong hand and ransomed you from the house of slaves, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

"Not because you were more numerous than all the peoples did the LORD set His love on you and choose you, for you were the fewest of all the peoples."

This is one of the clearest statements of grace in the Old Testament. Why did God choose Israel? Not because they were big. Not because they were good. Moses will say in chapter 9 that it was not because of their righteousness either. They were small, and they were often stubborn.

"But because of the LORD's love for you, and because He kept the oath which He swore to your fathers." Why did God love them? Because He loved them. There is no reason outside of God Himself. Love is the reason for His love.

"The LORD brought you out with a strong hand and ransomed you from the house of slaves." To ransom means to pay a price to set someone free. God ransomed Israel from Egypt.

The same is true of every believer. God did not choose us because we were impressive. He chose us "in Him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4), in love. He ransomed us not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). If you ever wonder whether God could really love you, read these two verses again. His love does not depend on what you bring Him.

7:9-10 *And you shall know that the LORD your God, He **is** God, the faithful God, who keeps the covenant and the steadfast love to those who love Him and to those who keep His commandments, to a thousand generations, and who repays those who hate Him, to his face, to make him perish; He will not delay with him who hates Him; to his face He will repay him.*

"And you shall know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps the covenant and the steadfast love to those who love Him and to those who keep His commandments, to a thousand generations."

God is faithful. He keeps His covenant. Steadfast love is hesed, His loyal covenant love that never lets go. And it reaches "to a thousand generations." That is a way of saying His love has no end. It explains the "thousands" of 5:10.

But verse 10 balances it: He "repays those who hate Him, to his face, to make him perish." To his face means personally and directly. God does not wait generations to deal with those who hate Him. He deals with each one.

Paul says, "Look then at the kindness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22). We need both. A God with no justice would not be good. A God with no mercy would leave us all without hope. In Christ we see both perfectly at the cross.

7:11 *And you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them.*

"And you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them."

After all that God has done in love, here is the right response: obey. Notice again the order. Chosen in love, ransomed from slavery, and then called to obey. Obedience is how love answers love. It is never how we earn it.

7:12-16 *And it shall be, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep for you the covenant and the steadfast love which He swore to your fathers. And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; and He will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your new wine and your fresh oil, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your flock, on the ground which He swore to your fathers to give to you. Blessed you shall be above all the peoples; there shall not be among you a barren male or a barren female, and among your livestock. And the LORD will remove from you every sickness; and all the evil diseases of Egypt which you have known, He will not put them on you, and He will lay them on all who hate you. And you shall consume all the peoples whom the LORD your God is giving over to you; your eye shall not pity them, and you shall not serve their gods, for that* ***will be*** *a snare to you.*

"And it shall be, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep for you the covenant and the steadfast love which He swore to your fathers."

Then come the blessings. God "will love you and bless you and multiply you." He would bless their children, their crops, "your grain and your new wine and your fresh oil," and their herds and flocks. There would be no barren man or woman, and no barren animal. God would remove "every sickness," including "the evil diseases of Egypt."

These were covenant blessings for Israel in the land, tied to their obedience under the Mosaic covenant. They are not promises that every faithful Christian will be healthy and wealthy. Many faithful believers suffer sickness and loss, and the New Testament never promises otherwise (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). But they do show us that God is the source of every good gift, and that His ways lead to life.

Verse 16 returns to the hard command: "your eye shall not pity them, and you shall not serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you." A snare is a trap. If Israel spared the nations out of pity, they would end up worshiping their gods. That is exactly what happened in the days of the judges (Judges 2:1-3).

7:17-19 *If you say in your heart, 'These nations **are** more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?' you shall not be afraid of them; you shall surely remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, the great trials which your eyes saw, and the signs and the wonders and the strong hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out; thus the LORD your God will do to all the peoples of whom you **are** afraid.*

"If you say in your heart, 'These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?'" Moses knew they would be tempted to fear, just as their parents had at Kadesh.

His answer: "you shall not be afraid of them; you shall surely remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt." Remember the plagues. Remember the Red Sea. Remember "the strong hand and the outstretched arm." "Thus the LORD your God will do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid."

Memory is a weapon against fear. When we are afraid, we should look back at what God has already done. If He could break Pharaoh, He can handle what is in front of us. Have you ever written down the things God has done for you? It helps on the hard days.

7:20-21 *And also the hornet the LORD your God will send among them, until those who are left and those who hide themselves from before you perish. You shall not be terrified of them, for the LORD your God **is** in your midst, a great and awesome God.*

"And also the hornet the LORD your God will send among them." The hornet is mentioned also in Exodus 23:28 and Joshua 24:12. Some take it as real swarms of hornets. Others see it as a picture of the panic and terror God would send ahead of Israel, which made the enemy flee. Either way, God would fight for them, until even "those who hide themselves" were gone.

"You shall not be terrified of them, for the LORD your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God." Israel did not need to fear the nations because the God who lived among them was greater and more fearsome than any enemy. The fear of God drives out every other fear.

7:22-24 *And the LORD your God will clear away these nations from before you little **by** little; you will not be able to make an end of them quickly, lest the living things of the field increase against you. And the LORD your God will give them over before you, and He will throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed. And He will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under the heavens; no man shall take his stand before you until you have destroyed them.*

"And the LORD your God will clear away these nations from before you little by little." Why little by little? "Lest the living things of the field increase against you." If the land were emptied all at once, wild animals would take over before Israel could settle it. God's timing was wise and kind.

This is often how God works in us, too. He does not usually remove every sin and struggle in a single day. He works little by little, and He knows the right pace. Be patient with His work in you, and in others.

"He will give their kings into your hand," and "no man shall take his stand before you." The book of Joshua tells of the thirty-one kings who fell (Joshua 12).

7:25-26 *The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire; you shall not covet silver and gold on them and take **it** for yourself, lest you be ensnared by it, for it **is** an abomination to the LORD your God. And you shall not bring an abomination into your house, and become a thing devoted to destruction like it; you shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it **is** a thing devoted to destruction.*

"The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire; you shall not covet silver and gold on them." Idols were often covered with precious metal. It would be tempting to burn the wood and keep the gold. God said no. "It is an abomination to the LORD your God." An abomination is something God finds disgusting.

"And you shall not bring an abomination into your house, and become a thing devoted to destruction like it." If you bring a cursed thing home, you share its curse. Achan did exactly this at Jericho. He took silver, gold and a fine robe from what was devoted to God and hid them in his tent, and it brought disaster on him and on Israel (Joshua 7).

"You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it." God wanted His people to see idolatry the way He sees it. We should ask ourselves: what do I bring into my home, my phone, my mind, that God calls detestable? Holiness is not only about what we avoid in public. It starts in our own house.

Chapter 7 Summary

When God brings Israel into the land and clears away the seven nations of Canaan, Israel is to devote them to destruction, make no covenant with them, not intermarry with them because they would turn Israel to other gods, and destroy their altars, pillars, Asherim and idols. This hard command was God's judgment on nations whose sin He had endured for centuries, it was limited to that land and that time, and Israel would face the same judgment if they followed those gods. Israel was a holy people, God's treasured possession, chosen not because they were many but because the LORD loved them and kept His oath to their fathers, ransoming them from slavery. He is the faithful God who keeps His covenant and steadfast love to a thousand generations of those who love Him, and He repays those who hate Him. If Israel obeyed, God would bless their families, crops and herds, and keep sickness from them. They were not to fear the nations, but remember what God did to Egypt, for He would send the hornet and drive the nations out little by little. They were to burn the idols and not take the silver and gold on them, because whatever was devoted to destruction must not come into their homes.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What did God command Israel to do with the seven nations of Canaan, and what were they not to do with them? (7:1-3)

2. What reason does verse 4 give for the ban on intermarriage, and how do Ruth and Rahab show it was about faith, not race?

3. What does Genesis 15:16 and Leviticus 18:24-28 tell us about why God judged the nations of Canaan?

4. What does it mean that Israel was a "holy people" and a "treasured possession"? (7:6)

5. Why did God choose Israel, according to verses 7 and 8?

6. How do verses 9 and 10 show both God's kindness and His severity?

7. Why did God drive out the nations "little by little"? (7:22)

8. How does knowing God chose you in love, not because of anything in you, change how you see yourself? (7:7-8; Ephesians 1:4)

9. What things might God be calling you to remove from your home or your life, the way Israel was to tear down the altars? (7:5, 25-26)

10. How would you explain this chapter to a friend who says the God of the Old Testament is cruel? What parts of the chapter and the rest of Scripture would you point to?

Chapter 8: Do Not Forget the LORD

Scripture

8:1-10 All the commandment which I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, so that you may live and multiply, and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD swore to your fathers. And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, to test you, to know what ***was*** in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you, and caused you to hunger, and caused you to eat the manna, which you had not known, and your fathers had not known, in order to make you know that man does not live on bread alone, but on everything that goes out of the mouth of the LORD man lives. Your clothing did not wear out from on you, and your foot did not swell these forty years. And you shall know with your heart that just as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God is disciplining you. And you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of wadis of water, of springs and deeps going out in the valley and in the hill country, a land of wheat and barley and vine and fig tree and pomegranate, a land of olive trees of oil and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, you will not lack anything in it, a land whose stones ***are*** iron, and from whose hills you will dig copper. And you will eat and be satisfied, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given to you.

8:11-20 Take heed to yourself, lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His judgments and His statutes which I am commanding you today, lest you eat and are satisfied, and build good houses and dwell ***in them***, and your herd and your flock multiply, and silver and gold multiply for you, and all that ***is*** yours multiplies, and your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves, who led you in the great and fearsome wilderness, ***with*** fiery serpent and scorpion and thirsty ground where ***there was*** no water, who brought out water for you from the rock of flint, who caused you to eat manna in the wilderness, which your fathers had not known, in order to humble you and in order to test you, to do you good at your latter end, and you say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand have made for me this wealth.' And you shall remember the LORD your God, for He ***is*** the ***One*** giving you strength to make wealth, in order to establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as ***at*** this day. And it shall be, if you indeed forget the LORD your God and walk after other gods and serve them and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations which the LORD is making perish from before you, so you shall perish, because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God.

Chapter 8 Preview

Chapter 8 is about two kinds of tests. The first was the wilderness. For forty years God led Israel through a dry and dangerous land, let them go hungry, and then fed them with manna, bread from heaven they had never seen before. He did it to humble them and to teach them that "man

does not live on bread alone." Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. God was training them the way a father trains his son.

The second test would be the good land. Canaan was full of streams, wheat, grapes, olives and honey, with iron and copper in its hills. Moses warns that full stomachs, fine houses and growing bank accounts can do what hunger never could: make them forget God and say, "My strength and the might of my hand have made for me this wealth." Moses says, Remember the LORD, for He gives you the power to get wealth. If you forget Him and follow other gods, you will perish like the nations. Jesus quoted verse 3 when Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread. This chapter speaks to anyone who has known lean times or good times, and that is all of us.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1 *All the commandment which I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, so that you may live and multiply, and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD swore to your fathers.*

"All the commandment which I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, so that you may live and multiply, and go in and take possession of the land."

Again Moses uses the singular, "all the commandment," the whole of God's will as one thing. And again obedience is tied to life and blessing in the land. Moses is not giving new laws here. He is giving reasons to keep the ones already given. The best reasons, as we will see, come from remembering.

8:2 *And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, to test you, to know what **was** in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.*

"And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness."

Remember. This is the key word of the chapter, along with its opposite, forget. Moses wants Israel to look back over the whole road, not only the miracles but also the hard places, and see God's hand in it.

Why did God lead them that way? Three reasons are given. "In order to humble you," to empty them of pride and self-reliance. "To test you," to prove what was real. And "to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not." God already knew their hearts. The test was so that they would know, and so that what was in their hearts would come out into the open.

God still does this. James tells us that "the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:3). Hard seasons are not wasted. God uses them to humble us, show us what is in us, and grow our trust. Is there a wilderness in your life right now? It may be the very place God is doing His deepest work.

8:3 *And He humbled you, and caused you to hunger, and caused you to eat the manna, which you had not known, and your fathers had not known, in order to make you know that man does not live on bread alone, but on everything that goes out of the mouth of the LORD man lives.*

"And He humbled you, and caused you to hunger, and caused you to eat the manna, which you had not known, and your fathers had not known."

Notice the order. God caused them to hunger. Then He fed them. He let them come to the end of themselves so they would learn where their help came from. Manna was the bread God sent from heaven every morning except the Sabbath (Exodus 16). No one had ever seen it before. It could not be grown or stored up, except for the Sabbath. They had to gather it fresh each day and trust God for tomorrow's. Jesus taught us to pray the same way: "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

Here is the lesson God wanted to teach: "that man does not live on bread alone, but on everything that goes out of the mouth of the LORD man lives." Bread keeps the body alive. But a person is more than a body. We live by God's word: by His promises, by His commands, by His creative power that even brought manna into being. God's word is what makes bread appear, and God's word is what feeds the soul.

When Jesus had fasted forty days in the wilderness, Satan came and said, "If You are the Son of God, speak, so that these stones may become loaves" (Matthew 4:3). Jesus answered, "It has been written," and quoted this verse: "Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word coming out through the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). See the picture. Israel, God's son, was tested forty years in the wilderness and failed. Jesus, God's Son, was tested forty days in the wilderness and did not fail. He would not use His power to serve Himself apart from His Father's will. He lived by every word from God's mouth. Where Israel failed, Christ stood firm, and He did it for us.

Jesus also told the crowds that the manna was only a picture. "Moses has not given you the bread out of heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread out of heaven" (John 6:32). Then He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). The deepest hunger in every human being is a hunger for God, and only Christ can fill it.

How are you feeding your soul? Most of us would never skip meals for a week. Many of us go weeks without feeding on God's Word. If we live on bread alone, our souls will starve.

8:4-5 *Your clothing did not wear out from on you, and your foot did not swell these forty years. And you shall know with your heart that just as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God is disciplining you.*

"Your clothing did not wear out from on you, and your foot did not swell these forty years." Think about that. Forty years of walking through desert, and their sandals and clothes held up and their feet did not swell from the miles. Nehemiah later praised God for this very thing (Nehemiah 9:21). God's care was in the small, everyday details.

"And you shall know with your heart that just as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God is disciplining you." Discipline here means training, correction and instruction, all the ways a good

father raises a child. The hunger, the testing and the long road were not signs that God hated them, as their parents had said at Kadesh (1:27). They were signs that He was their Father.

Hebrews says the same to us: "whom the Lord loves He disciplines" (Hebrews 12:6), and "afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). If God is training you, it means you are His child.

8:6-9 *And you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of wadis of water, of springs and deeps going out in the valley and in the hill country, a land of wheat and barley and vine and fig tree and pomegranate, a land of olive trees of oil and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, you will not lack anything in it, a land whose stones* ***are*** *iron, and from whose hills you will dig copper.*

"And you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him." Then Moses gives the reason: "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land."

Listen to how he describes it. "A land of wadis of water, of springs and deeps going out in the valley and in the hill country." After forty years of dry ground, this was a land with water. "A land of wheat and barley and vine and fig tree and pomegranate, a land of olive trees of oil and honey." These seven foods were the riches of Canaan. "A land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, you will not lack anything in it, a land whose stones are iron, and from whose hills you will dig copper."

You can almost hear Moses' longing as he describes a land he would never enter. God's gifts are good, and He wants His people to enjoy them. Paul says God "provides us all things richly for enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17). The danger is never in the gift. It is in forgetting the Giver.

8:10 *And you will eat and be satisfied, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given to you.*

"And you will eat and be satisfied, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given to you."

Here is the cure for forgetting, in one verse. When you eat and are full, bless the LORD. Thank Him. Jewish tradition bases its blessing after meals on this verse, and Christians have long given thanks at meals for the same reason.

This is more than a habit before dinner. It is a way of life. Every good thing we enjoy came from Him (James 1:17). "In everything give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). A grateful heart is a heart that remembers. A thankless heart is already starting to forget.

8:11-14 *Take heed to yourself, lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His judgments and His statutes which I am commanding you today, lest you eat and are satisfied, and build good houses and dwell* ***in them****, and your herd and your flock multiply, and silver and gold multiply for you, and all that* ***is*** *yours multiplies, and your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves,*

"Take heed to yourself, lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments." Notice how forgetting God is described. It is "not keeping His commandments." Forgetting God is not mainly losing a memory. It is living as if He were not there.

Moses paints the picture of success. "Lest you eat and are satisfied, and build good houses and dwell in them, and your herd and your flock multiply, and silver and gold multiply for you, and all that is yours multiplies." Everything multiplies. Life is good.

"And your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt." This is the danger of plenty. When everything is going well, pride grows and our sense of need shrinks. A wise man prayed, "poverty and wealth do not give to me," because if he had too much, he might "deny You" and ask who the LORD is (Proverbs 30:8-9).

This is a word for many of us. Most Christians in the West live with more food, comfort and wealth than any people in history. Is our prosperity drawing us closer to God, or making us forget Him?

8:15-16 *who led you in the great and fearsome wilderness,* ***with*** *fiery serpent and scorpion and thirsty ground where* ***there was*** *no water, who brought out water for you from the rock of flint, who caused you to eat manna in the wilderness, which your fathers had not known, in order to humble you and in order to test you, to do you good at your latter end,*

Moses reminds them who God had been for them. He "led you in the great and fearsome wilderness, with fiery serpent and scorpion and thirsty ground where there was no water." The fiery serpents were the poisonous snakes that bit the people when they grumbled (Numbers 21:6-9). The thirsty ground was real. Without God, they would have died.

He "brought out water for you from the rock of flint." Flint is the hardest of rocks, and yet water flowed from it (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11). Paul says "the rock was the Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4), meaning Christ was the One who went with them and gave them drink.

He "caused you to eat manna in the wilderness," and He did it "in order to humble you and in order to test you, to do you good at your latter end." Here is the purpose of it all: "to do you good." God's hard lessons are always for our good in the end. "To those who love God all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28).

8:17-18 *and you say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand have made for me this wealth.' And you shall remember the LORD your God, for He **is** the **One** giving you strength to make wealth, in order to establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as **at** this day.*

"And you say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand have made for me this wealth.'" This is the voice of pride. It is the man who looks at what he has and says, I did this.

Moses answers: "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for He is the One giving you strength to make wealth." Yes, they would work hard. They would plow, plant and build. But who gave them the strength, the land, the rain and the harvest? God did. Paul asks, "what do you have which you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

And why does God give it? "In order to establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers." Wealth was not given to make Israel proud. It was given to show that God keeps His promises. Our gifts, too, are given for His purposes, not just our comfort. Jesus told of a rich man who stored up for himself and forgot God, and He said, "So is the one who treasures up for himself and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

8:19-20 *And it shall be, if you indeed forget the LORD your God and walk after other gods and serve them and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations which the LORD is making perish from before you, so you shall perish, because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God.*

"And it shall be, if you indeed forget the LORD your God and walk after other gods and serve them and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you shall surely perish."

Moses ends with a serious warning. Forgetting God does not stop at being ungrateful. It ends in walking after other gods. When we forget the true God, we always find something else to worship.

"Like the nations which the LORD is making perish from before you, so you shall perish." This is important for understanding chapter 7. God was not judging the Canaanites because they were Canaanites. He was judging them for their sin, and He told Israel plainly that He would judge them the same way if they did the same things. God shows no partiality. Centuries later, that warning came true when Israel and Judah were taken into exile.

"Because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God." It always comes back to listening. Hear, Israel (6:4). That is where faithfulness begins, and not listening is where it ends.

Chapter 8 Summary

Moses called Israel to keep all God's commandment so they might live and take the land. They were to remember how God led them forty years in the wilderness to humble them, test them and show what was in their hearts. He let them hunger and then fed them with manna, to teach them that man does not live on bread alone but on everything that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Jesus quoted this verse when Satan tempted Him. God kept their clothes from wearing out and their feet from swelling, and He disciplined them as a father disciplines his son. Now He was bringing them into a good land of water, grain, fruit, oil, honey, iron and copper. When they ate

and were satisfied, they were to bless the LORD. Moses warned that when their houses, herds and silver and gold multiplied, their hearts could become proud, and they could forget the God who led them through the wilderness, gave them water from the rock and fed them manna, and say that their own strength made them rich. They were to remember that God gives the power to make wealth. If they forgot Him and followed other gods, they would perish like the nations.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. What three reasons does Moses give for why God led Israel through the wilderness? (8:2)

2. Why did God let Israel go hungry before feeding them manna, and what was He teaching them? (8:3)

3. How did Jesus use 8:3 when Satan tempted Him, and how is His test like Israel's? (Matthew 4:1-4)

4. What did God do for Israel's clothes and feet, and what does that show about His care? (8:4)

5. How is God's discipline like a father's? (8:5; Hebrews 12:6-11)

6. What does verse 10 tell Israel to do when they eat and are full?

7. What does pride say in verse 17, and how does Moses answer it in verse 18?

8. Have you been through a "wilderness" season? Looking back, what was God teaching you?

9. Which is the greater danger for you right now: hard times making you doubt God, or good times making you forget Him?

10. What is one way you can feed your soul on God's Word this week as faithfully as you feed your body?

Chapter 9: Not Because of Your Righteousness

Scripture

9:1-14 Hear, Israel: you are passing over the Jordan today, to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, cities great and fortified to the heavens, a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you yourself know, and ***of whom*** you yourself have heard, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak?' And you shall know today that the LORD your God, He ***is*** the ***One*** passing over before you ***as*** a consuming fire; He will destroy them, and He will subdue them before you; and you shall dispossess them and make them perish quickly, just as the LORD has spoken to you. Do not say in your heart, when the LORD your God drives them out from before you, saying, 'For my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to take possession of this land,' and for the wickedness of these nations the LORD is dispossessing them from before you. Not for your righteousness and for the uprightness of your heart are you going in to take possession of their land, but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is dispossessing them from before you, and in order to establish the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And you shall know that not for your righteousness is the LORD your God giving you this good land to take possession of it, for you ***are*** a people stiff of neck. Remember, do not forget, how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the wilderness; from the day that you came out from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebelling against the LORD. And at Horeb you provoked the LORD to anger, and the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you. When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD had made with you, and I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights; bread I did not eat, and water I did not drink. And the LORD gave to me the two tablets of stone, written by the finger of God, and on them ***were*** according to all the words which the LORD had spoken with you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. And it was at the end of forty days and forty nights ***that*** the LORD gave to me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. And the LORD said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out from Egypt have acted corruptly; they have turned aside quickly from the way which I commanded them; they have made for themselves a cast image.' And the LORD said to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and look, it ***is*** a people stiff of neck. Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under the heavens, and I will make you into a nation mightier and greater than it.'

9:15-29 And I turned and went down from the mountain, and the mountain ***was*** burning with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant ***were*** on my two hands. And I looked, and look, you had sinned against the LORD your God; you had made for yourselves a calf of cast metal; you had turned aside quickly from the way which the LORD had commanded you. And I took hold of the two tablets and threw them from on my two hands, and I broke them before your eyes. And I prostrated myself before the LORD as at the first, forty days and forty nights; bread I did not eat, and water I did not drink, because of all your sin which you had sinned by doing the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and the rage with which the LORD was wrathful against you, to destroy you. And the LORD listened to me also at that time. And with Aaron the LORD was very angry, to destroy him; and I prayed also for Aaron at that

time. And your sin which you had made, the calf, I took, and I burned it with fire, and I crushed it, grinding ***it*** well, until it was fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the wadi that came down from the mountain. And at Taberah and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you were provoking the LORD to anger. And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, 'Go up and take possession of the land which I have given to you,' and you rebelled against the mouth of the LORD your God, and you did not believe Him, and you did not listen to His voice. You have been rebelling against the LORD from the day that I knew you. And I prostrated myself before the LORD the forty days and the forty nights that I prostrated myself, for the LORD had said ***He would*** destroy you. And I prayed to the LORD and said, 'Lord GOD, do not ruin Your people and Your inheritance, whom You ransomed by Your greatness, whom You brought out from Egypt by a strong hand. Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not turn to the stubbornness of this people, and to its wickedness, and to its sin, lest the land from which You brought us out say, "Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land of which He spoke to them, and because of His hatred of them, He brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness." And they ***are*** Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your great strength and by Your outstretched arm.'

Chapter 9 Preview

In chapter 8 Moses warned Israel not to say, My strength made me rich. In chapter 9 he warns them not to say, My righteousness brought me here. Israel is about to cross the Jordan and face the Anakim and cities walled up to the sky. God will go before them like a consuming fire and give them the victory. But when He does, they must not think it was because they were good. God was driving out the nations because of the nations' wickedness and because of His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not because Israel deserved it. In fact, Moses says, "you are a people stiff of neck."

To prove it, Moses tells the worst story in Israel's history: the golden calf. While God was writing the Ten Commandments with His own finger, the people were dancing around an idol at the foot of the mountain. Moses broke the tablets, ground the calf to dust, and lay on his face before the LORD for forty days and nights, praying for the people God was ready to destroy. They were spared only because Moses interceded and God remembered His promise. This chapter takes away every bit of pride and leaves only grace. And it shows us a picture of the One who intercedes for us still.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-3 *Hear, Israel: you are passing over the Jordan today, to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, cities great and fortified to the heavens, a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you yourself know, and **of whom** you yourself have heard, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak?' And you shall know today that the LORD your God, He **is** the **One** passing over before you **as** a consuming fire; He will destroy them, and He will subdue them before you; and you shall dispossess them and make them perish quickly, just as the LORD has spoken to you.*

"Hear, Israel: you are passing over the Jordan today." Moses uses the opening words of the Shema again. The crossing is close.

He does not pretend it will be easy. The nations are "greater and mightier than you." Their cities are "great and fortified to the heavens." The people are "the sons of the Anakim," a people so tall that a saying had grown up about them: "Who can stand before the sons of Anak?" These were the very words that had frightened their fathers at Kadesh (1:28).

"And you shall know today that the LORD your God, He is the one passing over before you as a consuming fire." The question was not, Who can stand before the Anakim? It was, Who can stand before the LORD? God would go first. He would destroy and subdue. Israel's part was to follow and take possession.

When you face something too big for you, the answer is not to pretend it is small. The answer is to remember how big God is.

9:4-6 *Do not say in your heart, when the LORD your God drives them out from before you, saying, 'For my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to take possession of this land,' and for the wickedness of these nations the LORD is dispossessing them from before you. Not for your righteousness and for the uprightness of your heart are you going in to take possession of their land, but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is dispossessing them from before you, and in order to establish the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And you shall know that not for your righteousness is the LORD your God giving you this good land to take possession of it, for you **are** a people stiff of neck.*

"Do not say in your heart, when the LORD your God drives them out from before you, saying, 'For my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to take possession of this land.'"

Here is the danger after victory. It is easy to think, God blessed me because I am a good person. Moses says no, three times in three verses.

Why then was God giving them the land? Two reasons. First, "for the wickedness of these nations." God was judging the sin of Canaan, as we saw in chapter 7. Second, "in order to establish the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." God keeps His promises.

Notice what is missing: Israel's goodness. "Not for your righteousness is the LORD your God giving you this good land to take possession of it, for you are a people stiff of neck." A stiff neck is a

picture from farming. An ox that will not bend its neck to the yoke cannot be led. Israel was stubborn and hard to lead.

This is the heart of the gospel. God does not save us because we are righteous. "There is not a righteous one, not even one" (Romans 3:10). He saved us "not by works which we did in righteousness, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5). If you ever catch yourself thinking God blesses you because you are better than others, read these verses again.

9:7-8 *Remember, do not forget, how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the wilderness; from the day that you came out from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebelling against the LORD. And at Horeb you provoked the LORD to anger, and the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you.*

"Remember, do not forget, how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the wilderness." Moses has told them to remember God's goodness (8:2). Now he tells them to remember their own sin. Both are needed. Remembering God's goodness keeps us thankful. Remembering our sin keeps us humble.

"From the day that you came out from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebelling against the LORD." This is a strong word. The whole forty years were marked by rebellion.

"And at Horeb you provoked the LORD to anger." Of all the places to rebel, Horeb was the worst. It was the place where God spoke from the fire, the place where the covenant was made. And there they sinned so badly that "the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you."

9:9-11 *When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD had made with you, and I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights; bread I did not eat, and water I did not drink. And the LORD gave to me the two tablets of stone, written by the finger of God, and on them **were** according to all the words which the LORD had spoken with you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. And it was at the end of forty days and forty nights **that** the LORD gave to me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.*

Moses tells the story from his side. "When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant." He stayed there "forty days and forty nights; bread I did not eat, and water I did not drink." To go forty days without food and water could only be done by God's sustaining power. Moses was in God's presence the whole time.

"And the LORD gave to me the two tablets of stone, written by the finger of God." This is a striking phrase. God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments. Moses did not carve them. The words on the tablets were "according to all the words which the LORD had spoken with you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly."

Picture the scene. On top of the mountain, God is writing His covenant with His own finger. At the bottom, the people are breaking it.

9:12-14 *And the LORD said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out from Egypt have acted corruptly; they have turned aside quickly from the way which I commanded them; they have made for themselves a cast image.' And the LORD said to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and look, it **is** a people stiff of neck. Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under the heavens, and I will make you into a nation mightier and greater than it.'*

"Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out from Egypt have acted corruptly." Notice God calls them "your people," Moses' people, as if He is pulling back from them. "They have turned aside quickly from the way which I commanded them; they have made for themselves a cast image."

Quickly. That is the sad word. Forty days earlier they had heard God's voice and said, "we will listen and do it" (5:27). Now they had a golden calf.

"Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under the heavens, and I will make you into a nation mightier and greater than it." God offered to start over with Moses, the way He started over with Noah. What does "Let Me alone" mean? It seems God was giving Moses room to intercede, testing whether Moses would stand in the gap. It is as if God was saying, Only you stand between them and judgment. Moses did not leave Him alone. He prayed.

9:15-17 *And I turned and went down from the mountain, and the mountain **was** burning with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant **were** on my two hands. And I looked, and look, you had sinned against the LORD your God; you had made for yourselves a calf of cast metal; you had turned aside quickly from the way which the LORD had commanded you. And I took hold of the two tablets and threw them from on my two hands, and I broke them before your eyes.*

"And I turned and went down from the mountain, and the mountain was burning with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant were on my two hands." The fire was still on the mountain. God's holy presence was right there. And then Moses saw it: "you had made for yourselves a calf of cast metal."

Exodus 32 tells us Aaron made the calf from the people's gold earrings, and the people said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4). They gave the credit for their rescue to a statue of a young bull.

"And I took hold of the two tablets and threw them from on my two hands, and I broke them before your eyes." Moses broke them in front of everyone. This was not just a fit of temper. It showed what had happened. The covenant was broken. The people had shattered it, and now the tablets lay shattered on the ground.

9:18-20 *And I prostrated myself before the LORD as at the first, forty days and forty nights; bread I did not eat, and water I did not drink, because of all your sin which you had sinned by doing the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and the rage with which the LORD was wrathful against you, to destroy you. And the LORD listened to me also at that time. And with Aaron the LORD was very angry, to destroy him; and I prayed also for Aaron at that time.*

"And I prostrated myself before the LORD as at the first, forty days and forty nights." Moses lay face down before God for another forty days, with no food and no water, "because of all your sin which you had sinned."

"For I was afraid of the anger and the rage with which the LORD was wrathful against you, to destroy you." Moses knew how serious this was. "And the LORD listened to me also at that time." God heard Moses' prayer and spared the people.

"And with Aaron the LORD was very angry, to destroy him; and I prayed also for Aaron at that time." Exodus does not tell us this detail. Aaron, the high priest to be, who made the calf, was also under God's anger. He too lived only because Moses prayed for him.

What a picture of intercession. To intercede means to stand between and plead for someone else. Moses stood between a holy God and a guilty people and would not let go. And this points us to Jesus, who "is also able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, always living to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Moses prayed forty days. Jesus intercedes for us always. And He did more than pray. He gave Himself.

9:21 *And your sin which you had made, the calf, I took, and I burned it with fire, and I crushed it, grinding **it** well, until it was fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the wadi that came down from the mountain.*

"And your sin which you had made, the calf, I took, and I burned it with fire, and I crushed it, grinding it well, until it was fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the wadi that came down from the mountain."

Notice that Moses calls the calf "your sin." The idol was their sin made into an object. Moses destroyed it completely. He burned it, crushed it, ground it to powder, and threw it into the stream. Exodus 32:20 adds that he made the people drink the water. They had to swallow their own sin.

An idol that can be burned, ground to dust and washed away is no god at all. And sin is never something to keep or polish. It has to be dealt with completely.

9:22-24 *And at Taberah and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you were provoking the LORD to anger. And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, 'Go up and take possession of the land which I have given to you,' and you rebelled against the mouth of the LORD your God, and you did not believe Him, and you did not listen to His voice. You have been rebelling against the LORD from the day that I knew you.*

Moses gives a quick list of other times Israel rebelled. "At Taberah," where fire from the LORD burned among them after they complained (Numbers 11:1-3). "At Massah," where they tested God over water (Exodus 17:1-7). "At Kibroth-hattaavah," which means graves of craving, where they demanded meat and many died (Numbers 11:31-34).

And then the worst: "when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea," and "you rebelled against the mouth of the LORD your God, and you did not believe Him, and you did not listen to His voice" (see chapter 1).

"You have been rebelling against the LORD from the day that I knew you." Moses is blunt. Why remind them of all this? Not to shame them for its own sake, but so that when the victories come, they will remember it was all grace. Stephen said the same thing to the leaders of his day: "as your fathers did, you also do" (Acts 7:51). The human heart has not changed.

9:25-29 *And I prostrated myself before the LORD the forty days and the forty nights that I prostrated myself, for the LORD had said **He would** destroy you. And I prayed to the LORD and said, 'Lord GOD, do not ruin Your people and Your inheritance, whom You ransomed by Your greatness, whom You brought out from Egypt by a strong hand. Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not turn to the stubbornness of this people, and to its wickedness, and to its sin, lest the land from which You brought us out say, "Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land of which He spoke to them, and because of His hatred of them, He brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness." And they **are** Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your great strength and by Your outstretched arm.'*

Moses now tells us what he prayed during those forty days. It is one of the great prayers of the Bible, and we can learn how to pray from it.

He appealed to God's ownership: "do not ruin Your people and Your inheritance." Notice that God had said "your people" to Moses (9:12). Moses gives them back: they are Your people.

He appealed to God's past work: "whom You ransomed by Your greatness, whom You brought out from Egypt by a strong hand." Would God throw away what He had paid so much to redeem?

He appealed to God's promise: "Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." God had sworn an oath to them.

He appealed to God's reputation: "lest the land from which You brought us out say," that the LORD was not able to bring them in, or that He brought them out because of "His hatred of them." What would the nations think of God?

Notice what Moses never appealed to: the people's goodness. He did not say, They are not so bad. He said, "do not turn to the stubbornness of this people, and to its wickedness, and to its sin." Moses did not excuse their sin. He pleaded with God on the basis of who God is.

That is how we pray too. We do not come to God on our own merits. We come on the basis of His mercy, His promises and His glory, and in the name of Jesus, who "intercedes for us" (Romans 8:34).

Chapter 9 Summary

Moses told Israel they were about to cross the Jordan to face nations greater than they, with walled cities and the Anakim, but the LORD would go before them as a consuming fire. When He drove the nations out, Israel was not to think it was because of their own righteousness. God was giving them the land because of the nations' wickedness and to keep His oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for Israel was a stiff-necked people. Moses reminded them how they had rebelled from the day they left Egypt, and especially at Horeb. While Moses was on the mountain forty days receiving the tablets written by the finger of God, the people made a calf of cast metal. God told Moses He would destroy them and make a great nation from him. Moses came down, broke the tablets before their eyes, lay before the LORD another forty days without food or water, and prayed for the people and for Aaron, and the LORD listened. Moses burned and ground the calf to dust and threw it into the stream. He listed their rebellions at Taberah, Massah, Kibroth-hattaavah and Kadesh-barnea, and he told how he prayed for them, appealing to God's ownership of His people, His redemption of them, His promises to the fathers and His name among the nations.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. What did the people say about the Anakim, and what did Moses say about the LORD? (9:2-3)

2. What two reasons does Moses give for why God was giving Israel the land, and what reason does he rule out? (9:4-6)

3. What does it mean to be "stiff of neck"? (9:6, 13)

4. What was happening at the bottom of the mountain while God was writing the tablets? (9:9-12)

5. Why did Moses break the tablets in front of the people? (9:17)

6. What did Moses do for forty days after the golden calf, and for whom did he pray? (9:18-20)

7. On what four things did Moses base his prayer, and what did he never appeal to? (9:26-29)

8. How does Moses' intercession point to what Jesus does for us? (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34)

9. Have you ever caught yourself thinking God blesses you because you deserve it? How does this chapter answer that?

10. Who in your life needs you to stand in the gap for them in prayer? What would it look like to pray for them the way Moses prayed?

Chapter 10: New Tablets and What the LORD Requires

Scripture

10:1-11 At that time the LORD said to me, 'Cut out for yourself two tablets of stone like the first ***ones***, and come up to Me on the mountain, and you shall make for yourself an ark of wood. And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke, and you shall put them in the ark.' And I made an ark of acacia wood, and I cut out two tablets of stone like the first ***ones***, and I went up to the mountain, and the two tablets ***were*** in my hand. And He wrote on the tablets according to the first writing the ten words which the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them to me. And I turned and came down from the mountain, and I put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and they are there, just as the LORD commanded me. And the sons of Israel set out from Beeroth Bene-jaakan ***to*** Moserah. There Aaron died, and he was buried there; and Eleazar his son served as priest in his place. From there they set out to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah ***to*** Jotbathah, a land of wadis of water. At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to serve Him, and to bless in His name, to this day. Therefore Levi has no portion and inheritance with his brothers; the LORD, He ***is*** his inheritance, just as the LORD your God spoke to him. And I, I stood on the mountain as ***in*** the first days, forty days and forty nights; and the LORD listened to me also at that time; the LORD was not willing to ruin you. And the LORD said to me, 'Arise, go on the journey before the people, that they may go in and take possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give to them.'

10:12-22 And now, Israel, what is the LORD your God asking from you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I am commanding you today, for your good? Look, to the LORD your God ***belong*** the heavens and the heavens of the heavens, the earth and all that ***is*** in it. Only on your fathers did the LORD set His affection, to love them, and He chose their seed after them, you, out of all the peoples, as ***at*** this day. And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and your neck you shall not stiffen anymore. For the LORD your God, He ***is*** the God of the gods and the Lord of the lords, the great God, the mighty and the awesome, who does not lift up faces and does not take a bribe, doing the judgment of ***the*** fatherless and ***the*** widow, and loving ***the*** sojourner, to give him bread and clothing. And you shall love the sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. The LORD your God you shall fear; Him you shall serve, and to Him you shall cling, and by His name you shall swear. He ***is*** your praise, and He ***is*** your God, who has done with you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. With seventy souls your fathers went down to Egypt, and now the LORD your God has made you like the stars of the heavens for multitude.

Chapter 10 Preview

Chapter 9 ended with broken tablets and a guilty people. Chapter 10 begins with grace. God tells Moses to cut two new tablets, and He writes the Ten Commandments on them again. Moses puts them in a wooden ark, a chest that would travel with Israel. God did not throw away His covenant

people. He renewed the covenant. Moses also tells how God set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark and serve Him, and how God listened to his prayer and sent Israel on toward the land.

Then Moses asks one of the great questions of the Bible: "what is the LORD your God asking from you?" The answer is simple and deep: fear Him, walk in His ways, love Him, serve Him with all your heart and soul, and keep His commands for your own good. Moses tells Israel to circumcise their hearts, and he describes God as the God of gods and Lord of lords, who shows no favoritism, defends the orphan and the widow, and loves the foreigner. Because God loves the foreigner, Israel must too, for they were foreigners in Egypt. This chapter shows us what a life that pleases God looks like.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1-2 *At that time the LORD said to me, 'Cut out for yourself two tablets of stone like the first **ones**, and come up to Me on the mountain, and you shall make for yourself an ark of wood. And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke, and you shall put them in the ark.'*

"At that time the LORD said to me," Moses says, and God's words were, "Cut out for yourself two tablets of stone like the first ones, and come up to Me on the mountain." After the golden calf, after the broken tablets, after forty days of Moses lying on his face, God speaks again. And He says, Come up.

This is grace. Israel had broken the covenant almost as soon as they made it. God had every right to walk away. Instead, He gave them a second set of tablets.

"And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke." The words did not change. God did not lower His standard because they failed. But He gave His Word again. That is what God does with sinners who repent. He does not change His holiness, but He gives us a new beginning. "His compassions do not come to an end. They are new in the mornings" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

10:3-5 *And I made an ark of acacia wood, and I cut out two tablets of stone like the first **ones**, and I went up to the mountain, and the two tablets **were** in my hand. And He wrote on the tablets according to the first writing the ten words which the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them to me. And I turned and came down from the mountain, and I put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and they are there, just as the LORD commanded me.*

"And I made an ark of acacia wood, and I cut out two tablets of stone like the first ones." An ark here means a chest or box. This was the ark of the covenant, the gold-covered chest that would sit in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, with the mercy seat as its lid (Exodus 25:10-22). Acacia was a hard desert wood that does not rot easily.

"And He wrote on the tablets according to the first writing the ten words." This time Moses cut the stone, but God again did the writing.

"And I put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and they are there, just as the LORD commanded me." Centuries later, when Solomon put the ark in the temple, "there was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of the stones which Moses placed there at Horeb" (1 Kings 8:9).

Think about where God's Law was kept. It was inside the ark, under the mercy seat, where the blood of atonement was spattered once a year (Leviticus 16:14-15). Atonement means the covering or removing of sin so that a guilty people can be at peace with God. The Law that condemned Israel was covered by the place of mercy. That is a picture of what Christ did. Paul says God set forth Christ "as a propitiation through faith in His blood" (Romans 3:25). A propitiation is a sacrifice that turns away God's anger against sin, and the Greek word Paul uses is the same word used for the mercy seat (Hebrews 9:5).

10:6-7 *And the sons of Israel set out from Beeroth Bene-jaakan **to** Moserah. There Aaron died, and he was buried there; and Eleazar his son served as priest in his place. From there they set out to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah **to** Jotbathah, a land of wadis of water.*

These two verses are a short travel note set inside Moses' sermon. "The sons of Israel set out from Beeroth Bene-jaakan to Moserah. There Aaron died, and he was buried there; and Eleazar his son served as priest in his place." Then they went on to Gudgodah and Jotbathah, "a land of wadis of water."

Why is this here? It shows that God kept His word. Aaron had also sinned with the golden calf (9:20). Moses prayed for him, and God spared him. Aaron lived on for nearly forty years, served as high priest, and when he died, the priesthood went on through his son Eleazar. God did not cancel the priesthood because of Aaron's sin. He kept it going.

Numbers 20:22-29 says Aaron died on Mount Hor, and Numbers 33:30-38 lists these camps in a different order. Many think Moserah was the area where Mount Hor stood, and that Israel passed through some of these places more than once during the wandering years.

10:8-9 *At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to serve Him, and to bless in His name, to this day. Therefore Levi has no portion and inheritance with his brothers; the LORD, He **is** his inheritance, just as the LORD your God spoke to him.*

"At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi." Levi was one of the twelve tribes, descended from Jacob's son Levi. A Levite was a member of that tribe. When Israel sinned with the calf, the Levites stood with Moses on the LORD's side (Exodus 32:26-29). God then set them apart for His service.

Their work had three parts: "to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to serve Him, and to bless in His name." The priests, who were the descendants of Aaron within the tribe of Levi, offered the sacrifices and spoke God's blessing over the people (Numbers 6:24-26). The other Levites helped them and carried the tabernacle.

"Therefore Levi has no portion and inheritance with his brothers; the LORD, He is his inheritance." When the land was divided, Levi received no territory of its own, only towns to live

in among the other tribes (Numbers 35:1-8). They lived on the tithes and offerings of the people. But they had something better than land. They had the LORD.

Every believer in Christ is now part of "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). The psalmist could say, "The LORD is the portion of my share and my cup" (Psalm 16:5). Is He your portion? If you lost everything else, would He be enough?

10:10-11 *And I, I stood on the mountain as **in** the first days, forty days and forty nights; and the LORD listened to me also at that time; the LORD was not willing to ruin you. And the LORD said to me, 'Arise, go on the journey before the people, that they may go in and take possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give to them.'*

Moses finishes the story of his intercession. "I stood on the mountain as in the first days, forty days and forty nights; and the LORD listened to me also at that time; the LORD was not willing to ruin you."

Then God gave the order to move: "Arise, go on the journey before the people, that they may go in and take possession of the land which I swore to their fathers."

Here is the point of chapters 9 and 10 together. Israel deserved to be destroyed. They were stiff-necked from the beginning. But God listened to the one who prayed for them, He renewed the covenant, He kept the priesthood, and He sent them on toward the land. Everything they were about to receive was grace. And that is still the only way anyone comes to God: not by our goodness, but because of the One who stands between us and God and prays for us.

10:12-13 *And now, Israel, what is the LORD your God asking from you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I am commanding you today, for your good?*

"And now, Israel, what is the LORD your God asking from you?"

After all the history, Moses asks the simple question. What does God really want? His answer has five parts.

"To fear the LORD your God." Stand in awe of Him. Take Him seriously.

"To walk in all His ways." Live the way He lives. Do what He does.

"And to love Him." Here is the center, again. God wants love, not just duty.

"And to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Give Him your whole self, as the Shema said (6:5).

"To keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I am commanding you today, for your good."

That last phrase matters. God's commands are "for your good." He does not give rules to make us miserable. He gives them because He made us and knows how life works best.

The prophet Micah asked the same kind of question: "what does the LORD require from you but to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). It is simple enough for a child to understand, and deep enough that none of us has ever done it perfectly. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). What God asks is not a heavy load. It is a life of love.

10:14-15 *Look, to the LORD your God **belong** the heavens and the heavens of the heavens, the earth and all that **is** in it. Only on your fathers did the LORD set His affection, to love them, and He chose their seed after them, you, out of all the peoples, as **at** this day.*

"Look, to the LORD your God belong the heavens and the heavens of the heavens, the earth and all that is in it." The heavens of the heavens means the highest heavens, all the way up. God owns it all. He does not need anything from us.

And yet: "Only on your fathers did the LORD set His affection, to love them, and He chose their seed after them, you, out of all the peoples."

Put these two verses side by side. The God who owns the whole universe chose to set His love on one small family. Why? Not because He needed them. Simply because He loved them (7:7-8).

That is the wonder of grace. The God who made the galaxies knows your name and set His love on you in Christ. That should humble us and fill us with joy at the same time.

10:16 *And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and your neck you shall not stiffen anymore.*

"And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and your neck you shall not stiffen anymore."

Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham, a cutting of the flesh given to every Israelite boy (Genesis 17:9-14). But God always wanted more than an outward sign. To circumcise the heart means to cut away the hardness, pride and stubbornness inside, so that the heart is open to God. It is the opposite of a stiff neck.

Jeremiah repeated this call (Jeremiah 4:4). Paul says, "circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter" (Romans 2:29). And in Christ, believers have been "circumcised with a circumcision made without hands" (Colossians 2:11).

Here Moses tells Israel to circumcise their own hearts. In 30:6 he will say that God Himself will circumcise their hearts. Both are true. We are called to turn from our stubbornness, and only God can truly change our hearts. When we see how hard our hearts are, we cry out to Him to do what we cannot.

10:17-18 *For the LORD your God, He **is** the God of the gods and the Lord of the lords, the great God, the mighty and the awesome, who does not lift up faces and does not take a bribe, doing the judgment of **the** fatherless and **the** widow, and loving **the** sojourner, to give him bread and clothing.*

"For the LORD your God, He is the God of the gods and the Lord of the lords." This is a way of saying He is the highest God and the highest Lord, above every so-called god and every ruler. Revelation says Jesus wears the name "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16).

"The great God, the mighty and the awesome, who does not lift up faces and does not take a bribe," To lift up faces means to show favoritism. God cannot be bought, flattered or impressed. He judges fairly. Peter learned this when God sent him to the Gentile Cornelius: "God is not one who shows partiality" (Acts 10:34).

And what does this great God do with His power? He is "doing the judgment of the fatherless and the widow, and loving the sojourner, to give him bread and clothing." The God of gods takes up the cause of the orphan, the widow and the foreigner, the people with no one else to defend them. The most powerful Being in the universe bends down to the weakest.

James says pure religion is "to visit orphans and widows in their tribulation" (James 1:27). If we want to be like God, we must care about the people He cares about.

10:19 *And you shall love the sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.*

"And you shall love the sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt."

A sojourner was a foreigner who lived among Israel without land or family ties. Such people were easy to cheat and ignore. God tells Israel to love them. Not just tolerate them. Love them, as Leviticus 19:34 says, "as yourself."

And He gives the reason: you know what it is like. You were foreigners in Egypt. You remember being outsiders, being mistreated and having no rights. Do not do to others what was done to you.

Christians have the same reason. Paul tells Gentile believers that they were once "strangers to the covenants of the promise, not having hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). God took us in. How can we shut others out? Jesus said that when we take in a stranger, we take in Him (Matthew 25:35, 40).

10:20-22 *The LORD your God you shall fear; Him you shall serve, and to Him you shall cling, and by His name you shall swear. He **is** your praise, and He **is** your God, who has done with you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. With seventy souls your fathers went down to Egypt, and now the LORD your God has made you like the stars of the heavens for multitude.*

"The LORD your God you shall fear; Him you shall serve, and to Him you shall cling, and by His name you shall swear." Moses gathers it up again. Fear Him. Serve Him. Cling to Him, holding tight like a man clings to a rope, as in 4:4. Make your promises in His name alone.

"He is your praise, and He is your God." He is the reason for your praise, and He is the One you boast in. Israel's glory was not their army or their wealth. It was their God. Paul says the same of believers, who "boast in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:3).

"With seventy souls your fathers went down to Egypt" (10:22; see Genesis 46:27). Seventy people. "And now the LORD your God has made you like the stars of the heavens for multitude." That was God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:5), and it had come true before their eyes. If God kept that promise, He would keep every other one too.

Chapter 10 Summary

After the golden calf, God told Moses to cut two new tablets and make an ark of wood. God wrote the Ten Commandments again on the new tablets, and Moses put them in the ark. A travel note tells of Aaron's death and how the priesthood passed to his son Eleazar. God set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark, stand before Him and bless in His name, and Levi received no land because the LORD was their inheritance. God listened to Moses' prayer and sent Israel on to the land. Then Moses asked what the LORD requires: to fear Him, walk in His ways, love Him, serve Him with all their heart and soul, and keep His commands for their good. The LORD owns the heavens and the earth, yet He set His love on Israel's fathers and chose their descendants. Israel was to circumcise their hearts and stop being stiff-necked. The LORD is the God of gods and Lord of lords, who shows no favoritism and takes no bribe, defends the orphan and widow, and loves the foreigner, so Israel must love the foreigner, for they were foreigners in Egypt. They were to fear Him, serve Him and cling to Him, for He is their praise, who made seventy people into a nation like the stars.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. What did God tell Moses to do after the tablets were broken, and what does that show about God? (10:1-2)

2. What was put inside the ark, and where would the ark be kept? (10:2-5)

3. What three jobs did God give the tribe of Levi, and what was their inheritance? (10:8-9)

4. What five things does the LORD ask of Israel, and why does He ask them? (10:12-13)

5. What does it mean to "circumcise the foreskin of your heart"? (10:16; Romans 2:29)

6. How does Moses describe God in verses 17 and 18, and whom does this great God defend?

7. Why were the Israelites to love the foreigner? (10:19)

8. Moses says God's commands are "for your good" (10:13). Is there a command of God you have struggled to see that way? Why?

9. Who are the orphans, widows and foreigners in your community, and what is one way you could show them God's love?

10. Levi's inheritance was the LORD Himself. What would it look like for you to treat God as your portion, more than anything you own?

Chapter 11: Love the LORD and Choose the Blessing

Scripture

11:1-17 And you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge and His statutes and His judgments and His commandments all the days. And you shall know today, for ***it is*** not your sons, who have not known and who have not seen the discipline of the LORD your God, His greatness, His mighty hand and His outstretched arm, and His signs and His deeds which He did in the midst of Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land, and what He did to the army of Egypt, to its horses and to its chariots, how He made the water of the Red Sea flow over their faces when they pursued after you, and the LORD made them perish to this day, and what He did to you in the wilderness until you came to this place, and what He did to Dathan and to Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households and their tents and all the living substance that ***was*** at their feet, in the midst of all Israel. For your eyes ***are*** the ***ones*** seeing all the great work of the LORD which He did. And you shall keep all the commandment which I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong, and go in and take possession of the land to which you are passing over to take possession of it, and so that you may prolong ***your*** days on the ground which the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them and to their seed, a land flowing ***with*** milk and honey. For the land to which you are going in to take possession of it, it ***is*** not like the land of Egypt from which you came out, where you sowed your seed and watered ***it*** with your foot, like a garden of vegetables. And the land to which you are passing over to take possession of it ***is*** a land of mountains and valleys; by the rain of the heavens it drinks water, a land which the LORD your God is caring for; continually the eyes of the LORD your God ***are*** on it, from the beginning of the year and to the end of ***the*** year. And it shall be, if you surely listen to My commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give the rain of your land in its season, early rain and late rain, and you shall gather your grain and your new wine and your fresh oil. And I will give grass in your field for your livestock, and you shall eat and be satisfied. Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and bow down to them, and the anger of the LORD burn against you, and He shut up the heavens, and there be no rain, and the ground not yield its produce, and you perish quickly from on the good land which the LORD is giving to you.

11:18-32 And you shall put these words of Mine on your heart and on your soul, and you shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your sons, speaking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the ground which the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them, like the days of the heavens above the earth. For if you surely keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do it, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to cling to Him, then the LORD will dispossess all these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess nations greater and mightier than you. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; from the wilderness and the Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, and to the western sea

shall be your territory. No man shall take a stand before you; the dread of you and the fear of you the LORD your God will put on the face of all the land on which you tread, just as He spoke to you. See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, when you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God which I am commanding you today, and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, and turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, to walk after other gods which you have not known. And it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land to which you are going in to take possession of it, that you shall set the blessing on the mountain of Gerizim and the curse on the mountain of Ebal. ***Are*** they not on the other side of the Jordan, behind the way of the setting of the sun, in the land of the Canaanite who dwells in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinths of Moreh? For you are passing over the Jordan to go in to take possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, and you shall take possession of it and dwell in it. And you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the judgments which I am setting before you today.

Chapter 11 Preview

Chapter 11 closes the first part of Moses' second sermon, the part that lays out the heart of the Law before the detailed laws begin in chapter 12. Moses speaks to the people who saw God's mighty works with their own eyes. They saw what He did to Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, what He did for them in the wilderness, and what He did to Dathan and Abiram when the ground swallowed them. Their children had not seen it, so these adults carried a special responsibility to obey and to pass it on.

Moses then describes the land. Egypt was watered by the Nile, and the farmer watered his fields with his foot. Canaan was a land of hills and valleys that drank rain from heaven, a land God Himself cared for and watched all year. If Israel loved and served the LORD, He would send the early and late rains. If they turned to other gods, He would shut the heavens. Moses repeats the words of the Shema, and then he sets the choice before them: "a blessing and a curse." When they entered the land, they were to proclaim the blessing from Mount Gerizim and the curse from Mount Ebal. Everything hangs on whether they would listen.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1 *And you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge and His statutes and His judgments and His commandments all the days.*

"And you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge and His statutes and His judgments and His commandments all the days."

Moses starts where the Shema started: love. Then comes obedience. That is always the order in Deuteronomy. A charge is a duty given to someone to guard and carry out, like a soldier's post. Love for God shows itself in faithfully keeping what He has entrusted to us.

Notice "all the days." Not just on holy days. Not just when it is easy. Every day. Jesus said, "If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love" (John 15:10).

11:2-7 *And you shall know today, for **it is** not your sons, who have not known and who have not seen the discipline of the LORD your God, His greatness, His mighty hand and His outstretched arm, and His signs and His deeds which He did in the midst of Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land, and what He did to the army of Egypt, to its horses and to its chariots, how He made the water of the Red Sea flow over their faces when they pursued after you, and the LORD made them perish to this day, and what He did to you in the wilderness until you came to this place, and what He did to Dathan and to Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households and their tents and all the living substance that **was** at their feet, in the midst of all Israel. For your eyes **are** the **ones** seeing all the great work of the LORD which He did.*

"And you shall know today, for it is not your sons, who have not known and who have not seen." Moses speaks to the adults in front of him. Many of them were children or young people during the exodus and the wilderness years. They had seen what their own children had not.

What had they seen? "The discipline of the LORD your God, His greatness, His mighty hand and His outstretched arm." His signs in Egypt against Pharaoh. What He did at the Red Sea, how "He made the water of the Red Sea flow over their faces." What He did for them in the wilderness. "And what He did to Dathan and to Abiram," when "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households." Numbers 16 tells how these two men, along with Korah, rebelled against Moses and Aaron and refused to come when Moses called. God opened the ground beneath them.

Why mention this judgment in particular? Perhaps because Dathan and Abiram were from the tribe of Reuben, and that tribe had just received its land east of the Jordan. It was a reminder that rebellion against God's appointed leaders, from any tribe, is rebellion against God.

"For your eyes are the ones seeing all the great work of the LORD which He did." Seeing brings responsibility. The more God has shown us, the more He expects of us. What has your own life shown you of God? That is something your children have not seen unless you tell them.

11:8-9 *And you shall keep all the commandment which I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong, and go in and take possession of the land to which you are passing over to take possession of it, and so that you may prolong **your** days on the ground which the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them and to their seed, a land flowing **with** milk and honey.*

"And you shall keep all the commandment which I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong, and go in and take possession of the land." Obedience would make them strong. Their strength would not come from their army but from walking with God.

"And so that you may prolong your days on the ground which the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them and to their seed, a land flowing with milk and honey." The promise to the fathers keeps coming up. Everything Israel was about to receive rested on what God swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob centuries before.

11:10-12 *For the land to which you are going in to take possession of it, it **is** not like the land of Egypt from which you came out, where you sowed your seed and watered **it** with your foot, like a garden of vegetables. And the land to which you are passing over to take possession of it **is** a land of mountains and valleys; by the rain of the heavens it drinks water, a land which the LORD your God is caring for; continually the eyes of the LORD your God **are** on it, from the beginning of the year and to the end of **the** year.*

Now Moses compares two lands. In Egypt "you sowed your seed and watered it with your foot, like a garden of vegetables." Egypt almost never had rain. Its fields were watered from the Nile through ditches and channels. The farmer opened and closed the small channels with his foot, or worked a water wheel with his feet. Water came from the river and from hard work.

Canaan was different. It was "a land of mountains and valleys; by the rain of the heavens it drinks water." There was no great river to water the hills. They had to depend on rain from heaven. That meant they had to depend on God.

"A land which the LORD your God is caring for; continually the eyes of the LORD your God are on it, from the beginning of the year and to the end of the year." What a picture. God would watch over this land all year long, like a farmer watching his best field.

Here is a lesson for us. Some places in life let us feel self-sufficient, like Egypt with its river. Others leave us looking up, waiting on God. The second kind may feel harder, but it keeps us close to Him. God sometimes puts us where we must look to heaven, because that is where our help comes from. Peter says to cast "all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you" (1 Peter 5:7).

11:13-15 *And it shall be, if you surely listen to My commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give the rain of your land in its season, early rain and late rain, and you shall gather your grain and your new wine and your fresh oil. And I will give grass in your field for your livestock, and you shall eat and be satisfied.*

"And it shall be, if you surely listen to My commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."

Notice that Moses suddenly speaks in God's own voice: "My commandments." This is God speaking through His prophet.

"Then I will give the rain of your land in its season, early rain and late rain." In Israel, the early rain comes in the fall, softening the ground for plowing and planting. The late rain comes in the spring, filling out the grain before harvest. Both had to come at the right time, or the crops failed. James uses this picture for waiting on the Lord's return: "the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and late rain" (James 5:7).

"And you shall gather your grain and your new wine and your fresh oil." "And you shall eat and be satisfied." The blessing was simple and real: rain, harvest and full stomachs.

These were covenant promises to Israel in the land. God still sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), and every good harvest is His gift (Acts 14:17). But we should not read these verses as a promise that faithful Christians will never face drought or loss. Our blessings in Christ are first of all spiritual (Ephesians 1:3).

11:16-17 *Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and bow down to them, and the anger of the LORD burn against you, and He shut up the heavens, and there be no rain, and the ground not yield its produce, and you perish quickly from on the good land which the LORD is giving to you.*

"Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods." The Canaanites believed that Baal was the god of storm and rain. When Israel came into a land that depended on rain, the pull to worship Baal would be strong. Surely it couldn't hurt to honor the local rain god as well?

Moses says that is a deception. The LORD alone sends the rain. If they turned to Baal, "He shut up the heavens, and there be no rain, and the ground not yield its produce."

That is exactly what happened in the days of King Ahab, when Israel worshiped Baal. The prophet Elijah said, "there shall not be dew and rain these years, except according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1), and no rain fell for "three years and six months" (James 5:17). God showed that Baal could not send one drop. Then on Mount Carmel He sent fire, and then rain (1 Kings 18).

Our hearts can be "deceived" too. We start trusting something else to give us what only God can give. Watch your heart.

11:18-21 *And you shall put these words of Mine on your heart and on your soul, and you shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your sons, speaking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the ground which the LORD swore to your fathers to give to them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.*

"And you shall put these words of Mine on your heart and on your soul." Moses repeats the words of 6:6-9 almost exactly: bind them on your hand, wear them between your eyes, teach them to your children "when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you rise up," and write them on your doorposts and gates.

Why repeat it? Because it matters that much. Chapter 6 opened this section of Moses' sermon with these words, and chapter 11 closes it with them. Everything in between is framed by the call to keep God's Word on our hearts and teach it to our children. Jewish prayer later joined 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 together and said them every day.

"So that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied," Moses says, "like the days of the heavens above the earth." As long as the sky stands over the earth, that is how long God wanted

His people to enjoy the land. The promise was to "your sons" too. Faith passed on is blessing passed on.

11:22-25 *For if you surely keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do it, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to cling to Him, then the LORD will dispossess all these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess nations greater and mightier than you. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; from the wilderness and the Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, and to the western sea shall be your territory. No man shall take a stand before you; the dread of you and the fear of you the LORD your God will put on the face of all the land on which you tread, just as He spoke to you.*

"For if you surely keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do it, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to cling to Him." Love, walk, cling. That is the whole of it.

Then the promise: "the LORD will dispossess all these nations from before you." "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours." God repeated this promise to Joshua (Joshua 1:3). Israel had to walk in to receive it.

The borders are wide: "from the wilderness and the Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, and to the western sea." These are the borders God promised Abraham (Genesis 15:18). Israel came close to them only in the days of David and Solomon, when Solomon ruled over kingdoms as far as the Euphrates (1 Kings 4:21). I believe God will give Israel the whole land He promised when Christ reigns on the earth in His kingdom, because God's promises to Abraham have never been canceled (Romans 11:29).

"No man shall take a stand before you; the dread of you and the fear of you the LORD your God will put on the face of all the land." It would be God's fear that went ahead of them, as Rahab later told the spies (Joshua 2:9-11).

11:26-28 *See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, when you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God which I am commanding you today, and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, and turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, to walk after other gods which you have not known.*

"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse."

Here it is, as simple as it can be. Two roads. "The blessing, when you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God." "And the curse, if you do not listen," and turn aside "to walk after other gods which you have not known." Gods they had not known were gods that had done nothing for them, unlike the LORD, who had done everything.

Chapters 27 and 28 will spell out these blessings and curses in detail, and in 30:19 Moses will say, "choose life." For Israel under the covenant of Sinai, this was the choice in the land.

What does this mean for us? Paul says that everyone who tries to stand before God on the basis of keeping the law is "under a curse," because no one keeps it all (Galatians 3:10). But "Christ

redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Jesus took the curse so that we could receive the blessing. The choice set before every person now is whether we will trust Him. And for those who do, the call to obey still stands, not to earn the blessing, but because we have received it.

11:29-30 *And it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land to which you are going in to take possession of it, that you shall set the blessing on the mountain of Gerizim and the curse on the mountain of Ebal.* ***Are*** *they not on the other side of the Jordan, behind the way of the setting of the sun, in the land of the Canaanite who dwells in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinths of Moreh?*

"You shall set the blessing on the mountain of Gerizim and the curse on the mountain of Ebal." These two mountains stand facing each other in the middle of the land, with the town of Shechem in the valley between them. Gerizim is on the south side, Ebal on the north.

Moses gives directions to the place: west of the Jordan, "opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinths of Moreh." A terebinth is a large, spreading tree. The terebinth of Moreh near Shechem is the very place where Abraham first stopped when he entered Canaan and where God first promised him the land (Genesis 12:6-7). Israel would proclaim the covenant on the spot where the promise began.

Joshua did exactly what Moses commanded. After the victories at Jericho and Ai, he gathered all Israel between the two mountains and read "all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse" (Joshua 8:30-35). Chapter 27 will give the details of this ceremony.

11:31-32 *For you are passing over the Jordan to go in to take possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, and you shall take possession of it and dwell in it. And you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the judgments which I am setting before you today.*

"For you are passing over the Jordan to go in to take possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, and you shall take possession of it and dwell in it." Moses speaks with full confidence. Not if, but you shall.

"And you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the judgments which I am setting before you today." With this, Moses finishes the great call to love and obey that began in chapter 5. In the next chapters he will set out the statutes and judgments one by one. But he has made sure they understand the heart of it first. The rules are not the starting point. Love for God is. All the commands that follow are ways to live out that love in the land.

Chapter 11 Summary

Moses called Israel to love the LORD and keep His charge and commandments every day. The adults in front of him had seen what their children had not: God's mighty hand against Pharaoh, the Red Sea closing over Egypt's army, His care in the wilderness, and the earth swallowing Dathan and Abiram. They were to keep the commandment so they would be strong and live long in the land. Unlike Egypt, which was watered by the river and the farmer's foot, Canaan was a

land of hills and valleys that drank rain from heaven, and the LORD's eyes were on it all year. If they loved and served Him, He would send the early and late rain and they would be satisfied, but if their hearts were deceived and they served other gods, He would shut up the heavens. Moses repeated the call to keep God's words on their hearts, teach them to their children, and write them on their doorposts. If they loved God, walked in His ways and clung to Him, He would drive out the nations and give them every place their feet walked, from the wilderness to the Euphrates. Moses set before them a blessing for listening and a curse for turning to other gods, and he commanded that the blessing be proclaimed on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal when they entered the land.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. What does Moses put first in verse 1, before keeping God's commands?

2. What had the adults seen that their children had not, and why did that matter? (11:2-7)

3. How was the land of Canaan different from Egypt when it came to water? (11:10-12)

4. What are the early and late rains, and what did God promise about them? (11:14)

5. Why would the Israelites be tempted to worship other gods in a land that depended on rain? (11:16-17)

6. Why do you think Moses repeated the words of 6:6-9 in 11:18-20?

7. What two things did Moses set before Israel, and what would decide which one they received? (11:26-28)

8. How does Galatians 3:10-13 help us understand the blessing and the curse for those who trust in Christ?

9. Are you in a land that drinks rain from heaven, a season where you must look to God for what you need? How are you responding?

10. What have your eyes seen of God's work in your life that the next generation has not? How will you tell them?

Chapter 12: The Place the LORD Will Choose

Scripture

12:1-14 These ***are*** the statutes and the judgments which you shall be careful to do in the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given to you to take possession of it, all the days that you live on the ground. You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you are dispossessing served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every luxuriant tree. And you shall break down their altars, and you shall shatter their pillars, and their Asherim you shall burn with fire, and the carved images of their gods you shall cut down, and you shall destroy their name from that place. You shall not do so to the LORD your God, but to the place which the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name there, for His dwelling, you shall seek, and you shall go there. And you shall bring there your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, and your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and your vows and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in every undertaking of your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, every man all that ***is*** right in his own eyes, for you have not yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving to you. And you shall pass over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is causing you to inherit, and He will give you rest from all your enemies all around, and you shall dwell ***in*** security. And it shall be ***that*** the place which the LORD your God will choose to make His name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I am commanding you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all the choice of your vows which you vow to the LORD. And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters and your slaves and your female slaves, and the Levite who ***is*** in your gates, for he has no portion and inheritance with you. Take heed to yourself, lest you offer up your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer up your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you.

12:15-28 Only, with all the desire of your soul you may slaughter and eat flesh according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given to you, in all your gates; the unclean and the clean may eat it, like the gazelle and like the deer. Only the blood you shall not eat; on the earth you shall pour it out like water. You are not able to eat in your gates the tithe of your grain and of your new wine and of your fresh oil, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock, and any of your vows which you vow, and your freewill offerings, and the contribution of your hand; but before the LORD your God you shall eat it, in the place which the LORD your God will choose, you and your son and your daughter and your slave and your female slave and the Levite who ***is*** in your gates; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in every undertaking of your hand. Take heed to yourself, lest you forsake the Levite all your days on your ground. When the LORD your God enlarges your territory, just as He spoke to you, and you say, 'Let me eat flesh,' because your soul desires to eat flesh, with all the desire of your soul you may eat flesh. If the place which the LORD your God will choose to put His name there is too far from you, then you may slaughter from your herd and from your flock which the LORD has given to you, just as I have commanded

you, and you may eat in your gates with all the desire of your soul. Indeed, just as the gazelle and the deer are eaten, so you may eat it; the unclean and the clean alike may eat it. Only be strong not to eat the blood, for the blood, it ***is*** the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. You shall not eat it; on the earth you shall pour it out like water. You shall not eat it, so that it may go well with you and with your sons after you, when you do what ***is*** right in the eyes of the LORD. Only your holy things which you have, and your vows, you shall take, and you shall go to the place which the LORD will choose. And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, on the altar of the LORD your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the LORD your God, and the flesh you may eat. Keep and hear all these words which I am commanding you, so that it may go well with you and with your sons after you forever, when you do the good and the right in the eyes of the LORD your God.

12:29-32 When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations to which you are going to dispossess them, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself, lest you be ensnared after them, after they have been destroyed from before you, and lest you inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? And let me do so, I also.' You shall not do so to the LORD your God, for every abomination of the LORD which He hates they have done for their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they burn with fire to their gods. Every word which I am commanding you, it you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to it, and you shall not take away from it.

Chapter 12 Preview

With chapter 12 Moses turns from the heart of the Law to its details. Chapters 12 to 26 are often called the law code of Deuteronomy. They tell Israel how to live in the land once they cross the Jordan. And the very first law is about worship. Before Moses says a word about money, family or courts, he tells Israel where and how they are to meet with God. The nations of Canaan worshiped their gods on every hill and under every green tree. Israel was to tear all of that down and bring their offerings to one place: the place the LORD Himself would choose to put His name.

The chapter also gives Israel freedom. Once they were spread out in the land, they could kill and eat meat at home, as long as they did not eat the blood. And it ends with a warning that runs through the whole book: do not ask how the nations served their gods, and do not add to God's Word or take away from it. The question this chapter puts to us is simple. Do we worship God the way He asks, or the way that seems right in our own eyes?

Chapter 12 Study

12:1 *These **are** the statutes and the judgments which you shall be careful to do in the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given to you to take possession of it, all the days that you live on the ground.*

"These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall be careful to do in the land." Statutes are fixed rules. Judgments are rulings on cases, the kind of decisions a judge makes. Moses has spent eleven chapters on why Israel should obey. Now he tells them what to obey.

Notice the setting: "in the land." These laws were given for life in Canaan, under the covenant God made with Israel at Horeb. Some of them only make sense in that land, with a temple, priests and harvests. That is why we always ask three questions of these laws: what it meant for Israel then, how Christ fulfilled it, and what it teaches us now. And notice how long they were to last: "all the days that you live on the ground." Obedience was not a season. It was a way of life.

12:2-3 *You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you are dispossessing served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every luxuriant tree. And you shall break down their altars, and you shall shatter their pillars, and their Asherim you shall burn with fire, and the carved images of their gods you shall cut down, and you shall destroy their name from that place.*

The first command in the law code is to destroy. "You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you are dispossessing served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every luxuriant tree." The Canaanites believed their gods lived in high places and gave life through green trees and rain. So they put their shrines there. A high place was a hilltop shrine with an altar, often with a stone pillar and a wooden Asherah pole beside it. Asherah was a Canaanite goddess, and her poles stood for fertility.

Israel was to break the altars, shatter the pillars, burn the Asherim, and cut down the images. "You shall destroy their name from that place." In the ancient world, to name a god at a place was to claim it for that god. Israel was to wipe the names of the false gods off the map.

Sadly, Israel did not do it. The books of Kings say over and over that even good kings did not take away the high places (1 Kings 15:14; 2 Kings 12:3). It took centuries and kings like Hezekiah and Josiah to tear them down. What we leave standing in our lives tends to pull us back. This is a call to a clean break with false worship.

12:4-7 *You shall not do so to the LORD your God, but to the place which the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name there, for His dwelling, you shall seek, and you shall go there. And you shall bring there your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, and your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and your vows and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in every undertaking of your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.*

"You shall not do so to the LORD your God." Israel was not to worship the LORD the way the Canaanites worshiped their gods, at any hill they liked. Instead they were to go "to the place which the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name there, for His dwelling." This phrase, "the place which the LORD your God will choose," comes again and again in these chapters. Moses never names the place. First it was the tabernacle at Shiloh (Joshua 18:1; Jeremiah 7:12). Later God chose Jerusalem, where Solomon built the temple (1 Kings 8:29; 2 Chronicles 6:6).

To "put His name there" means God would make His presence known there in a special way. God is everywhere, and Solomon said even the highest heavens cannot hold Him (1 Kings 8:27). But He chose a place where His people could meet Him, on His terms.

There they were to bring their "burnt offerings" (offered whole on the altar), their "sacrifices" (mostly peace offerings, shared in a meal), their tithes (a tenth of their produce), their gifts, their vows, and the firstborn of their animals. And there they were to "eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice." Worship in Deuteronomy is not gloomy. It is a family meal with God at the head of the table.

12:8-9 *You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, every man all that **is** right in his own eyes, for you have not yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving to you.*

"You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, every man all that is right in his own eyes." In the wilderness things were not yet settled. They were on the move, and the full law of worship could not yet be kept. Moses says why: "you have not yet come to the rest and to the inheritance."

That phrase, "every man all that is right in his own eyes," is worth remembering. The book of Judges ends with almost the same words to describe a time when Israel fell apart (Judges 21:25). Doing what is right in our own eyes is the root of most of our troubles. God gives us His Word so we do not have to guess what pleases Him.

12:10-12 *And you shall pass over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is causing you to inherit, and He will give you rest from all your enemies all around, and you shall dwell **in** security. And it shall be **that** the place which the LORD your God will choose to make His name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I am commanding you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all the choice of your vows which you vow to the LORD. And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters and your slaves and your female slaves, and the Levite who **is** in your gates, for he has no portion and inheritance with you.*

"He will give you rest from all your enemies all around, and you shall dwell in security." Once God gave them rest in the land, the rule would take full effect. All the offerings were to come to the chosen place.

Again the note is joy: "you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters and your slaves and your female slaves, and the Levite." Everyone in the house was invited, including the servants. The Levite is named because he had "no portion and inheritance with you." The tribe of Levi received no land of its own. They served at the sanctuary and lived on the offerings and on the kindness of the other tribes. Deuteronomy keeps reminding Israel not to forget them.

The New Testament speaks of a better rest that God gives His people in Christ (Hebrews 4:8-10). Joshua gave Israel rest in the land, but it was a picture of something greater.

12:13-14 *Take heed to yourself, lest you offer up your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer up your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you.*

"Take heed to yourself, lest you offer up your burnt offerings in every place that you see." Why did it matter so much where they worshiped? There are at least two reasons. First, it guarded against idolatry. Scattered shrines on every hill would soon mix the LORD's worship with Baal's. One place under the priests' care kept worship pure. Second, it taught that God sets the terms for how sinners come to Him. They could not make up their own way.

This is a picture of a truth the New Testament makes plain. There is one way to God. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). We do not need to go to a temple in Jerusalem now. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that the hour was coming when the true worshipers "will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). But we still come God's way, through His Son, not ours.

12:15-16 *Only, with all the desire of your soul you may slaughter and eat flesh according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given to you, in all your gates; the unclean and the clean may eat it, like the gazelle and like the deer. Only the blood you shall not eat; on the earth you shall pour it out like water.*

Then comes a freedom. "With all the desire of your soul you may slaughter and eat flesh," Moses says, "in all your gates." In the wilderness, it seems, animals of the herd and flock were to be brought to the tabernacle when they were killed (Leviticus 17:3-6). Once Israel was spread through the land, that would be impossible. So God allowed them to kill and eat meat at home, like hunted game, "like the gazelle and like the deer." The "unclean and the clean may eat it," because this was an ordinary meal, not a sacrifice.

"Only the blood you shall not eat; on the earth you shall pour it out like water." This rule goes back to Noah (Genesis 9:4). The reason is given in verse 23.

12:17-19 *You are not able to eat in your gates the tithe of your grain and of your new wine and of your fresh oil, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock, and any of your vows which you vow, and your freewill offerings, and the contribution of your hand; but before the LORD your God you shall eat it, in the place which the LORD your God will choose, you and your son and your daughter and your slave and your female slave and the Levite who **is** in your gates; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in every undertaking of your hand. Take heed to yourself, lest you forsake the Levite all your days on your ground.*

The holy things were different. The tithe, the firstborn, and their vows and gifts could not be eaten "in your gates," meaning in their own towns. They had to be eaten "before the LORD your God" in "the place which the LORD your God will choose." Again the whole family and the servants were included.

"Take heed to yourself, lest you forsake the Levite all your days on your ground." This is the second time in this chapter. It is easy to forget those who serve God when we are busy with our

own fields. Paul says the same thing to the church: those who teach the Word should be cared for by those they teach (Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).

12:20-22 *When the LORD your God enlarges your territory, just as He spoke to you, and you say, 'Let me eat flesh,' because your soul desires to eat flesh, with all the desire of your soul you may eat flesh. If the place which the LORD your God will choose to put His name there is too far from you, then you may slaughter from your herd and from your flock which the LORD has given to you, just as I have commanded you, and you may eat in your gates with all the desire of your soul. Indeed, just as the gazelle and the deer are eaten, so you may eat it; the unclean and the clean alike may eat it.*

Moses repeats the freedom to eat meat at home and explains it. "When the LORD your God enlarges your territory," and the chosen place "is too far from you," then they could slaughter at home and "eat in your gates with all the desire of your soul."

This shows something about God's Law that we sometimes miss. It is not only a list of things we cannot do. God cares about His people's daily lives. He knew they would live far from the sanctuary, and He made room for ordinary life. His commands are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

12:23-25 *Only be strong not to eat the blood, for the blood, it **is** the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. You shall not eat it; on the earth you shall pour it out like water. You shall not eat it, so that it may go well with you and with your sons after you, when you do what **is** right in the eyes of the LORD.*

"Only be strong not to eat the blood, for the blood, it is the life." Why be strong? Because it would be tempting. Many nations around them drank blood or ate meat with the blood in it, sometimes in their pagan rites. God says no.

The reason is that life belongs to God. Leviticus explains: "the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls" (Leviticus 17:11). Atonement means covering sin so that a sinner can be made right with God. The blood was set apart for that holy use. So pouring it on the ground was a way of giving the life back to God.

This points us to the cross. Hebrews says, "apart from shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22), and the blood of Christ is the blood that truly takes sin away. The early church asked Gentile believers to keep away from blood, out of respect for their Jewish brothers (Acts 15:29). Believers today differ on whether that rule still binds us, but all agree on what it pointed to: life is precious, and the blood of Jesus is precious most of all (1 Peter 1:19).

12:26-28 *Only your holy things which you have, and your vows, you shall take, and you shall go to the place which the LORD will choose. And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, on the altar of the LORD your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the LORD your God, and the flesh you may eat. Keep and hear all these words which I am commanding you, so that it may go well with you and with your sons after you forever, when you do the good and the right in the eyes of the LORD your God.*

The holy things and vows were to be taken "to the place which the LORD will choose." There the burnt offering went wholly on the altar, "the flesh and the blood." For the other sacrifices, the blood was poured on the altar, "and the flesh you may eat."

"Keep and hear all these words which I am commanding you, so that it may go well with you and with your sons after you forever." Moses keeps thinking of the children. Our faithfulness, or our unfaithfulness, shapes the next generation more than we know.

12:29-31 *When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations to which you are going to dispossess them, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself, lest you be ensnared after them, after they have been destroyed from before you, and lest you inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? And let me do so, I also.' You shall not do so to the LORD your God, for every abomination of the LORD which He hates they have done for their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they burn with fire to their gods.*

Now the warning. After God cut off the nations, Israel would be tempted to ask, "How did these nations serve their gods? And let me do so, I also." It sounds like harmless curiosity. Maybe their ways worked. Maybe Israel could borrow a few of them for the LORD.

God says no, and He gives the reason: "every abomination of the LORD which He hates they have done for their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they burn with fire to their gods." An abomination is something God finds disgusting. The worship of Molech and other Canaanite gods included burning children as sacrifices (Leviticus 18:21). This is one of the reasons God judged these nations. Tragically, Israel later did this very thing, in the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:3; Jeremiah 7:31).

We should not think we are above this. Every age has its ways of sacrificing children to what it worships, whether pleasure, money or convenience. And the church is always tempted to borrow the world's methods to reach the world. We should ask whether what we bring into worship honors God, or just copies the culture around us.

12:32 *Every word which I am commanding you, it you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to it, and you shall not take away from it.*

"Every word which I am commanding you, it you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to it, and you shall not take away from it." Moses said the same in 4:2. God's Word is enough. Adding to it puts our ideas on the same level as His. Taking away from it says some of His words do not matter.

The Bible ends with the same warning (Revelation 22:18-19). The Pharisees added traditions until they set aside God's commands (Mark 7:8-9). Others take away whatever they find hard. The safe road is to receive all of it, as it is written.

Chapter 12 Summary

The law code begins with worship. When Israel entered the land they were to destroy every Canaanite high place, altar, pillar, Asherah and image, and wipe out the names of the false gods. They were not to worship the LORD in the same way on every hill. They were to bring all their offerings, tithes, vows and firstborn to the one place the LORD would choose to put His name, and there eat and rejoice before Him with their families, servants and the Levites. In the wilderness each man did what was right in his own eyes, but in the land God's way would rule. Ordinary meat could be killed and eaten at home, but the blood was never to be eaten, because the life is in the blood. Israel was not to ask how the nations served their gods, for those nations even burned their children. And they were not to add to God's Word or take from it. The one place of worship points to the one way to God, through Jesus Christ.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. What were the Israelites to do with the places where the nations served their gods? (12:2-3)

2. Where were the Israelites to bring their offerings, and what were they to do there? (12:5-7)

3. What does Moses say each man was doing in the wilderness, and how does Judges 21:25 echo it? (12:8)

4. Who was to be included when Israel rejoiced before the LORD, and why is the Levite mentioned so often? (12:12, 18-19)

5. What freedom did God give about eating meat, and what one rule remained? (12:15-16, 20-22)

6. Why were the Israelites not to eat blood, and how does this point to the cross? (12:23; Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22)

7. What question did Moses warn Israel not to ask about the nations' gods, and why? (12:30-31)

8. How does the one chosen place of worship point to the one way to God through Jesus? (12:13-14; John 14:6)

9. Where are you tempted to worship God in the way that seems right in your own eyes, instead of the way He asks? (12:8)

10. What "high places" might still be standing in your life that you need to tear down? (12:2-3)

Chapter 13: False Prophets and the Pull to Other Gods

Scripture

13:1-11 If a prophet or a dreamer of a dream arises in your midst, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign and the wonder of which he spoke to you comes ***to pass***, saying, 'Let us walk after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us be made to serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of the dream, for the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you are loving the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. After the LORD your God you shall walk, and Him you shall fear, and His commandments you shall keep, and to His voice you shall listen, and Him you shall serve, and to Him you shall cling. And that prophet or that dreamer of the dream shall be put to death, for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt and ransomed you from the house of slaves, to thrust you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. And you shall purge the evil from your midst. If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife of your bosom or your friend who ***is*** as your own soul, entices you in secret, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, you and your fathers, of the gods of the peoples who ***are*** around you, those near to you or those far from you, from the end of the earth and to the end of the earth, you shall not consent to him, and you shall not listen to him, and your eye shall not pity him, and you shall not spare ***him***, and you shall not cover over him. But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be on him first to put him to death, and the hand of all the people last. And you shall stone him with stones, and he shall die, for he sought to thrust you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves. And all Israel shall hear and fear, and they shall not again do like this evil thing in your midst.

13:12-18 If you hear in one of your cities which the LORD your God is giving to you to dwell there, saying, 'Men, sons of worthlessness, have gone out from your midst, and they have thrust away the inhabitants of their city, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods,"' which you have not known, then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly; and look, ***it is*** truth, the thing ***is*** certain, this abomination has been done in your midst, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the mouth of the sword, devoting it to destruction and all that ***is*** in it, and its livestock, with the mouth of the sword. And all its plunder you shall gather into the midst of its open square, and you shall burn with fire the city and all its plunder, a whole offering to the LORD your God; and it shall be a heap forever; it shall not be built again. And nothing of the devoted thing shall cling to your hand, so that the LORD may turn from the burning of His anger, and give you compassion, and have compassion on you, and multiply you, just as He swore to your fathers, when you listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep all His commandments which I am commanding you today, to do what ***is*** right in the eyes of the LORD your God.

Chapter 13 Preview

Chapter 12 ended with a warning not to copy the worship of the nations. Chapter 13 tells Israel what to do when the pull toward other gods comes from inside Israel itself. Moses names three cases. The first is a prophet or dreamer who gives a sign that comes true and then says, "Let us

walk after other gods." The second is someone close to you, a brother, a child, a wife or a best friend, who whispers the same thing in secret. The third is a whole town that turns to other gods. In each case the answer is the same: do not listen, and purge the evil from Israel.

This is a hard chapter. It commands the death penalty for those who led Israel into idolatry, and it does not spare family. We need to read it in its setting. Israel was a nation under God's direct rule, and turning to other gods was treason against their King. We will look at why God took it so seriously, at the care for justice built into the law, and at how the New Testament handles false teaching in the church today. The deeper lesson is clear: no sign, no wonder, and no one we love may come before the LORD.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1-2 *If a prophet or a dreamer of a dream arises in your midst, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign and the wonder of which he spoke to you comes* ***to pass****, saying, 'Let us walk after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us be made to serve them,'*

"If a prophet or a dreamer of a dream arises in your midst." A prophet speaks for God. A dreamer claims to receive messages from God in dreams. God did speak to His prophets in dreams and visions (Numbers 12:6), so a dreamer could look very convincing.

This one even "gives you a sign or a wonder," and it "comes to pass." What then? If his message is "Let us walk after other gods," the sign does not matter. This is very important. A miracle does not prove that a message is from God. Pharaoh's magicians copied some of the plagues (Exodus 7:11, 22). Jesus warned that "false christs and false prophets will rise up, and they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24). Paul says the coming lawless one will come with false signs and wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9). The test of a prophet is not first what he can do, but what he says about God.

13:3 *you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of the dream, for the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you are loving the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

"You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of the dream, for the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you are loving the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

Why would God allow a false prophet's sign to come true? Moses says God was testing Israel. God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13). But He does allow tests that show what is really in our hearts. Would Israel follow the LORD, or follow whoever had the most impressive show?

Notice the words "with all your heart and with all your soul." This is the Shema of 6:5. The test was a test of love. The person who truly loves God will not leave Him for someone with a wonder in his hand. Paul says the same: even if "an angel out of heaven, should preach the gospel to you contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

13:4 *After the LORD your God you shall walk, and Him you shall fear, and His commandments you shall keep, and to His voice you shall listen, and Him you shall serve, and to Him you shall cling.*

"After the LORD your God you shall walk, and Him you shall fear, and His commandments you shall keep, and to His voice you shall listen, and Him you shall serve, and to Him you shall cling."

Six verbs, and in the Hebrew the object, the LORD, comes first in each line, putting the stress on Him. Not after other gods, but after the LORD. Not to the prophet's voice, but to His voice. To cling is the same word used of a man holding fast to his wife (Genesis 2:24). This is the answer to every false prophet. The best protection against error is not studying every false teaching. It is knowing and loving the true God so well that a counterfeit is easy to spot.

13:5 *And that prophet or that dreamer of the dream shall be put to death, for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt and ransomed you from the house of slaves, to thrust you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. And you shall purge the evil from your midst.*

"And that prophet or that dreamer of the dream shall be put to death, for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt."

This is the first death penalty in the law code. The crime is "rebellion," trying "to thrust you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk." Israel was a nation ruled by God Himself. He had redeemed them from slavery and made a covenant with them. To lead them to other gods was like leading a revolt against the king. And these gods were not harmless. Chapter 12 has just said they demanded the burning of children (12:31).

"And you shall purge the evil from your midst." This phrase comes again and again in Deuteronomy. Evil was like a sickness that would spread through the whole nation unless it was removed.

13:6-8 *If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife of your bosom or your friend who **is** as your own soul, entices you in secret, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, you and your fathers, of the gods of the peoples who **are** around you, those near to you or those far from you, from the end of the earth and to the end of the earth, you shall not consent to him, and you shall not listen to him, and your eye shall not pity him, and you shall not spare **him**, and you shall not cover over him.*

The second case is harder. The tempter is "your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife of your bosom or your friend who is as your own soul." These are the people closest to us. And he comes "in secret," with no sign and no crowd, only the quiet pull of love and trust: "Let us go and serve other gods."

"You shall not consent to him, and you shall not listen to him, and your eye shall not pity him, and you shall not spare him, and you shall not cover over him." To cover over means to hide it or keep it quiet. Love for family could not outweigh loyalty to God.

Jesus said something like this. "The one who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). Often the strongest pull away from God does not come from strangers. It comes from those we love most. This does not mean we stop loving them. It means God comes first.

13:9-11 *But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be on him first to put him to death, and the hand of all the people last. And you shall stone him with stones, and he shall die, for he sought to thrust you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves. And all Israel shall hear and fear, and they shall not again do like this evil thing in your midst.*

"But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be on him first to put him to death, and the hand of all the people last." The one he tried to lead astray was to be the first witness and the first to throw a stone. That was a guard against false charges. No one could accuse a family member from a distance and let others carry it out. Other passages add that there had to be at least two or three witnesses (17:6; 19:15), and the matter had to be looked into with care (13:14; 17:4).

"And all Israel shall hear and fear, and they shall not again do like this evil thing." The penalty was meant to protect the whole nation.

How should we read this today? I want to be plain. This law was given to Israel under the Mosaic covenant, when God ruled the nation directly. The church is not a nation, and it does not carry the sword. When Paul dealt with sin in the church, he quoted this very phrase from Deuteronomy, "you will remove the evil man from among yourselves" (1 Corinthians 5:13), but he meant putting the person out of the fellowship, not putting him to death. And his goal was that the person would repent and be restored (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). No Christian has any right to harm another person because of what they believe. Jesus told Peter to put away his sword (Matthew 26:52). What has not changed is how seriously God takes leading people away from Him. Jesus said it would be better for such a person to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck (Matthew 18:6).

13:12-14 *If you hear in one of your cities which the LORD your God is giving to you to dwell there, saying, 'Men, sons of worthlessness, have gone out from your midst, and they have thrust away the inhabitants of their city, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods,"' which you have not known, then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly; and look, **it is** truth, the thing **is** certain, this abomination has been done in your midst,*

The third case is a whole town. "Men, sons of worthlessness, have gone out from your midst, and they have thrust away the inhabitants of their city." Sons of worthlessness is a Hebrew way of saying wicked, good-for-nothing men. Later the word worthlessness, belial, became a name for Satan (2 Corinthians 6:15).

Before anything was done, there had to be a careful trial. "You shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly." Three verbs, all meaning look hard. Only if "it is truth, the thing is certain" could they act. Rumor was not enough. God's justice never acts on gossip. That is a good word for us, too. How quickly do we believe a bad report about someone without checking it?

13:15-16 *you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the mouth of the sword, devoting it to destruction and all that **is** in it, and its livestock, with the mouth of the sword. And all its plunder you shall gather into the midst of its open square, and you shall burn with fire the city and all its plunder, a whole offering to the LORD your God; and it shall be a heap forever; it shall not be built again.*

If it was true, the town was to be treated like a city of Canaan. "You shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the mouth of the sword, devoting it to destruction." This is the same word, herem, that we met in 2:34 and 7:2. The town and all its plunder were to be burned as "a whole offering to the LORD your God." It was never to be built again.

This is very hard to read. But it shows something important about the ban in Deuteronomy. It was never about race. God would judge an Israelite town by the same standard as the Canaanites if it turned to the same gods. He has no favorites when it comes to sin. Israel could not say, We are God's people, so idolatry is fine for us.

The book of Judges tells of a time when Israel went to war against one of its own tribes for a terrible sin (Judges 20). And in the end God did to Israel as a nation what He warned here. Because they served other gods, He sent them into exile, and Jerusalem itself was burned (2 Kings 25:9).

13:17-18 *And nothing of the devoted thing shall cling to your hand, so that the LORD may turn from the burning of His anger, and give you compassion, and have compassion on you, and multiply you, just as He swore to your fathers, when you listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep all His commandments which I am commanding you today, to do what **is** right in the eyes of the LORD your God.*

"And nothing of the devoted thing shall cling to your hand." No one was to profit from the judgment. It was not a raid for plunder. It was God's justice. This is what Achan forgot at Jericho (Joshua 7).

Then the tone changes. If Israel obeyed, God would "turn from the burning of His anger, and give you compassion, and have compassion on you, and multiply you." The goal of judgment was mercy for the nation. God wanted to bless them, as He had promised their fathers.

All of this hangs on one condition: "when you listen to the voice of the LORD your God." The whole chapter comes back to listening. Do not listen to the prophet, do not listen to the friend, listen to the LORD. God the Father said the same of His Son on the mountain: "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased; listen to Him" (Matthew 17:5). In a world full of voices, that is still our safety.

Chapter 13 Summary

Moses warns Israel about three ways they could be pulled toward other gods. If a prophet or dreamer gives a sign that comes true and then calls them to serve other gods, they must not listen, because God is testing whether they love Him with all their heart. They must walk after the LORD,

fear Him, keep His commands, listen to His voice, serve Him and cling to Him, and the false prophet must be put to death for rebellion. If a brother, child, wife or close friend tempts them in secret, they must not hide it or spare the one who did it. If a whole town turns to other gods, after careful inquiry it must be devoted to destruction like the cities of Canaan, and none of its plunder kept. These were laws for Israel under God's direct rule, where leading people to idols was treason. In the church today false teaching is answered with discipline, not the sword, but the lesson stands: no sign, no wonder, and no person we love may come before the LORD.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. What should Israel do if a prophet gives a sign that comes true and then tells them to follow other gods? (13:1-3)

2. Why did God allow such a test, according to verse 3?

3. List the six things Israel was to do toward the LORD in verse 4. Which one stands out to you?

4. What people close to us are named in verse 6, and why might their pull be harder to resist?

5. What steps did Israel have to take before acting against a town that turned to idols? (13:14)

6. How does verse 15 show that the ban (herem) was about sin, not race?

7. How did Paul use the phrase "purge the evil from your midst" in the church, and how was that different from this chapter? (13:5; 1 Corinthians 5:13; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8)

8. Why is a miracle not enough to prove a message comes from God? (13:1-3; Matthew 24:24)

9. Is there anyone you love whose voice pulls you away from the LORD? How can you love them and still put God first? (13:6; Matthew 10:37)

10. How well do you know God's Word? What would help you spot a false teaching more quickly? (13:4; 1 John 4:1)

Chapter 14: Clean Food and the Tithe

Scripture

14:1-21 You ***are*** sons of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves, and you shall not make baldness between your eyes for the dead. For you ***are*** a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be for Him a people of treasured possession out of all the peoples who ***are*** on the face of the ground. You shall not eat any abomination. This ***is*** the animal which you may eat: ox, lamb of ***the*** sheep, and kid of ***the*** goats, deer and gazelle and roe-deer and wild goat and ibex and antelope and mountain sheep. And every animal that divides a hoof and cleaves a cleft of two hooves, bringing up cud, among the animals, it you may eat. Nevertheless, these you shall not eat, of those that bring up the cud and of those that divide the cloven hoof: the camel and the hare and the rock badger, for they bring up cud, and a hoof they do not divide; they ***are*** unclean to you. And the pig, for it divides a hoof, and ***brings up*** no cud; it ***is*** unclean to you. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcass you shall not touch. This you may eat of all that ***is*** in the water: all that has fin and scale you may eat. And all that does not have fin and scale you shall not eat; it ***is*** unclean to you. Every clean bird you may eat. And these ***are those*** of which you shall not eat: the eagle and the bearded vulture and the osprey, and the red kite and the hawk and the black kite according to its kind, and every raven according to its kind, and the ostrich and the screech owl and the gull and the falcon according to its kind, the little owl and the great owl and the barn owl, and the desert owl and the Egyptian vulture and the cormorant, and the stork and the heron according to its kind, and the hoopoe and the bat. And every swarming thing of the flying things ***is*** unclean to you; they shall not be eaten. Every clean flying thing you may eat. You shall not eat any carcass; to the sojourner who ***is*** in your gates you may give it, and he may eat it, or ***you may*** sell ***it*** to a foreigner; for you ***are*** a holy people to the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in the milk of its mother.

14:22-29 You shall surely tithe all the produce of your seed which comes out of the field year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place which He will choose to make His name dwell there, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, and your fresh oil, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God all the days. And if the way is too great for you, so that you are not able to carry it, because the place which the LORD your God will choose to put His name there is too far from you, when the LORD your God blesses you, then you shall give ***it*** for money, and bind up the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God will choose. And you shall give the money for all that your soul desires, for cattle and for sheep and for wine and for strong drink and for all that your soul asks of you; and you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. And the Levite who ***is*** in your gates, you shall not forsake him, for he has no portion and inheritance with you. At the end of three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and you shall deposit ***it*** in your gates. And the Levite shall come, because he has no portion and inheritance with you, and the sojourner and the fatherless and the widow who ***are*** in your gates, and they shall eat and be satisfied, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

Chapter 14 Preview

This chapter covers two things that touched Israel every day: what they ate, and what they did with their harvest. It begins by reminding Israel who they are, "sons of the LORD your God" and "a holy people." Because of that, they were not to mourn the dead the way the pagans did, cutting themselves and shaving their heads. And they were to eat only what God called clean. Moses lists the animals, fish and birds Israel could and could not eat, much as Leviticus 11 does.

The second half is about the tithe, a tenth of the yearly harvest. Israel was to bring it to the place God would choose and eat it there with joy before the LORD. Every third year the tithe was to stay in their towns to feed the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan and the widow. As we read, we will ask why God gave food laws to Israel, and why Jesus later made all foods clean (Mark 7:19). We will also see that God's people have always been called to be different, and to be generous.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1-2 *You **are** sons of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves, and you shall not make baldness between your eyes for the dead. For you **are** a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be for Him a people of treasured possession out of all the peoples who **are** on the face of the ground.*

"You are sons of the LORD your God." This is a remarkable thing to say. Israel was God's family. God had called Israel "My son, My firstborn" when He sent Moses to Pharaoh (Exodus 4:22).

Because they were His sons, "you shall not cut yourselves, and you shall not make baldness between your eyes for the dead." Cutting the skin and shaving the front of the head were ways pagans mourned the dead, and they were often tied to the worship of their gods. The prophets of Baal cut themselves on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:28). Leviticus 19:28 gives the same command.

Israel was not to grieve that way. Why? "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God." The children of the living God do not mourn like those who have no hope. Paul says the same thing to believers who have lost loved ones: we grieve, but not "just as also the rest who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Grief is real and right. But our grief is different because we know the One who holds life and death.

14:3 *You shall not eat any abomination.*

"You shall not eat any abomination." This short verse is the heading for the food laws that follow. The word abomination here means something God's people were to treat as off limits and disgusting. It did not mean the animal itself was evil. God made every creature and called it good (Genesis 1:31). It meant that for Israel, under this covenant, it was not food.

14:4-8 *This **is** the animal which you may eat: ox, lamb of **the** sheep, and kid of **the** goats, deer and gazelle and roe-deer and wild goat and ibex and antelope and mountain sheep. And every animal that divides a hoof and cleaves a cleft of two hooves, bringing up cud, among the animals, it you may eat. Nevertheless, these you shall not eat, of those that bring up the cud and of those that divide the cloven hoof: the camel and the hare and the rock badger, for they bring up cud, and a hoof they do not divide; they **are** unclean to you. And the pig, for it divides a hoof, and **brings up** no cud; it **is** unclean to you. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcass you shall not touch.*

First the land animals. Israel could eat the ox, sheep and goat, and wild game such as the deer and gazelle. Some of these names are hard to identify today, and translations differ on a few of them.

The rule is this: "every animal that divides a hoof and cleaves a cleft of two hooves, bringing up cud." To bring up the cud means to chew food a second time, as cows and sheep do. An animal had to have both marks. So the camel, the hare and the rock badger were out, because they chew the cud (or seem to) but do not have split hooves. The pig was out because it has a split hoof but does not chew the cud. "Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcass you shall not touch."

Why these animals? Scripture does not give us the full reason. Some have pointed to health, since some unclean animals carry disease more easily. Others note that some of them, like the pig, were used in pagan rites. But the main reason the text gives is in verse 2: "you are a holy people." The food laws marked Israel as different every time they sat down to eat. Every meal reminded them that they belonged to God.

14:9-10 *This you may eat of all that **is** in the water: all that has fin and scale you may eat. And all that does not have fin and scale you shall not eat; it **is** unclean to you.*

Next the creatures of the water. "All that has fin and scale you may eat." Fish like trout or bass were clean. Creatures without both, such as shellfish, eels and catfish, were unclean.

The point is the same. God drew lines, and Israel lived inside them. Holiness reached into the kitchen.

14:11-20 *Every clean bird you may eat. And these **are those** of which you shall not eat: the eagle and the bearded vulture and the osprey, and the red kite and the hawk and the black kite according to its kind, and every raven according to its kind, and the ostrich and the screech owl and the gull and the falcon according to its kind, the little owl and the great owl and the barn owl, and the desert owl and the Egyptian vulture and the cormorant, and the stork and the heron according to its kind, and the hoopoe and the bat. And every swarming thing of the flying things **is** unclean to you; they shall not be eaten. Every clean flying thing you may eat.*

Then the birds. Moses does not give a rule for birds. He gives a list of the unclean ones: the eagle, the vultures, the hawks, the ravens, the owls, the stork, the heron, the hoopoe and the bat. The exact names of some of these birds are not certain, and translations differ. But notice what most of them have in common. Many are birds of prey or birds that eat dead things. They live on blood and death. That fits the blood law of 12:23.

"Every swarming thing of the flying things is unclean to you." This means flying insects, though Leviticus 11:21-22 allows locusts and grasshoppers. "Every clean flying thing you may eat." So chickens, doves, quail and other common birds were fine.

This list is long, and it is there for a reason. It gave Israel a clear guide they could follow. God does not leave His people guessing about what He asks of them.

14:21 *You shall not eat any carcass; to the sojourner who **is** in your gates you may give it, and he may eat it, or **you may** sell **it** to a foreigner; for you **are** a holy people to the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in the milk of its mother.*

"You shall not eat any carcass." A carcass here means an animal that died on its own, not one that was killed and drained of its blood. The blood was still in it. An Israelite could give it "to the sojourner who is in your gates," or sell it "to a foreigner." A sojourner was a foreigner living in Israel. The food laws were for Israel as God's holy people. They were not for the whole world.

"You shall not boil a young goat in the milk of its mother." This command is also in Exodus 23:19 and 34:26. Why? Scripture does not say. Some think it was a pagan practice in Canaan. Others think it teaches tenderness, that the milk which gave the young goat life should not be used to cook it. Either way, God was teaching His people to be different. Later Jewish tradition built the rule of never eating meat and milk together on this verse.

How do these food laws apply to us today? Jesus Himself answered that. He said, "Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man" (Matthew 15:11). Mark explains what Jesus meant. Food goes "into the belly, and goes out into the latrine, cleansing all the foods" (Mark 7:19). In other words, Jesus declared all foods clean.

Then in Acts 10, Peter saw a sheet let down from heaven, full of animals clean and unclean. A voice said, "Having risen up, Peter, kill and eat." Peter refused: "I have never eaten anything common or unclean." The voice answered, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common" (Acts 10:13-15). The vision was about more than food. It taught Peter that God was now welcoming Gentiles, who had been seen as unclean, into His people through faith in Christ (Acts 10:28, 34-35). The food laws had kept Israel separate. In Christ, the wall between Jew and Gentile was broken down (Ephesians 2:14).

Paul says the food laws were "a shadow of the things coming, but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17). They pointed ahead to the holiness God wanted in His people. Now that Christ has come, the shadow has given way to the real thing. "Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, being received with thanksgiving" (1 Timothy 4:4).

So what does this chapter teach us now? That God's people are to be holy, set apart, in every part of life, even at the dinner table. Paul says, "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Our holiness is no longer marked by what we eat. It is marked by how we live, love and speak.

14:22-23 *You shall surely tithe all the produce of your seed which comes out of the field year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place which He will choose to make His name dwell there, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, and your fresh oil, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God all the days.*

Now the tithe. "You shall surely tithe all the produce of your seed which comes out of the field year by year." A tithe is a tenth. Every year, a tenth of the harvest belonged to God.

"And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place which He will choose." This tithe was not burned or simply handed over. The family ate it at the sanctuary in a feast before the LORD, along with the firstborn of the flocks. What was the purpose? "So that you may learn to fear the LORD your God all the days." Giving back to God teaches us that everything comes from Him. When we give the first and best, we learn to trust Him for the rest.

14:24-27 *And if the way is too great for you, so that you are not able to carry it, because the place which the LORD your God will choose to put His name there is too far from you, when the LORD your God blesses you, then you shall give **it** for money, and bind up the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God will choose. And you shall give the money for all that your soul desires, for cattle and for sheep and for wine and for strong drink and for all that your soul asks of you; and you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. And the Levite who **is** in your gates, you shall not forsake him, for he has no portion and inheritance with you.*

God made room for distance again. If the chosen place was too far to carry all that produce, they could sell it, "bind up the money in your hand," and buy food at the sanctuary: "cattle and for sheep and for wine and for strong drink and for all that your soul asks of you." Then "you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household."

Notice how joyful this is. God's people were to feast before Him. Strong drink here means fermented drink like beer. Scripture warns again and again against drunkenness (Proverbs 20:1; Ephesians 5:18). But this verse shows that the feast was a real celebration, not a grim duty.

"And the Levite who is in your gates, you shall not forsake him." The third reminder in three chapters. God's people were never to rejoice in a way that forgot those in need.

14:28-29 *At the end of three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and you shall deposit **it** in your gates. And the Levite shall come, because he has no portion and inheritance with you, and the sojourner and the fatherless and the widow who **are** in your gates, and they shall eat and be satisfied, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.*

"At the end of three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and you shall deposit it in your gates." Every third year the tithe was stored in the towns instead of being taken to the sanctuary. Then the Levite, "and the sojourner and the fatherless and the widow," could come and "eat and be satisfied."

This was a welfare system built into worship. The poor did not have to beg. God had made provision for them, and His people were the means of it. God promises a blessing for this: "so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand."

James says that pure religion is "to visit orphans and widows in their tribulation" (James 1:27). This has always been God's heart. The New Testament does not command believers to tithe in the same way Israel did. But it does call us to give generously, cheerfully, and with the needy in mind (2 Corinthians 9:7; Galatians 2:10). "God loves a cheerful giver."

Chapter 14 Summary

Israel was God's family and His holy people, so they were not to mourn the dead with the cutting and shaving of the pagans. They were not to eat what God called unclean. Land animals had to have split hooves and chew the cud; water creatures had to have fins and scales; birds of prey and those that eat dead things were unclean, and so were most flying insects. They were not to eat an animal that died on its own or boil a young goat in its mother's milk. These food laws marked Israel as set apart at every meal. Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19), and Peter's vision in Acts 10 showed that the wall between Jew and Gentile had come down in Christ; the food laws were a shadow, and the reality is Christ. Every year Israel was to tithe a tenth of the harvest and eat it with joy at the place God would choose, selling it and buying food there if the way was far. Every third year the tithe was to be stored in the towns to feed the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan and the widow. God's people are still called to be holy and generous.

When I lose someone I love, I pray that we will be together with God in heaven. That hope brings me peace. Grief is real, but for believers it is not the end of the story (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. What does Moses call Israel in verses 1 and 2, and how was this to change the way they mourned?

2. What two marks did a land animal need to be clean? (14:6)

3. Which creatures of the water could Israel eat? (14:9-10)

4. What do many of the unclean birds have in common, and how does this connect to the blood law? (14:12-18; 12:23)

5. What reason does the text itself give for the food laws? (14:2, 21)

6. How did Jesus and Peter's vision show that the food laws were fulfilled in Christ? (Mark 7:18-19; Acts 10:13-15)

7. What was the purpose of eating the tithe before the LORD? (14:23)

8. Who was fed by the third-year tithe, and what does this teach about God's heart? (14:28-29)

9. How do you grieve the loss of someone you love? How does hope in Christ change it? (14:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:13)

10. Is your giving joyful, or does it feel like a duty? What would help you give with joy and with the needy in mind? (14:26, 29; 2 Corinthians 9:7)

Chapter 15: The Year of Release

Scripture

15:1-11 At the end of seven years you shall make a release. And this ***is*** the manner of the release: every owner of a loan of his hand shall release what he lends to his neighbor; he shall not press his neighbor and his brother, for ***one*** has proclaimed a release to the LORD. The foreigner you may press, and what is yours with your brother, let your hand release. Nevertheless, there shall be no needy one among you, for the LORD will surely bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving to you ***as*** an inheritance to take possession of it, if only you surely listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to be careful to do all this commandment which I am commanding you today. For the LORD your God has blessed you just as He spoke to you, and you shall lend to many nations, and you, you shall not borrow; and you shall rule over many nations, and over you they shall not rule. If there is among you a needy one, one of your brothers, in one of your gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving to you, you shall not harden your heart, and you shall not shut your hand from your needy brother. But you shall surely open your hand to him, and you shall surely lend him sufficient for his lack which he lacks. Take heed to yourself, lest there be a word ***of*** worthlessness in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, has drawn near,' and your eye be evil against your needy brother, and you do not give to him, and he call out against you to the LORD, and it be sin on you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, for on account of this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in every undertaking of your hand. For the needy will not cease from the midst of the land; therefore I am commanding you, saying, 'You shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor, and to your needy in your land.'

15:12-23 If your brother, the Hebrew ***man*** or the Hebrew ***woman***, is sold to you, and he serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall send him away free from you. And when you send him away free from you, you shall not send him away empty. You shall surely furnish him from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your winepress; ***from*** that with which the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God ransomed you; therefore I am commanding you this thing today. And it shall be, if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, because it is good for him with you, then you shall take the awl and put ***it*** into his ear and into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. And also to your female slave you shall do so. It shall not be hard in your eyes when you send him away free from you, for ***at*** double the hire of a hired worker he has served you six years; and the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do. Every firstborn that is born in your herd and in your flock, the male, you shall sanctify to the LORD your God; you shall not work with the firstborn of your ox, and you shall not shear the firstborn of your flock. Before the LORD your God you shall eat it year by year in the place which the LORD will choose, you and your household. And if there is a blemish in it, lame or blind, any evil blemish, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God. In your gates you may eat it, the unclean and the clean alike, like the gazelle and like the deer. Only its blood you shall not eat; on the earth you shall pour it out like water.

Chapter 15 Preview

Chapter 14 ended with the third-year tithe for the poor. Chapter 15 goes further. Every seventh year Israel was to hold a "year of release." Loans between Israelites were to be released, and God warns His people not to shut their hand to a poor brother just because that year was close. Then Moses turns to Hebrew servants. A man or woman who had sold themselves into service because of debt was to go free in the seventh year of service, and not empty-handed. If a servant chose to stay for love of his master, his ear was pierced at the door as a sign that he would serve for life.

The chapter ends with the firstborn of the herds and flocks, which belonged to the LORD. Through all of it runs one reason: "you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God ransomed you." Israel was to treat the poor the way God had treated them. These laws touch on debt and servanthood, which can be hard to read, and we will look at what they were and what they were not. But their heart is generosity, and that has not changed.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1-2 *At the end of seven years you shall make a release. And this **is** the manner of the release: every owner of a loan of his hand shall release what he lends to his neighbor; he shall not press his neighbor and his brother, for **one** has proclaimed a release to the LORD.*

"At the end of seven years you shall make a release." The word release means to let go, to drop. Every seventh year was already a Sabbath year for the land, when the fields were to rest (Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:1-7). Now Deuteronomy adds a release for debts.

"Every owner of a loan of his hand shall release what he lends to his neighbor; he shall not press his neighbor and his brother." Loans in Israel were not business loans. They were help for a neighbor who had fallen on hard times, after a bad harvest or a sickness. The lender was not to press the borrower for payment in the seventh year, "for one has proclaimed a release to the LORD." This was the LORD's release, not just a bank policy.

Bible teachers differ on whether the debt was cancelled for good or only put on hold for that year, when no crops were sown and no one could pay. Either way, it gave the poor a fresh start and kept them from sinking under debt forever.

15:3 *The foreigner you may press, and what is yours with your brother, let your hand release.*

"The foreigner you may press." A foreigner here is not the sojourner who lived among Israel as a poor guest. It is an outsider, usually a trader, who came for business. He was not part of the covenant community and was not under its Sabbath year. Business loans to traders were a different thing from help to a poor neighbor. The release was a family law for God's people.

15:4-6 *Nevertheless, there shall be no needy one among you, for the LORD will surely bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving to you **as** an inheritance to take possession of it, if only you surely listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to be careful to do all this commandment which I am commanding you today. For the LORD your God has blessed you just as He spoke to you, and you shall lend to many nations, and you, you shall not borrow; and you shall rule over many nations, and over you they shall not rule.*

"Nevertheless, there shall be no needy one among you, for the LORD will surely bless you in the land." This was God's goal. If Israel obeyed, He would bless the land so richly that poverty would disappear. "You shall lend to many nations, and you, you shall not borrow."

But it hangs on a condition: "if only you surely listen to the voice of the LORD your God." Israel's history shows they did not. Still, this verse shows us God's heart. He does not want His people to be poor and forgotten. In the early church, when the Spirit came, we read something very much like this verse: "neither was anyone needy among them," because believers shared what they had (Acts 4:34).

15:7-8 *If there is among you a needy one, one of your brothers, in one of your gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving to you, you shall not harden your heart, and you shall not shut your hand from your needy brother. But you shall surely open your hand to him, and you shall surely lend him sufficient for his lack which he lacks.*

"If there is among you a needy one, one of your brothers," then "you shall not harden your heart, and you shall not shut your hand from your needy brother." Verse 4 said what God wanted. Verse 7 says what to do when it does not happen. There will be needy people. When we meet them, God speaks to our heart first, and then to our hand. A hard heart leads to a closed hand.

"But you shall surely open your hand to him, and you shall surely lend him sufficient for his lack." Not a token. Enough for what he lacks. John asks, "whoever has the goods of the world and sees his brother having need and shuts his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17).

15:9-10 *Take heed to yourself, lest there be a word **of** worthlessness in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, has drawn near,' and your eye be evil against your needy brother, and you do not give to him, and he call out against you to the LORD, and it be sin on you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, for on account of this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in every undertaking of your hand.*

God saw the trick coming. Someone might think, "The seventh year, the year of release, has drawn near," and refuse to lend because he would not get his money back. God calls that "a word of worthlessness in your heart." He says such a person's "eye be evil against your needy brother." An evil eye in Hebrew is a stingy, grudging eye.

"And he call out against you to the LORD, and it be sin on you." The poor man has a court of appeal. God hears him.

"You shall surely give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him." God cares about how we give, not only what we give. Paul says the same: not "out of grief or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). And God promises, "the LORD your God will bless you in all your work." We cannot outgive God.

15:11 *For the needy will not cease from the midst of the land; therefore I am commanding you, saying, 'You shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor, and to your needy in your land.'*

"For the needy will not cease from the midst of the land." This might seem to clash with verse 4. It does not. Verse 4 told what would happen if Israel fully obeyed. Verse 11 is honest about what will really happen in a fallen world. Both are true. So the command follows: "You shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor, and to your needy in your land."

Jesus quoted this verse when a woman poured costly perfume on Him: "you always have the poor with you, but Me you do not always have" (Matthew 26:11). He was not saying the poor do not matter. Anyone who knew this verse would hear the rest of it: so open your hand to them. Jesus was saying that this moment, before His death, was special, and that caring for the poor would go on every day after.

15:12-14 *If your brother, the Hebrew **man** or the Hebrew **woman**, is sold to you, and he serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall send him away free from you. And when you send him away free from you, you shall not send him away empty. You shall surely furnish him from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your winepress; **from** that with which the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him.*

Now Moses turns to a different kind of release. "If your brother, the Hebrew man or the Hebrew woman, is sold to you, and he serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall send him away free."

We need to understand what this was. This was not the slavery of the American South, where people were kidnapped, owned for life because of their race, and treated as property. In Israel a person usually sold himself, or was sold by his family, to pay a debt he could not pay (Leviticus 25:39). He was more like a bonded worker. He worked off his debt for up to six years, and then he went free. The Law also made kidnapping a person to sell him a crime punished by death (Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7). The same act that built the Atlantic slave trade was a capital crime in Israel's Law.

Notice too that this law covers women as well as men. A Hebrew woman was to go free the same as a man.

And she or he was not to go out with nothing. "When you send him away free from you, you shall not send him away empty." The master was to "furnish him from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your winepress." The word furnish pictures putting a necklace on someone, loading him with gifts. A freed servant was to have what he needed to start again.

15:15 *And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God ransomed you; therefore I am commanding you this thing today.*

Why? "And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God ransomed you." When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He did not send them out empty. They left with silver and gold from the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36). Israel was to do for others what God had done for them.

This is how grace works. We do not treat others well to earn God's favor. We treat them well because we have received His favor. Jesus said, "freely you received; freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

15:16-17 *And it shall be, if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, because it is good for him with you, then you shall take the awl and put **it** into his ear and into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. And also to your female slave you shall do so.*

Some servants would not want to leave. A servant might say, "I will not go out from you," and Moses gives the reason: "because he loves you and your household, because it is good for him with you." This tells us something. In a godly household, service under this Law could be good enough that a servant chose to stay.

"Then you shall take the awl and put it into his ear and into the door, and he shall be your slave forever." An awl is a sharp tool for making holes in leather. The ear was pierced against the door of the house as a mark that he now belonged to that household for life (Exodus 21:6). The ear was a fitting place: it is how we hear and obey.

Paul called himself "a slave of Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:1). Many Christians have seen in this law a picture of how we serve our Master, not because we must, but because we love Him and it is good to be with Him. Jesus Himself took "the form of a slave" for us (Philippians 2:7).

15:18 *It shall not be hard in your eyes when you send him away free from you, for **at** double the hire of a hired worker he has served you six years; and the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.*

"It shall not be hard in your eyes when you send him away free from you, for at double the hire of a hired worker he has served you six years." The master had gotten a good deal. A servant's work was worth twice what a hired man would cost, because he worked for food and shelter rather than wages. So letting him go was only fair. God knew it would still feel like a loss. So He adds a promise: "the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do."

15:19-20 *Every firstborn that is born in your herd and in your flock, the male, you shall sanctify to the LORD your God; you shall not work with the firstborn of your ox, and you shall not shear the firstborn of your flock. Before the LORD your God you shall eat it year by year in the place which the LORD will choose, you and your household.*

"Every firstborn that is born in your herd and in your flock, the male, you shall sanctify to the LORD your God." To sanctify means to set apart as holy. The firstborn belonged to God, because

God spared Israel's firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 13:2, 15). They were not to work the firstborn ox or shear the firstborn sheep. It was God's, not theirs to use.

"Before the LORD your God you shall eat it year by year in the place which the LORD will choose, you and your household." The firstborn was eaten as a family feast at the sanctuary. Again, giving to God and joy before God go together.

Christ is called "the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29), and Israel's firstborn were spared by the blood of the Passover lamb. Everything about the firstborn reminded Israel that they had been bought by God.

15:21-23 *And if there is a blemish in it, lame or blind, any evil blemish, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God. In your gates you may eat it, the unclean and the clean alike, like the gazelle and like the deer. Only its blood you shall not eat; on the earth you shall pour it out like water.*

"And if there is a blemish in it, lame or blind, any evil blemish, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God." God was not to be given the leftovers. Malachi later rebuked Israel for bringing blind and lame animals to the altar (Malachi 1:8). A firstborn with a defect could be eaten at home, "the unclean and the clean alike," like any game. "Only its blood you shall not eat."

This also points ahead. Only a perfect sacrifice was fit for God, and Christ was offered "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). What we give God should be our best, because He gave His best for us.

Chapter 15 Summary

Every seventh year Israel was to hold a release, when loans to fellow Israelites were let go. Business with foreigners was not included. God's goal was that there be no poor among them, and He promised to bless them if they obeyed, but He knew the poor would always be in the land. So He commanded them to open their hand, to lend enough to meet the need, and not to refuse because the year of release was near, and to give without a grudging heart. A Hebrew man or woman sold into service because of debt was to serve no more than six years and go free in the seventh, loaded with gifts from the flock, the threshing floor and the winepress, because the LORD had ransomed Israel from slavery in Egypt. This was debt service with limits, not the race-based slavery of later centuries. A servant who chose to stay out of love had his ear pierced at the door and served for life. The firstborn males of the herd and flock were holy to the LORD and eaten at the sanctuary, unless they had a blemish. The chapter calls us to an open hand and a glad heart, because God has been generous to us in Christ.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. What was to happen every seventh year, and what does the word release mean? (15:1-2)

2. What did God want to be true in Israel, and what condition did He attach to it? (15:4-5)

3. What wrong thought did God warn against in verse 9, and why was it sin?

4. How do verses 4 and 11 fit together?

5. How long did a Hebrew servant serve, and how was he to be sent away? (15:12-14)

6. What reason did God give for treating freed servants generously? (15:15)

7. How was service under this Law different from the race-based slavery of later history? (15:12; Leviticus 25:39; Exodus 21:16)

8. What did the pierced ear mean, and how can it picture our service to Christ? (15:16-17)

9. Is there a needy person God has put in front of you? Is your hand open or shut? (15:7-8; 1 John 3:17)

10. Do you give God your best, or your leftovers? What would giving your best look like this week? (15:21; Malachi 1:8)

Chapter 16: Passover, Weeks and Booths

Scripture

16:1-8 Keep the month of Abib, and you shall observe a Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out from Egypt by night. And you shall sacrifice a Passover to the LORD your God, ***from the*** flock and ***the*** herd, in the place which the LORD will choose to make His name dwell there. You shall not eat leavened ***bread*** with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, bread of affliction, for in haste you came out from the land of Egypt, so that you may remember the day of your coming out from the land of Egypt all the days of your life. And leaven shall not be seen with you in all your territory seven days; and none of the flesh which you sacrifice in the evening on the first day shall remain overnight until the morning. You are not able to sacrifice the Passover in any one of your gates which the LORD your God is giving to you, but at the place which the LORD your God will choose to make His name dwell there, ***there*** you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening, at the going in of the sun, the appointed time of your coming out from Egypt. And you shall cook ***it*** and eat ***it*** in the place which the LORD your God will choose; and you shall turn in the morning and go to your tents. Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day ***there shall be*** a solemn assembly to the LORD your God; you shall not do work.

16:9-17 Seven weeks you shall count for yourself; from when the sickle begins in the standing grain you shall begin to count seven weeks. And you shall observe the Festival of Weeks to the LORD your God ***with*** the measure of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you. And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your slave and your female slave and the Levite who ***is*** in your gates, and the sojourner and the fatherless and the widow who ***are*** in your midst, in the place which the LORD your God will choose to make His name dwell there. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall keep and do these statutes. The Festival of Booths you shall observe for yourself seven days, when you gather in from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your festival, you and your son and your daughter and your slave and your female slave and the Levite and the sojourner and the fatherless and the widow who ***are*** in your gates. Seven days you shall hold a festival to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD will choose, for the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, and you shall be altogether joyful. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread and at the Festival of Weeks and at the Festival of Booths; and he shall not appear before the LORD empty, ***each*** man according to the gift of his hand, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given to you.

16:18-22 Judges and officers you shall appoint for yourself in all your gates which the LORD your God is giving to you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people ***with*** judgment of righteousness. You shall not turn aside judgment; you shall not show regard to faces; and you shall not take a bribe, for the bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Righteousness, righteousness you shall pursue, so that you may live and take possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving to you. You shall not plant for yourself

an Asherah, any tree, beside the altar of the LORD your God which you shall make for yourself. And you shall not set up for yourself a pillar, which the LORD your God hates.

Chapter 16 Preview

Israel's year was built around three great feasts. Three times a year every man was to go up to the place the LORD would choose and appear before Him. In the spring came the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which looked back to the night God brought Israel out of Egypt. Seven weeks later came the Festival of Weeks at the wheat harvest. In the fall, after the last harvest, came the Festival of Booths, seven days of joy. Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28 and 29 give the full calendar. Deuteronomy gives the heart of it: remember what God has done, rejoice before Him, and bring everyone with you, especially the poor.

The New Testament shows that these feasts point to Christ. "Our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, which is the Festival of Weeks (Acts 2:1). And Jesus stood up at the Festival of Booths and invited the thirsty to come to Him (John 7:37). The chapter ends by turning to the courts. Israel was to appoint judges who would judge fairly, take no bribes and pursue justice. Worship and justice belong together.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1-2 *Keep the month of Abib, and you shall observe a Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out from Egypt by night. And you shall sacrifice a Passover to the LORD your God,* ***from the*** *flock and* ***the*** *herd, in the place which the LORD will choose to make His name dwell there.*

"Keep the month of Abib, and you shall observe a Passover to the LORD your God." Abib means fresh ears of grain. It was the first month of Israel's year, in our March or April. Later it was called Nisan (Esther 3:7).

"For in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out from Egypt by night." Passover remembered the night the LORD passed over the houses marked with the blood of a lamb and struck the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 12). It was the night of Israel's birth as a free people.

"You shall sacrifice a Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place which the LORD will choose." In Egypt the Passover was a lamb or goat killed in each home (Exodus 12:3-7). Now, in the land, it was to be kept at the sanctuary. The "herd" here likely refers to the other sacrifices offered during the seven days of the feast, along with the Passover lamb itself (2 Chronicles 35:7-9).

16:3-4 *You shall not eat leavened **bread** with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, bread of affliction, for in haste you came out from the land of Egypt, so that you may remember the day of your coming out from the land of Egypt all the days of your life. And leaven shall not be seen with you in all your territory seven days; and none of the flesh which you sacrifice in the evening on the first day shall remain overnight until the morning.*

"You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, bread of affliction, for in haste you came out from the land of Egypt." Leaven is yeast, or a bit of old dough that makes new dough rise. Israel left Egypt in such a hurry that their bread had no time to rise (Exodus 12:34, 39). Unleavened bread, flat and plain, was "bread of affliction." Eating it reminded them of slavery and of a sudden rescue.

Why remember? "So that you may remember the day of your coming out from the land of Egypt all the days of your life." The feasts were God's way of keeping His people from forgetting.

In the New Testament, leaven often pictures sin, which spreads through a life the way yeast spreads through dough. Paul writes, "cleanse out the old leaven, so that you may be a new lump, just as you are unleavened. For also our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus died at Passover. He is the Lamb whose blood makes death pass over us. And at the Last Supper, during Passover, He gave His followers a new meal of remembrance: "do this for My remembrance" (Luke 22:19).

16:5-7 *You are not able to sacrifice the Passover in any one of your gates which the LORD your God is giving to you, but at the place which the LORD your God will choose to make His name dwell there, **there** you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening, at the going in of the sun, the appointed time of your coming out from Egypt. And you shall cook **it** and eat **it** in the place which the LORD your God will choose; and you shall turn in the morning and go to your tents.*

"You are not able to sacrifice the Passover in any one of your gates." This is the law of chapter 12 applied to the Passover. It was now to be kept "at the place which the LORD your God will choose," "in the evening, at the going in of the sun, the appointed time of your coming out from Egypt." That is the very hour they had eaten the first Passover.

In the morning they could "go to your tents," meaning to their lodging in or near the city. The rest of the week continued.

It is worth noticing that Jesus kept this law. He went up to Jerusalem for the Passover as a boy (Luke 2:41-42), and He went up to Jerusalem to die at the Passover. He died in the place God had chosen, at the time God had appointed.

16:8 *Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day **there shall be** a solemn assembly to the LORD your God; you shall not do work.*

"Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God; you shall not do work." The feast lasted seven days in all (16:3). A solemn assembly was a holy gathering for worship, a day of rest from ordinary work. Israel's year began with rest and remembering what God had done. That is a good way to start anything.

16:9-10 *Seven weeks you shall count for yourself; from when the sickle begins in the standing grain you shall begin to count seven weeks. And you shall observe the Festival of Weeks to the LORD your God* ***with*** *the measure of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you.*

"Seven weeks you shall count for yourself; from when the sickle begins in the standing grain." The barley harvest began around Passover. Seven weeks later the wheat harvest was gathered. Leviticus says to count fifty days (Leviticus 23:16). That is why the Greek-speaking Jews called it Pentecost, which means fiftieth.

"And you shall observe the Festival of Weeks to the LORD your God with the measure of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you." There was no fixed amount here. Each family gave in proportion to how God had blessed their harvest. Paul gives the same rule to the church: each one should put aside "whatever he may be prospered" (1 Corinthians 16:2).

16:11-12 *And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your slave and your female slave and the Levite who* ***is*** *in your gates, and the sojourner and the fatherless and the widow who* ***are*** *in your midst, in the place which the LORD your God will choose to make His name dwell there. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall keep and do these statutes.*

"And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your slave and your female slave and the Levite who is in your gates, and the sojourner and the fatherless and the widow who are in your midst." Look at that list. Everyone was at the table. The servant, the foreigner, the orphan and the widow rejoiced alongside the landowner. God's feasts had no outsiders.

"And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt." This was the reason to include the servants and the poor. They had all been slaves once. No one in Israel had a right to look down on anyone else.

God fulfilled this feast in a wonderful way. On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit was poured out on His followers in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-4). Three thousand people were saved that day (Acts 2:41), the first great harvest of the gospel. And just like the Feast of Weeks, the gospel invites everyone to the table: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, rich and poor.

16:13-15 *The Festival of Booths you shall observe for yourself seven days, when you gather in from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your festival, you and your son and your daughter and your slave and your female slave and the Levite and the sojourner and the fatherless and the widow who **are** in your gates. Seven days you shall hold a festival to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD will choose, for the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, and you shall be altogether joyful.*

"The Festival of Booths you shall observe for yourself seven days, when you gather in from your threshing floor and from your winepress." This came in the fall, at the end of the harvest, in our September or October. Leviticus says Israel was to live in booths, shelters made of branches, for the seven days, to remember that God made them live in booths when He brought them out of Egypt (Leviticus 23:42-43).

"And you shall rejoice in your festival." Then verse 15: "you shall be altogether joyful." This was the happiest week of Israel's year. The harvest was in. God had provided again. Some call it the feast of thanksgiving.

Jesus went up to Jerusalem at this feast in John 7. On its last and greatest day, He stood and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). The feast reminded Israel how God gave water in the wilderness, and Jesus said He is the true source of living water. John also says that the Word became flesh and "dwelt among us" (John 1:14), and the Greek word he uses means to pitch a tent. God came to live among His people.

The prophets say this feast has a future too. In Christ's kingdom on earth, the nations "will go up from year to year to bow down to the King, the LORD of armies, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths" (Zechariah 14:16). I believe this will be fulfilled when Christ reigns in His thousand-year kingdom.

16:16-17 *Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread and at the Festival of Weeks and at the Festival of Booths; and he shall not appear before the LORD empty, **each** man according to the gift of his hand, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given to you.*

"Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He will choose." The men were to go as heads of their households, and as verses 11 and 14 show, the whole family was welcome. These were the three pilgrimage feasts. Families traveled together, singing on the road. Many think the Psalms of Ascents (Psalms 120 to 134) were sung on these trips up to Jerusalem.

"And he shall not appear before the LORD empty, each man according to the gift of his hand, according to the blessing of the LORD your God." We come to God with gratitude in our hands, not because He needs our gifts, but because we have been given so much.

Colossians 2:16-17 tells us these feasts were "a shadow of the things coming, but the body is of Christ." Christians are not required to keep Israel's feasts. Many believers find it helpful to learn

about them, and some Messianic Jewish believers keep them as a remembrance of Christ. But no one should judge another believer over them.

16:18 *Judges and officers you shall appoint for yourself in all your gates which the LORD your God is giving to you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people* ***with*** *judgment of righteousness.*

"Judges and officers you shall appoint for yourself in all your gates." Now the subject turns to justice. Every town was to have judges to hear cases and officers to carry out their decisions. The town gate was where the elders sat and judged (Ruth 4:1-2).

"And they shall judge the people with judgment of righteousness." Righteous judgment is fair judgment, by God's standard. Moses had set up judges in the wilderness (1:13-17). Now the system would be spread through the land.

16:19 *You shall not turn aside judgment; you shall not show regard to faces; and you shall not take a bribe, for the bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.*

Moses gives three rules for judges. "You shall not turn aside judgment" means do not twist justice. "You shall not show regard to faces" means do not favor someone because of who they are, rich or poor, friend or stranger. "And you shall not take a bribe, for the bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous."

Notice that the bribe blinds even the wise. No one is above its pull. A gift can bend a good man's judgment before he knows it. Isaiah later said of Jerusalem's leaders, "every one of them loves a bribe" (Isaiah 1:23). James warns the church against favoring the rich over the poor (James 2:1-4). God Himself shows no partiality (Acts 10:34).

16:20 *Righteousness, righteousness you shall pursue, so that you may live and take possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving to you.*

"Righteousness, righteousness you shall pursue." The word is doubled to make it strong. Do not just wait for justice to happen. Chase it. Hunt it down like a man after something precious.

"So that you may live and take possession of the land." Justice was tied to life in the land. A nation that twists justice is rotting from the inside. Amos cried, "let justice roll like the waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing wadi" (Amos 5:24). Whether we are judges, bosses, parents or church leaders, we are called to be fair.

16:21-22 *You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah, any tree, beside the altar of the LORD your God which you shall make for yourself. And you shall not set up for yourself a pillar, which the LORD your God hates.*

Then two short commands about worship. "You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah, any tree, beside the altar of the LORD your God." An Asherah was a sacred pole or tree for the Canaanite goddess of that name. Israel was not to set one up next to the LORD's altar, as if she were His

partner. "And you shall not set up for yourself a pillar, which the LORD your God hates." A pillar was a standing stone used in pagan worship.

Why put this right after the law on judges? Perhaps because both are about keeping the heart of Israel pure. A nation that mixes its worship will soon twist its justice too. Sadly, Israel did both. Even in the temple in Jerusalem, King Manasseh set up an image of Asherah (2 Kings 21:7).

Chapter 16 Summary

Israel was to keep three great feasts at the place the LORD would choose. Passover, in the month of Abib, remembered the night God brought them out of Egypt, with seven days of unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, and a holy assembly on the seventh day. The Festival of Weeks came seven weeks later at the wheat harvest, with a freewill offering as God had blessed them and joy for the whole household, including servants, Levites, foreigners, orphans and widows. The Festival of Booths came in the fall after the harvest, seven days of complete joy. Three times a year every man was to appear before the LORD and not come empty-handed. These feasts point to Christ, our Passover lamb, to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, and to Jesus, the living water who came to dwell among us and who will reign over the nations. The chapter then commands Israel to appoint judges in every town who would judge righteously, show no favoritism and take no bribes, and to pursue justice. Israel was not to set up an Asherah or a sacred pillar beside the LORD's altar.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. What did the Passover remember, and why did Israel eat unleavened bread? (16:1-3)

2. Where and when was the Passover to be sacrificed in the land? (16:5-6)

3. How was the Festival of Weeks timed, and how much were they to give? (16:9-10)

4. Who was to rejoice at the feasts, and why does Moses remind them they were slaves in Egypt? (16:11-12, 14)

5. How does the New Testament show that these three feasts point to Christ and the Spirit? (1 Corinthians 5:7; Acts 2:1-4; John 7:37)

6. What three rules did Moses give the judges? (16:19)

7. What does it mean to "pursue" righteousness, and why was it tied to life in the land? (16:20)

8. Why do you think the warning about Asherah and pillars comes right after the law on judges? (16:21-22)

9. What has God done for you that you need to remember on purpose? How could you build a habit of remembering? (16:3, 12)

10. Where in your life do you have the power to be fair or unfair to others? How can you pursue justice there? (16:18-20)

Chapter 17: Justice and the King

Scripture

17:1-13 You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep in which there is a blemish, any evil thing, for it ***is*** an abomination of the LORD your God. If there is found in your midst, in one of your gates which the LORD your God is giving to you, a man or a woman who does the evil in the eyes of the LORD your God by transgressing His covenant, and he has gone and served other gods and bowed down to them, and to the sun or to the moon or to any of the host of the heavens, which I have not commanded, and it is declared to you, and you hear ***of it***, and you shall investigate thoroughly; and look, ***it is*** truth, the thing ***is*** certain, this abomination has been done in Israel, then you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil thing to your gates, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them with stones, and they shall die. On the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the mouth of one witness. The hand of the witnesses shall be on him first to put him to death, and the hand of all the people last. And you shall purge the evil from your midst. If a matter is too difficult for you for judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, matters of disputes in your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God will choose. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge who will be in those days, and you shall inquire, and they shall declare to you the word of the judgment. And you shall do according to the word which they declare to you from that place which the LORD will choose, and you shall be careful to do according to all that they instruct you. According to the law which they instruct you and according to the judgment which they say to you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, ***to the*** right or ***to the*** left. And the man who acts with presumption so as not to listen to the priest who stands to serve the LORD your God there, or to the judge, that man shall die; and you shall purge the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and they shall not act presumptuously again.

17:14-20 When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, and you take possession of it and dwell in it, and you say, 'Let me set a king over me like all the nations that ***are*** around me,' you shall surely set over yourself a king whom the LORD your God will choose; from the midst of your brothers you shall set a king over yourself; you are not able to put over yourself a foreign man who ***is*** not your brother. Only he shall not multiply horses for himself, and he shall not cause the people to return to Egypt in order to multiply horses, and the LORD has said to you, 'You shall not again return on this way anymore.' And he shall not multiply wives for himself, and his heart shall not turn aside; and silver and gold he shall not multiply for himself greatly. And it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll, from before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them, so that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and so that he may not turn aside from the commandment, ***to the*** right or ***to the*** left, so that he may prolong ***his*** days over his kingdom, he and his sons, in the midst of Israel.

Chapter 17 Preview

Chapter 16 ended by calling for righteous judges. Chapter 17 goes on with justice. It opens with a short word about blemished sacrifices, then gives the law for a man or woman found serving other gods: after a careful inquiry and on the word of two or three witnesses, they were to be put to death. Then Moses sets up a high court. Cases too hard for the local judges were to go to the priests and the judge at the place the LORD would choose, and their ruling was final.

The second half of the chapter looks far ahead. Moses knew that one day Israel would ask for a king "like all the nations." God would allow it, but the king of Israel was to be different. He must be the man God chose, an Israelite. He must not pile up horses, wives or gold. And he must write out his own copy of God's Law and read it every day of his life, so that he would not think himself better than his brothers. This is one of the most important passages on leadership in the Bible. Israel's kings mostly failed it. Only one King has kept it perfectly, and He is coming back to reign.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1 *You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep in which there is a blemish, any evil thing, for it **is** an abomination of the LORD your God.*

"You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep in which there is a blemish, any evil thing, for it is an abomination of the LORD your God." Chapter 15 said the same of the firstborn (15:21). Here it covers every sacrifice.

Why does this verse stand here, between the law on judges and the law on idolaters? Perhaps because offering God a flawed animal was a quiet way of despising Him. It treated Him as less than He is. Malachi said that Israel would never give a sick animal to their governor, yet they gave it to God (Malachi 1:8). What we give to God shows what we think of Him.

17:2-5 *If there is found in your midst, in one of your gates which the LORD your God is giving to you, a man or a woman who does the evil in the eyes of the LORD your God by transgressing His covenant, and he has gone and served other gods and bowed down to them, and to the sun or to the moon or to any of the host of the heavens, which I have not commanded, and it is declared to you, and you hear **of it**, and you shall investigate thoroughly; and look, **it is** truth, the thing **is** certain, this abomination has been done in Israel, then you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil thing to your gates, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them with stones, and they shall die.*

"If there is found in your midst, in one of your gates which the LORD your God is giving to you, a man or a woman who does the evil in the eyes of the LORD your God by transgressing His covenant." Covenant breaking here means serving "other gods" and bowing down to them, "and to the sun or to the moon or to any of the host of the heavens." The host of the heavens means the stars. Star worship was common in the ancient world, and Israel later fell into it (2 Kings 21:3-5; 23:5).

Notice the words "a man or a woman." The law applied to everyone equally.

Before anything was done, there had to be a careful trial. "It is declared to you, and you hear of it, and you shall investigate thoroughly." Only if "it is truth, the thing is certain" could they act. Then the guilty person was to be taken "to your gates," outside the town, and stoned.

This is hard to read, as it was in chapter 13. Idolatry in Israel was treason against the God who had redeemed them and was their King. It brought God's judgment on the whole nation, and the gods of Canaan demanded terrible things, even children (12:31). This law was given to Israel under God's direct rule. It is not a pattern for any government or church today. The church deals with sin by teaching, discipline and the hope of repentance (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1), never by force.

17:6-7 *On the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the mouth of one witness. The hand of the witnesses shall be on him first to put him to death, and the hand of all the people last. And you shall purge the evil from your midst.*

"On the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the mouth of one witness." This is a great protection. One person's word, no matter how sure, was never enough to take a life. Chapter 19 will extend this rule to every case (19:15).

"The hand of the witnesses shall be on him first to put him to death." A witness who knew he would have to throw the first stone would think hard before lying. This made false charges much less likely.

Jesus used the two or three witnesses rule for dealing with sin in the church (Matthew 18:16), and Paul used it too (2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19). It is still a good rule. We should be very slow to believe an accusation against anyone on the word of one person alone. Sadly, Jesus Himself was condemned at a trial where the witnesses did not agree (Mark 14:55-59). The rule was broken to put the only innocent Man to death.

17:8-9 *If a matter is too difficult for you for judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, matters of disputes in your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God will choose. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge who will be in those days, and you shall inquire, and they shall declare to you the word of the judgment.*

"If a matter is too difficult for you for judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke." Between blood and blood means different kinds of killing, such as murder or accident. Plea and plea means legal claims. Stroke and stroke means kinds of injury. Some cases were too hard for the town elders.

Those cases were to go "up to the place which the LORD your God will choose," to "the priests, the Levites, and to the judge who will be in those days." This was a high court at the sanctuary. Moses had done this work himself in the wilderness, taking the hard cases (1:17; Exodus 18:26). Later King Jehoshaphat set up such a court in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 19:8-11).

17:10-11 *And you shall do according to the word which they declare to you from that place which the LORD will choose, and you shall be careful to do according to all that they instruct you. According to the law which they instruct you and according to the judgment which they say to you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you,* ***to the*** *right or* ***to the*** *left.*

"And you shall do according to the word which they declare to you from that place which the LORD will choose." The high court's ruling was final. "You shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or to the left."

Why such authority? Because the priests ruled "according to the law which they instruct you." Their authority came from God's Word. They were not free to make up new laws. When Jesus faced the religious leaders of His day, He did not reject the Law. He rejected their traditions that went beyond it and against it (Matthew 15:3-6).

17:12-13 *And the man who acts with presumption so as not to listen to the priest who stands to serve the LORD your God there, or to the judge, that man shall die; and you shall purge the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and they shall not act presumptuously again.*

"And the man who acts with presumption so as not to listen to the priest who stands to serve the LORD your God there, or to the judge, that man shall die." To act with presumption means to act proudly, defiantly, on purpose. This was not someone who disagreed with a ruling and appealed. It was someone who refused to submit at all to God's court. Without this, no ruling would ever stand, and every dispute would end in blood feuds.

"And all the people shall hear and fear, and they shall not act presumptuously again." Order in a nation depends on people respecting lawful authority. Paul says the same about government: rulers are "a servant of God to you for the good" (Romans 13:4). Christians are called to respect authority, unless it commands what God forbids (Acts 5:29).

17:14 *When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, and you take possession of it and dwell in it, and you say, 'Let me set a king over me like all the nations that* ***are*** *around me,'*

"When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, and you take possession of it and dwell in it," Moses says, the people will want a king. They will say, "Let me set a king over me like all the nations that are around me." Moses looks more than three hundred years ahead. In the days of Samuel, Israel said almost exactly this: "appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5).

Was it wrong to want a king? God had promised Abraham that kings would come from him (Genesis 17:6), and Jacob said the scepter would not leave Judah (Genesis 49:10). So a king was part of God's plan. But in 1 Samuel 8, the people's request was a rejection of the LORD as their King (1 Samuel 8:7). The problem was the motive: to be "like all the nations." God wanted Israel to be different from the nations, not copies of them.

17:15 *you shall surely set over yourself a king whom the LORD your God will choose; from the midst of your brothers you shall set a king over yourself; you are not able to put over yourself a foreign man who* ***is*** *not your brother.*

"You shall surely set over yourself a king whom the LORD your God will choose." The king was not to be the strongest man, or the most popular. He was to be God's choice. God chose Saul, and later David, through Samuel (1 Samuel 10:24; 16:12-13).

"From the midst of your brothers you shall set a king over yourself; you are not able to put over yourself a foreign man." The king had to be an Israelite, one of God's covenant people, who knew the LORD and His Law. A foreign king would bring in foreign gods.

17:16-17 *Only he shall not multiply horses for himself, and he shall not cause the people to return to Egypt in order to multiply horses, and the LORD has said to you, 'You shall not again return on this way anymore.' And he shall not multiply wives for himself, and his heart shall not turn aside; and silver and gold he shall not multiply for himself greatly.*

Then come three limits. These are the things kings in that day loved most.

First, "he shall not multiply horses for himself." Horses meant chariots, and chariots meant military power. The king was not to trust in his army. "These trust in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7). And he must not send the people back to Egypt to buy horses. God had brought Israel out of Egypt. They were not to go back there for anything.

Second, "he shall not multiply wives for himself, and his heart shall not turn aside." In those days kings married many wives, often to seal treaties with other nations. Those wives brought their gods with them.

Third, "silver and gold he shall not multiply for himself greatly." Wealth was not evil in itself, but a king who piled it up would trust in it and oppress his people to get more.

The sad thing is that Solomon broke all three. He had "one thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen" (1 Kings 10:26), and his horses came "from Egypt" (1 Kings 10:28). He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and "his wives turned aside his heart after other gods" (1 Kings 11:3-4). And he "made the silver in Jerusalem like the stones" (1 Kings 10:27). The wisest man who ever lived knew this law and did exactly what it warned against. After his death the kingdom split in two (1 Kings 11:11-13; 12:16-20). Knowing the right thing is not the same as doing it.

17:18-19 *And it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll, from before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them,*

"And it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll, from before the priests, the Levites." The first job of a new king was not to

plan a war or build a palace. It was to copy out God's Law with his own hand, from the scroll kept by the priests. This "copy of this law" is where the Greek translators got the name Deuteronomy, second law, as the Overview explains.

"And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life." Not once. Every day. Why? "So that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law." The most powerful man in Israel was to be the most humble student of God's Word.

That is a word for every leader, in the home, the church, and anywhere else. Is God's Word with you? Do you read it daily? A leader who does not stay under God's Word will soon think he is above it.

17:20 *so that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and so that he may not turn aside from the commandment,* ***to the*** *right or* ***to the*** *left, so that he may prolong* ***his*** *days over his kingdom, he and his sons, in the midst of Israel.*

The goal is stated plainly: "so that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers." The king was still a brother. He was not a god, as Pharaoh claimed to be. He stood under God's Law like every other Israelite. "So that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or to the left." And then God would bless his house: "so that he may prolong his days over his kingdom, he and his sons."

This passage points us to Christ. God promised David that his Son would sit on his throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Jesus is that Son, from the line of David, God's chosen King (Luke 1:32-33). He did not trust in horses. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21:5). He did not seek wealth. He had nowhere to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). He did not lift Himself above His brothers. He washed their feet (John 13:5) and "humbled Himself" all the way to the cross (Philippians 2:8). And He did not just read the Law. He kept every word of it (Matthew 5:17). One day He will return as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16) and reign over the earth in righteousness.

Chapter 17 Summary

Israel was not to offer God a blemished animal. A man or woman found serving other gods or the sun, moon and stars was to be put to death, but only after a careful inquiry and on the testimony of two or three witnesses, never one, and the witnesses were to throw the first stones. Cases too hard for the local judges were to be taken to the priests and the judge at the place the LORD would choose, and their ruling, based on God's Law, was final; anyone who defied it in pride was to die. When Israel asked for a king, he had to be the one God chose and an Israelite. He was not to multiply horses, wives or gold, and he was not to send the people back to Egypt. He was to write his own copy of the Law, keep it with him and read it every day of his life, so he would fear the LORD, not lift himself above his brothers, and not turn aside from God's commands. Solomon broke every one of these limits. Jesus, the Son of David, is the true King who kept the Law, humbled Himself, and will reign forever.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. What kind of sacrifice did God refuse, and what does this show about how we honor Him? (17:1; Malachi 1:8)

2. What had to happen before anyone could be punished for idolatry? (17:4-6)

3. Why were the witnesses to throw the first stones? (17:7)

4. Where were hard cases to be taken, and why was the court's ruling final? (17:8-11)

5. What was wrong with Israel's motive in asking for a king? (17:14; 1 Samuel 8:5-7)

6. What three things was the king not to multiply, and why? (17:16-17)

7. How did Solomon break each of these limits, and what happened as a result? (1 Kings 10:26-11:4)

8. What was the king to do with the Law, and why? (17:18-20)

9. How does Jesus fulfill the picture of the true King in this passage? (Matthew 21:5; Philippians 2:8)

10. What are your horses, wives and gold, the things you are tempted to trust or pile up? Is God's Word with you every day? (17:16-19)

Chapter 18: Priests, Levites and the Prophet Like Moses

Scripture

18:1-8 ***There*** shall not be for the priests, the Levites, all the tribe of Levi, a portion and an inheritance with Israel; the fire offerings of the LORD and his inheritance they shall eat. And an inheritance shall not be for him in the midst of his brothers; the LORD, He ***is*** his inheritance, just as He spoke to him. And this shall be the due of the priests from the people, from those who sacrifice the sacrifice, whether ox or sheep: and he shall give to the priest the foreleg and the two cheeks and the stomach. The first of your grain, your new wine, and your fresh oil, and the first of the fleece of your flock, you shall give to him. For the LORD your God has chosen him out of all your tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, he and his sons, all the days. And if the Levite comes from one of your gates out of all Israel, where he is sojourning, and he comes with all the desire of his soul to the place which the LORD will choose, and he ministers in the name of the LORD his God like all his brothers the Levites who stand there before the LORD, portion like portion they shall eat, besides his sales according to the fathers.

18:9-14 When you are coming into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, you shall not learn to do according to the abominations of those nations. ***There*** shall not be found among you one who makes his son and his daughter pass through the fire, one who divines divinations, a soothsayer, and an interpreter of omens, and a sorcerer, and one who casts a spell, and one who asks a medium and a spiritist, and one who inquires of the dead. For everyone who does these ***things is*** an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God is dispossessing them from before you. You shall be blameless with the LORD your God. For these nations which you are dispossessing listen to soothsayers and to diviners; and you, not so has the LORD your God permitted you.

18:15-22 A prophet from your midst, from your brothers, like me, the LORD your God will raise up for you; to him you shall listen, according to all that you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not again hear the voice of the LORD my God, and this great fire let me not see anymore, and I will not die.' And the LORD said to me, 'They have done well ***in*** what they have spoken. A prophet I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers, like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And it shall be ***that*** the man who does not listen to My words which he speaks in My name, I Myself will require ***it*** of him. Only, the prophet who acts presumptuously to speak a word in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, and who speaks in the name of other gods, then that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?" when the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the word does not happen and does not come, that ***is*** the word which the LORD has not spoken; with presumption the prophet has spoken it; you shall not be afraid of him.'

Chapter 18 Preview

Chapters 16 and 17 dealt with judges and kings. Chapter 18 turns to the other two kinds of leaders in Israel: the priests and the prophets. First Moses explains how the priests and Levites were to be

supported. They had no land, because the LORD Himself was their inheritance, so the people were to give them a share of the sacrifices and the firstfruits. Then Moses warns against every kind of occult practice the Canaanites used to learn the future: divination, omens, sorcery, spells, mediums and calling up the dead. Israel was not to go looking for hidden knowledge that way.

Instead, God would speak to them through a prophet. And then Moses gives one of the great promises of the Old Testament: "A prophet from your midst, from your brothers, like me, the LORD your God will raise up for you; to him you shall listen." Israel waited for that Prophet for centuries. Peter stood up in the temple in Jerusalem and said He had come, and His name is Jesus (Acts 3:22-23). We will spend time on this promise, because it is one of the clearest pictures of Christ in the whole book. The chapter ends with how to tell a true prophet from a false one.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1-2 ***There*** *shall not be for the priests, the Levites, all the tribe of Levi, a portion and an inheritance with Israel; the fire offerings of the LORD and his inheritance they shall eat. And an inheritance shall not be for him in the midst of his brothers; the LORD, He* ***is*** *his inheritance, just as He spoke to him.*

"There shall not be for the priests, the Levites, all the tribe of Levi, a portion and an inheritance with Israel." A priest was a man from the family of Aaron who offered sacrifices and served at the altar. The Levites were the rest of the tribe of Levi, who helped the priests, cared for the sanctuary and taught the Law. When the land was divided, Levi received no territory of its own, only towns to live in (Joshua 21).

How would they live? "The fire offerings of the LORD and his inheritance they shall eat." A fire offering was any offering burned on the altar. The priests received parts of many of these.

Then a beautiful line: "the LORD, He is his inheritance." God had told Aaron, "I am your portion and your inheritance" (Numbers 18:20). The other tribes had fields and vineyards. Levi had God. Was that a loss? Not at all. The psalmist says, "The LORD is the portion of my share and my cup" (Psalm 16:5). Every believer can say the same. Whatever we have or do not have in this world, if we have the LORD, we have the best inheritance there is.

18:3-5 *And this shall be the due of the priests from the people, from those who sacrifice the sacrifice, whether ox or sheep: and he shall give to the priest the foreleg and the two cheeks and the stomach. The first of your grain, your new wine, and your fresh oil, and the first of the fleece of your flock, you shall give to him. For the LORD your God has chosen him out of all your tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, he and his sons, all the days.*

Here is how the priests were supported. From every ox or sheep offered as a sacrifice, the priest received "the foreleg and the two cheeks and the stomach." Leviticus gives the priest the breast and the right thigh of the peace offerings (Leviticus 7:31-34). These seem to be added parts, or the portion from animals offered in a different way.

They also received "the first of your grain, your new wine, and your fresh oil, and the first of the fleece of your flock." Firstfruits were the first and best of each harvest.

Why? "For the LORD your God has chosen him out of all your tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, he and his sons, all the days." Those who serve God's people should be supported by them. Paul uses this very principle: "those who attend at the altar share with the altar," and "so also the Lord prescribed for those who proclaim the gospel to live from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:13-14).

18:6-8 *And if the Levite comes from one of your gates out of all Israel, where he is sojourning, and he comes with all the desire of his soul to the place which the LORD will choose, and he ministers in the name of the LORD his God like all his brothers the Levites who stand there before the LORD, portion like portion they shall eat, besides his sales according to the fathers.*

"And if the Levite comes from one of your gates out of all Israel, where he is sojourning, and he comes with all the desire of his soul to the place which the LORD will choose." Levites lived in towns all over Israel. If one of them wanted to serve at the sanctuary, he was free to come.

"Portion like portion they shall eat." He was to receive the same share as the Levites already serving there. No one could push him out or treat him as second class. "Besides his sales according to the fathers" probably means whatever he received from selling his family property. That was his own, on top of his share.

God cared about fairness among His servants. Those who serve in God's house should not compete for position. Jesus said, "whoever wishes to become great among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:26).

18:9 *When you are coming into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, you shall not learn to do according to the abominations of those nations.*

"When you are coming into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, you shall not learn to do according to the abominations of those nations." Notice the word learn. These practices are learned. People are drawn into them slowly, often by curiosity. God said, Do not even start.

18:10-11 ***There*** *shall not be found among you one who makes his son and his daughter pass through the fire, one who divines divinations, a soothsayer, and an interpreter of omens, and a sorcerer, and one who casts a spell, and one who asks a medium and a spiritist, and one who inquires of the dead.*

Moses then lists the abominations. "One who makes his son and his daughter pass through the fire." This means child sacrifice, offering children to gods like Molech (12:31; Leviticus 18:21). It is listed first, perhaps because the occult and child sacrifice were tied together. People offered their children to get answers or blessings from their gods.

The rest of the list covers every way the nations tried to learn the future or control the unseen world:

- "One who divines divinations," a fortune-teller who claims to read the future, often by drawing lots or looking at the insides of animals.
- "A soothsayer," someone who tells the future, perhaps by reading the clouds or the stars.
- "An interpreter of omens," who reads signs in events or nature.
- "A sorcerer," who uses magic, often with drugs or charms, to cause harm or gain power.
- "One who casts a spell," who binds others with magic words.
- "One who asks a medium and a spiritist," someone who seeks out people who claim to talk with spirits.
- "One who inquires of the dead," who tries to call up the spirits of the dead for knowledge.

King Saul broke this command near the end of his life. He went to a medium at En-dor to call up the dead prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 28:7-19). The next day he died in battle.

These things are not harmless games. Behind them are real spiritual powers opposed to God. In Acts 16 Paul cast a spirit of fortune-telling out of a slave girl (Acts 16:16-18). In Ephesus new believers burned their books of magic (Acts 19:19). Paul lists sorcery among the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). Today this includes things like horoscopes, tarot cards, Ouija boards, psychics, seances and spells. Many treat them as entertainment. God calls them an abomination. If you have been involved in them, the good news is that Christ can set you free. Confess it, turn from it, and get rid of anything connected to it.

18:12-14 *For everyone who does these **things is** an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God is dispossessing them from before you. You shall be blameless with the LORD your God. For these nations which you are dispossessing listen to soothsayers and to diviners; and you, not so has the LORD your God permitted you.*

"For everyone who does these things is an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God is dispossessing them from before you." This is one of the reasons God judged the nations of Canaan. Their sin was not only idolatry. It was child sacrifice and the occult.

"You shall be blameless with the LORD your God." Blameless means whole, complete, wholehearted. God told Abraham, "walk before Me, and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1). It does not mean sinless. It means not divided, not trusting God with one hand and a fortune-teller with the other.

"For these nations which you are dispossessing listen to soothsayers and to diviners; and you, not so has the LORD your God permitted you." The nations listened to soothsayers. Israel was to listen to God. That sets up the next verse.

18:15 *A prophet from your midst, from your brothers, like me, the LORD your God will raise up for you; to him you shall listen,*

"A prophet from your midst, from your brothers, like me, the LORD your God will raise up for you; to him you shall listen."

This is the answer to verse 14. Israel did not need diviners or mediums to know God's will. God would speak to them through a prophet. A prophet is someone God calls to speak His words to His people. Notice four things in this verse.

"From your midst, from your brothers." He would be an Israelite, one of them.

"Like me." He would be like Moses. That is a big claim. Moses was the greatest prophet in Israel's history. The last chapter of Deuteronomy says, "there has not arisen again a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (34:10). God spoke to other prophets in visions and dreams, but to Moses "mouth to mouth" (Numbers 12:6-8).

"The LORD your God will raise up." God Himself would send Him.

"To him you shall listen." This is the command. When He came, Israel was to hear and obey.

18:16-17 *according to all that you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not again hear the voice of the LORD my God, and this great fire let me not see anymore, and I will not die.' And the LORD said to me, 'They have done well **in** what they have spoken.*

Moses explains where this promise came from. At Horeb, when God spoke the Ten Commandments from the fire, the people were terrified. They said, "Let me not again hear the voice of the LORD my God, and this great fire let me not see anymore, and I will not die" (see 5:23-27). They asked for someone to stand between them and God.

The LORD answered, "They have done well in what they have spoken." God agreed. Sinful people cannot stand before the holy God in His full glory. They need a mediator, a go-between. Moses was that mediator at Horeb. But God was promising more.

18:18 *A prophet I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers, like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*

"A prophet I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers, like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

Now God Himself speaks the promise. Notice the words "I will put My words in his mouth." This Prophet would speak exactly what God gave Him, no more and no less.

Listen to how Jesus spoke of Himself: "I did not speak from Myself, but the Father who sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak" (John 12:49). And again: "even as My Father taught Me, these things I speak" (John 8:28). Jesus is telling us, in the very language of Deuteronomy 18, that He is this Prophet.

18:19 *And it shall be **that** the man who does not listen to My words which he speaks in My name, I Myself will require **it** of him.*

"And it shall be that the man who does not listen to My words which he speaks in My name, I Myself will require it of him." To reject this Prophet was to reject God. God would hold that person accountable.

Peter quoted this verse in his second sermon, in the temple, right after God healed a lame man through him: "every soul which does not listen to that prophet will be utterly destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:23).

So who is this Prophet?

In one sense God kept this promise all through Israel's history. After Moses, God sent prophets like Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and they spoke His words. Some Bible teachers believe that is part of the meaning here, since verses 20 to 22 go on to talk about prophets in general.

But Israel knew there was more. Deuteronomy 34:10 says no prophet like Moses had arisen, so they kept waiting. By the time of Jesus, the Jews were looking for "the Prophet." When John the Baptist came, the priests asked him, "Are you the prophet?" and he said, "No" (John 1:21). When Jesus fed the five thousand, the people said, "This is truly the Prophet who is coming into the world" (John 6:14). Philip told Nathanael, "We have found Him of whom Moses wrote in the law" (John 1:45). Jesus Himself said, "if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote concerning Me" (John 5:46).

And the apostles said it plainly. Peter quoted Deuteronomy 18:15 and 19 and applied it straight to Jesus (Acts 3:22-26). Stephen did the same before the council (Acts 7:37). I believe the New Testament settles the question: Jesus Christ is the Prophet like Moses.

How is Jesus like Moses? Think of these:

- Both were born when a king was killing Hebrew baby boys, and both were spared (Exodus 1:22; 2:1-10; Matthew 2:13-16).
- Both spent time in Egypt and were brought out by God (Exodus 2; Matthew 2:15).
- Both were sent by God to deliver His people from slavery, Moses from Pharaoh, Jesus from sin and death.
- Both did great signs and wonders.
- Both fasted forty days (Exodus 34:28; Matthew 4:2).
- Both were mediators of a covenant, Moses of the old covenant at Sinai, Jesus of the new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6).
- Both prayed for their people when they sinned and offered themselves for them (Exodus 32:30-32; Luke 23:34).
- Both knew God face to face. Moses spoke with God as with a friend (Exodus 33:11). Jesus is "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18).

But Jesus is also far greater than Moses. "Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant," but Christ was faithful "as a Son over His house" (Hebrews 3:5-6). "The law was given through Moses; the grace and the truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Moses could only stand between the people and God. Jesus is God the Son who became man, so He brings us all the way to the Father. He is the "one mediator of God and men" (1 Timothy 2:5).

On the mountain of transfiguration, Moses himself stood with Jesus, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased; listen to Him" (Matthew 17:5). Those last words echo Deuteronomy 18:15, "to him you shall listen." God the Father was saying, Here is the Prophet Moses promised. Listen to Him.

That is the question for every one of us. Are you listening to Him? You cannot be neutral about Jesus. To listen to Him is life. To refuse to listen is to answer to God Himself.

18:20 *Only, the prophet who acts presumptuously to speak a word in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, and who speaks in the name of other gods, then that prophet shall die.*

"Only, the prophet who acts presumptuously to speak a word in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, and who speaks in the name of other gods, then that prophet shall die."

Two kinds of false prophet are named. One speaks in the LORD's name what God did not say. The other speaks in the name of other gods, as in 13:1-5. Both were deadly to Israel, and both were to be put to death under Israel's law. To claim God's authority for your own words is a terrible thing. It still is. Anyone who says that God told him something should be very careful that God really did.

18:21-22 *And if you say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?" when the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the word does not happen and does not come, that **is** the word which the LORD has not spoken; with presumption the prophet has spoken it; you shall not be afraid of him.'*

"How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?" That was a fair question. Here is the test: "when the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the word does not happen and does not come, that is the word which the LORD has not spoken."

A true prophet of God is always right when he foretells the future. Not mostly right. Always. If what he says does not come to pass, he is a false prophet. "You shall not be afraid of him."

This test works together with the one in 13:1-3. A sign that comes true does not prove a prophet is from God if he leads people to other gods. And a prophet who speaks in God's name is false if his words fail. Both tests must be passed. John tells believers today, "test the spirits to see whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). We test every teaching by God's Word. Many people today claim to speak for God and set dates or make predictions that fail. Deuteronomy tells us plainly not to fear them, and not to follow them.

And there is one Prophet whose every word has stood. Jesus said, "The heaven and the earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

Chapter 18 Summary

The priests and Levites had no land, because the LORD was their inheritance; the people were to support them with set portions of the sacrifices and the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil and wool, and any Levite who came to serve at the sanctuary was to receive an equal share. Israel was not to learn the abominations of the nations: child sacrifice, divination, soothsaying, omens, sorcery, spells, mediums, spiritists and calling up the dead, for these were among the reasons God was driving the nations out. Israel was to be wholehearted with the LORD. Instead of diviners, God would raise up a Prophet like Moses from among their brothers, put His words in His mouth, and hold accountable anyone who would not listen. This promise came from Israel's request at Horeb for a mediator. The New Testament shows that Jesus is that Prophet, like Moses and greater than Moses, and the Father says of Him, "listen to Him." A prophet who speaks in God's name what God has not commanded, or in the name of other gods, is false, and if his words do not come to pass, the people need not fear him.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. Why did the tribe of Levi receive no land, and what was their inheritance instead? (18:1-2)

2. How were the priests and Levites to be supported, and how does Paul apply this to the church? (18:3-5; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14)

3. List the occult practices named in verses 10 and 11. Why do you think child sacrifice is listed first?

4. What does it mean to be "blameless" with the LORD? (18:13)

5. What four things does verse 15 tell us about the coming Prophet?

6. Where did the promise of the Prophet come from, according to verses 16 and 17?

7. How does the New Testament show that Jesus is the Prophet like Moses? (John 6:14; 12:49; Acts 3:22-23; Matthew 17:5)

8. How are Jesus and Moses alike, and how is Jesus greater? (Hebrews 3:5-6; John 1:17)

9. What are the two tests of a false prophet in Deuteronomy, and how can you test what you hear today? (13:1-3; 18:21-22; 1 John 4:1)

10. Are there any occult practices or objects in your life, even ones that seemed harmless, that you need to confess and get rid of? Are you truly listening to Jesus? (18:10-15)

Chapter 19: Cities of Refuge and True Witnesses

Scripture

19:1-13 When the LORD your God cuts off the nations whose land the LORD your God is giving to you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses, three cities you shall set apart for yourself in the midst of your land which the LORD your God is giving to you to take possession of it. You shall prepare the way for yourself, and you shall divide into three ***parts*** the territory of your land which the LORD your God causes you to inherit, and it shall be for every killer to flee there. And this ***is*** the case of the killer who flees there and lives: whoever strikes his neighbor without knowledge, and he ***was*** not hating him in time past, and whoever goes with his neighbor into the forest to cut wood, and his hand is driven with the axe to cut down the tree, and the iron slips off from the wood and finds his neighbor, and he dies, he shall flee to one of these cities and live, lest the avenger of the blood pursue after the killer while his heart is hot, and overtake him because the way is long, and strike him mortally, and for him ***there is*** no judgment of death, for he ***was*** not hating him in time past. Therefore I am commanding you, saying, 'Three cities you shall set apart for yourself.' And if the LORD your God enlarges your territory, just as He swore to your fathers, and gives to you all the land which He spoke to give to your fathers, if you keep all this commandment to do it, which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to walk in His ways all the days, then you shall add for yourself three more cities to these three, and innocent blood shall not be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God is giving to you ***as*** an inheritance, and blood be on you. And if there is a man hating his neighbor, and he lies in wait for him and rises up against him and strikes him mortally, and he dies, and he flees to one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there, and give him into the hand of the avenger of the blood, and he shall die. Your eye shall not pity him, and you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel, and it shall be well with you.

19:14-21 You shall not move back the boundary of your neighbor, which the former ***ones*** have set, in your inheritance which you shall inherit in the land which the LORD your God is giving to you to take possession of it. One witness shall not stand up against a man for any iniquity and for any sin, in any sin which he sins; at the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses a matter shall stand. When a witness of violence stands up against a man to testify against him ***of*** rebellion, then the two men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who shall be in those days. And the judges shall inquire thoroughly, and look, the witness ***is*** a witness of falsehood; he has testified falsehood against his brother, then you shall do to him just as he planned to do to his brother, and you shall purge the evil from your midst. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and they shall not again do anymore according to this evil thing in your midst. And your eye shall not pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Chapter 19 Preview

This chapter is about protecting life and protecting justice. In chapter 4 Moses set apart three cities of refuge east of the Jordan (4:41-43). Now he commands Israel to set apart three more in the land west of the Jordan, with good roads leading to them, so that a person who killed someone

by accident could flee there and be safe from the dead man's family. A murderer, though, could not hide in them. If he fled there, the elders of his own town were to bring him back to face justice.

The chapter then gives three laws that guard fairness in the land. Do not move your neighbor's boundary stone. Do not convict anyone on the word of one witness. And if a witness lies to destroy someone, do to him what he meant to do to the other person: "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth." Many people know that last phrase but misunderstand it. We will see what it meant for Israel's judges, and what Jesus said about it. The cities of refuge also give us a picture of the refuge we have in Christ.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1-3 *When the LORD your God cuts off the nations whose land the LORD your God is giving to you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses, three cities you shall set apart for yourself in the midst of your land which the LORD your God is giving to you to take possession of it. You shall prepare the way for yourself, and you shall divide into three **parts** the territory of your land which the LORD your God causes you to inherit, and it shall be for every killer to flee there.*

"When the LORD your God cuts off the nations whose land the LORD your God is giving to you." Notice whose land it was. The LORD gave it. And notice "you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses." Israel would live in houses they did not build (6:10-11).

"Three cities you shall set apart for yourself in the midst of your land." These are the cities of refuge in the land of Canaan itself, west of the Jordan. Joshua names them: Kedesh in Galilee in the north, Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim in the middle, and Hebron in Judah in the south (Joshua 20:7).

"You shall prepare the way for yourself, and you shall divide into three parts the territory of your land." The land was divided so that a city of refuge would be within reach from anywhere. And the roads were to be ready. A man running for his life should not get lost or stuck. God made refuge easy to reach.

19:4-5 *And this **is** the case of the killer who flees there and lives: whoever strikes his neighbor without knowledge, and he **was** not hating him in time past, and whoever goes with his neighbor into the forest to cut wood, and his hand is driven with the axe to cut down the tree, and the iron slips off from the wood and finds his neighbor, and he dies, he shall flee to one of these cities and live,*

"And this is the case of the killer who flees there and lives: whoever strikes his neighbor without knowledge, and he was not hating him in time past." Without knowledge means by accident, without meaning to. The Law always made a difference between murder and an accidental killing. Exodus 21:13 says God would set a place for the one who did not lie in wait.

Moses gives an example everyone could picture. Two men go into the forest to cut wood. One swings his axe, "and the iron slips off from the wood and finds his neighbor, and he dies." That was a tragedy, not a crime. "He shall flee to one of these cities and live."

God's Law looks at the heart. It asks not only what happened, but why. Jesus taught the same when He said that anger in the heart is at the root of murder (Matthew 5:21-22).

19:6-7 *lest the avenger of the blood pursue after the killer while his heart is hot, and overtake him because the way is long, and strike him mortally, and for him* ***there is*** *no judgment of death, for he* ***was*** *not hating him in time past. Therefore I am commanding you, saying, 'Three cities you shall set apart for yourself.'*

Why was a refuge needed? "Lest the avenger of the blood pursue after the killer while his heart is hot." The avenger of blood was the closest male relative of the dead man. In that world, there were no police. The family was expected to see that a killing was answered. The Hebrew word is go'el, the same word used for a kinsman-redeemer, the relative who rescued family members in trouble (Ruth 3:9; 4:1-6). Here he protects the family by bringing justice.

But grief and anger can make a man act before the facts are known. He might "overtake him because the way is long, and strike him mortally, and for him there is no judgment of death." The man who killed by accident did not deserve to die. The city of refuge gave time for anger to cool and for the truth to come out. Numbers 35 explains that the congregation would judge the case, and the man who killed by accident would stay in the city until the death of the high priest (Numbers 35:24-28).

19:8-10 *And if the LORD your God enlarges your territory, just as He swore to your fathers, and gives to you all the land which He spoke to give to your fathers, if you keep all this commandment to do it, which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to walk in His ways all the days, then you shall add for yourself three more cities to these three, and innocent blood shall not be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God is giving to you* ***as*** *an inheritance, and blood be on you.*

"And if the LORD your God enlarges your territory, just as He swore to your fathers, and gives to you all the land which He spoke to give to your fathers." God had promised Abraham land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18). If Israel loved God and walked in His ways, and He gave them all of it, they were to "add for yourself three more cities to these three." Then there would be nine in all, counting the three east of the Jordan.

Scripture never records Israel adding these three. Israel never fully held the whole land in the way God promised, because they did not fully obey. I believe God will still keep His promise to Abraham in full when Christ reigns in His kingdom.

Why so many cities? "And innocent blood shall not be shed in the midst of your land," Moses says, "and blood be on you." If an innocent man was killed because no refuge was near, his blood would be on the whole nation. God held Israel responsible to make justice possible for everyone.

19:11-13 *And if there is a man hating his neighbor, and he lies in wait for him and rises up against him and strikes him mortally, and he dies, and he flees to one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there, and give him into the hand of the avenger of the blood, and he shall die. Your eye shall not pity him, and you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel, and it shall be well with you.*

The refuge was not for murderers. "And if there is a man hating his neighbor, and he lies in wait for him and rises up against him and strikes him mortally, and he dies, and he flees to one of these cities." Notice the words hating and lies in wait. This was planned. That is murder.

"Then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there, and give him into the hand of the avenger of the blood, and he shall die." The elders of his own town, who knew him, were to judge the case. The city of refuge could not be used to escape justice.

"Your eye shall not pity him, and you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel." This goes back to God's word to Noah: "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:6). Murder is so serious because every person is made in the image of God. Under the Law, there was no ransom for a murderer (Numbers 35:31).

Today, in the church age, Paul says the governing authority "does not bear the sword in vain," and it is "an avenger for wrath to the one who practices the evil" (Romans 13:4). Christians differ on how the death penalty should be used by governments today. But all agree that murder is a great evil, and that justice must be done fairly.

The cities of refuge also give us a picture of Christ. The New Testament does not name the cities as a type of Him, but Hebrews uses their language when it speaks of "we who have fled for refuge" to take hold of the hope set before us (Hebrews 6:18). The way to the city was made plain and open, and the way to Christ is open to anyone who will come (John 6:37). The man who fled there was safe only inside the walls, and we are safe only in Christ (Romans 8:1). And the man was set free when the high priest died (Numbers 35:25, 28). Our High Priest has died for us, and He lives forever to keep us (Hebrews 7:25). There is one big difference. The cities were only for those who killed by accident. Christ receives even those whose guilt is real, if they come to Him in repentance and faith.

19:14 *You shall not move back the boundary of your neighbor, which the former **ones** have set, in your inheritance which you shall inherit in the land which the LORD your God is giving to you to take possession of it.*

"You shall not move back the boundary of your neighbor, which the former ones have set, in your inheritance." In ancient Israel boundary stones marked the edge of each family's land. There were no deeds at a county office. To move the stone at night was to steal a neighbor's land, and with it his family's future. Proverbs repeats the warning: "Do not displace an ancient boundary which your fathers made" (Proverbs 22:28).

Why does this verse appear here? It fits with the chapter's concern for justice. The land was God's gift to each family. Stealing it quietly was a sin against the neighbor and against God. Today we

can apply it to honesty in every kind of property: our dealings, our taxes, our business. God sees the boundary stones no one else is watching.

19:15 *One witness shall not stand up against a man for any iniquity and for any sin, in any sin which he sins; at the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses a matter shall stand.*

"One witness shall not stand up against a man for any iniquity and for any sin." Chapter 17 required two or three witnesses for a death penalty (17:6). Now the rule covers every case. "At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses a matter shall stand."

This is a basic rule of justice, and it has shaped courts for thousands of years. Jesus used it in Matthew 18:16 for dealing with sin among believers. Paul used it in 2 Corinthians 13:1 and told Timothy not to receive an accusation against an elder except on the evidence of "two or three witnesses" (1 Timothy 5:19). It protects people from false charges, gossip and grudges.

19:16-18 *When a witness of violence stands up against a man to testify against him **of** rebellion, then the two men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who shall be in those days. And the judges shall inquire thoroughly, and look, the witness **is** a witness of falsehood; he has testified falsehood against his brother,*

But what if a witness lies? "When a witness of violence stands up against a man to testify against him of rebellion." A witness of violence is a malicious witness, someone whose lie is meant to do harm.

"Then the two men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges." To stand before the priests and judges was to stand before the LORD. Courts in Israel were God's courts. Every judge was accountable to Him.

"And the judges shall inquire thoroughly." Again, the judges had to dig. And if "the witness is a witness of falsehood; he has testified falsehood against his brother," then justice must be done to him. This is the ninth commandment in action: "you shall not answer against your neighbor as a witness of falsehood" (5:20).

19:19-20 *then you shall do to him just as he planned to do to his brother, and you shall purge the evil from your midst. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and they shall not again do anymore according to this evil thing in your midst.*

"Then you shall do to him just as he planned to do to his brother." If his lie would have cost the accused a fine, he paid that fine. If it would have cost the accused his life, he lost his. The punishment fit what he intended.

This is a strong guard against false witness. A man thinking of lying in court would have to face the fact that whatever he tried to do to another would fall on himself. "And those who remain shall hear and fear, and they shall not again do anymore according to this evil thing in your midst."

Think about how Jesus was condemned. False witnesses came forward against Him, and their testimonies did not agree (Mark 14:56). Under this law, they should have been punished. Instead the innocent One was condemned. He took the place of the guilty.

19:21 *And your eye shall not pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*

"And your eye shall not pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." This is sometimes called the law of retaliation, or the law of like for like. Many people think it is cruel. In fact it limited punishment. In the ancient world, revenge often went far beyond the harm done. A man might kill for an insult. This law said the punishment must fit the crime, no more and no less. It was given to judges in a court, not to private people taking revenge. Exodus 21:23-25 and Leviticus 24:19-20 give the same rule, and in many cases it seems that payment could be made in place of the injury.

Jesus quoted this rule in the Sermon on the Mount. "You heard that it was said," He began, and quoted the words "eye for eye," and then He said, "But I say to you, not to resist the evil person" (Matthew 5:38-39). Jesus was not throwing out justice in the courts. He was speaking to those who used this rule to justify personal revenge. As His followers, we do not pay back evil for evil. Paul says, "not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath; for it has been written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). We leave justice to God and to the authorities He has set up.

Chapter 19 Summary

When Israel took the land, they were to set apart three cities of refuge west of the Jordan, divide the land into three parts and prepare the roads, so that anyone who killed his neighbor by accident, like a man whose axe head flew off, could flee there and be safe from the avenger of blood while his anger was hot. If God enlarged their land, they were to add three more, so that innocent blood would not be shed. But a murderer who killed out of hatred and lay in wait could not hide there; the elders of his city were to take him and hand him over to the avenger of blood, and his life was to be taken. Israel was not to move a neighbor's boundary stone. No one was to be convicted on the word of one witness, but on two or three. A false witness was to receive the punishment he planned for his brother, life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, a rule that limited punishment to fit the crime. The cities of refuge picture the refuge we have in Christ, and Jesus calls His followers not to take personal revenge.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. Why were the cities of refuge spread through the land and the roads prepared? (19:2-3)

2. What was the difference between the man who could flee to a city of refuge and the man who could not? (19:4-5, 11)

3. What was the avenger of blood, and why was a refuge needed from him? (19:6)

4. What was to happen if God enlarged Israel's land, and why? (19:8-10)

5. Why was moving a boundary stone such a serious sin? (19:14; Proverbs 22:28)

6. How many witnesses were needed to convict someone, and how does the New Testament use this rule? (19:15; Matthew 18:16; 1 Timothy 5:19)

7. What was to be done to a false witness, and why? (19:16-20)

8. How did "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" limit punishment, and what did Jesus say about it? (19:21; Matthew 5:38-39)

9. How is Christ like a city of refuge for you? Have you fled to Him? (Hebrews 6:18)

10. Is there someone you are tempted to pay back for a wrong? What would it look like to leave that to God? (19:21; Romans 12:19)

Chapter 20: Laws for War

Scripture

20:1-9 When you go out to the battle against your enemies, and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God ***is*** with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. And it shall be, when you draw near to the battle, that the priest shall come near and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, 'Hear, Israel: you are approaching today to the battle against your enemies. Let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid, and do not be alarmed, and do not tremble before them, for the LORD your God ***is*** the ***One*** who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.' And the officers shall speak to the people, saying, 'Who ***is*** the man who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. And who ***is*** the man who has planted a vineyard and has not put it to use? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man put it to use. And who ***is*** the man who has betrothed a wife and has not taken her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.' And the officers shall speak further to the people, and they shall say, 'Who ***is*** the man ***who is*** fearful and faint of heart? Let him go and return to his house, and the heart of his brothers shall not melt like his heart.' And it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall appoint commanders of armies at the head of the people.

20:10-20 When you draw near to a city to fight against it, then you shall call to it for peace. And it shall be, if it answers you ***with*** peace and opens to you, then it shall be ***that*** all the people who are found in it shall be forced labor for you, and they shall serve you. And if it does not make peace with you, and it makes war with you, then you shall besiege it. And the LORD your God shall give it into your hand, and you shall strike every male of it by the mouth of the sword. Only the women and the little ones and the livestock and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself; and you shall eat the spoil of your enemies which the LORD your God has given to you. Thus you shall do to all the cities very far from you, which ***are*** not of the cities of these nations. Only, of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God is giving to you ***as*** an inheritance, you shall not keep alive any breath, for you shall utterly devote them to destruction: the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God. When you besiege a city many days, fighting against it to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them, for from them you shall eat, and them you shall not cut down. For ***is*** the tree of the field a man, to go into the siege from before you? Only a tree which you know that it ***is*** not a tree for food, it you shall destroy and cut down, and you shall build siegeworks against the city which is making war with you, until it falls.

Chapter 20 Preview

Israel was about to go to war. This chapter gives the rules. It begins with faith: when Israel saw horses and chariots and an army larger than their own, they were not to be afraid, because the LORD who brought them out of Egypt was with them. Before the battle a priest was to encourage

the army, and officers were to send home any man who had just built a house, planted a vineyard or become engaged, and any man who was afraid. Israel's strength was not in numbers.

Then come the rules for attacking a city. Cities far away were first to be offered peace. If they refused, the city was besieged, its men were killed and the rest were taken as spoil. But the cities of the seven nations of Canaan were to be devoted to destruction, so that they could not teach Israel their abominations. This is the same hard command we met in chapter 7, and we will look at it again with care. The chapter ends with a surprising law: when besieging a city, do not cut down its fruit trees. Even in war, God set limits.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1 *When you go out to the battle against your enemies, and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God **is** with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.*

"When you go out to the battle against your enemies, and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you, you shall not be afraid of them." Israel had no chariots. The Canaanites did, and chariots were the tanks of the ancient world (Joshua 17:16; Judges 4:3). On paper, Israel was outmatched.

"For the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." The answer to fear was memory again. The God who drowned Pharaoh's chariots in the sea (Exodus 14:28) could handle the chariots of Canaan. David said the same when he faced Goliath: "the battle belongs to the LORD" (1 Samuel 17:47).

Our battles are not the same as Israel's. But the fear is often the same. When we face something bigger than we are, we remember who is with us.

20:2-4 *And it shall be, when you draw near to the battle, that the priest shall come near and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, 'Hear, Israel: you are approaching today to the battle against your enemies. Let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid, and do not be alarmed, and do not tremble before them, for the LORD your God **is** the **One** who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.'*

"When you draw near to the battle, that the priest shall come near and speak to the people." Before the officers spoke, the priest spoke. Israel's wars were to begin with God.

"Hear, Israel," he said, the same words that begin the Shema (6:4). "Let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid, and do not be alarmed, and do not tremble before them." Four ways of saying, do not fear.

Why? "For the LORD your God is the One who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to save you." The LORD fought for Israel. That is why Israel's wars in the conquest were sometimes called the wars of the LORD (Numbers 21:14; 1 Samuel 18:17). They were not Israel's wars for gain. They were God's judgments carried out through Israel.

20:5-7 *And the officers shall speak to the people, saying, 'Who **is** the man who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. And who **is** the man who has planted a vineyard and has not put it to use? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man put it to use. And who **is** the man who has betrothed a wife and has not taken her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.'*

Now the officers spoke. Three kinds of men were sent home. The man "who has built a new house and has not dedicated it," the man "who has planted a vineyard and has not put it to use," and the man "who has betrothed a wife and has not taken her." To be betrothed was to be legally pledged to marry, a step more binding than our engagement.

Why send them home? So that they would not "die in the battle and another man" enjoy what they had begun. A vineyard took years to bear fruit (Leviticus 19:23-25). A man who had worked toward it should get to enjoy it. A young man who was about to be married should have the chance to marry. 24:5 adds that a newly married man was to be free from war for a year.

This shows God's kindness, even in a law about war. He cared about the ordinary joys of life: a home, a harvest, a marriage. It also showed again that victory did not depend on how many soldiers Israel had.

20:8-9 *And the officers shall speak further to the people, and they shall say, 'Who **is** the man **who is** fearful and faint of heart? Let him go and return to his house, and the heart of his brothers shall not melt like his heart.' And it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall appoint commanders of armies at the head of the people.*

"Who is the man who is fearful and faint of heart? Let him go and return to his house, and the heart of his brothers shall not melt like his heart." Fear spreads. One frightened soldier can make a whole company panic. So the fearful were allowed to go home.

Gideon later did exactly this. He told the fearful to go home, and twenty-two thousand left. God then cut his army down to three hundred men, so that Israel would know the victory was the LORD's (Judges 7:2-7).

Then "they shall appoint commanders of armies at the head of the people." Only after the army was ready in heart were the leaders put in place.

There is a lesson for the church here. God does not need big numbers. He needs people who trust Him. And fear, like faith, spreads. What do we spread to those around us?

20:10-11 *When you draw near to a city to fight against it, then you shall call to it for peace. And it shall be, if it answers you **with** peace and opens to you, then it shall be **that** all the people who are found in it shall be forced labor for you, and they shall serve you.*

Now the rules for attacking a city. "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, then you shall call to it for peace." Israel was first to offer terms. As verse 15 makes clear, this was for "the cities very far from you," outside the land of Canaan.

"If it answers you with peace and opens to you," then its people "shall be forced labor for you, and they shall serve you." They would become subjects of Israel, paying with their work. That was hard, but it was far better than war. Their lives were spared. This was how nations dealt with conquered peoples in that day, and here Israel was required to offer peace first.

20:12-15 *And if it does not make peace with you, and it makes war with you, then you shall besiege it. And the LORD your God shall give it into your hand, and you shall strike every male of it by the mouth of the sword. Only the women and the little ones and the livestock and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself; and you shall eat the spoil of your enemies which the LORD your God has given to you. Thus you shall do to all the cities very far from you, which **are** not of the cities of these nations.*

If the city refused peace and made war, Israel was to besiege it. Then "the LORD your God shall give it into your hand, and you shall strike every male of it by the mouth of the sword. Only the women and the little ones and the livestock and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself."

This is hard to read. Many teachers take every male here to mean the fighting men of a city that had refused peace and chosen to fight. The women and children were spared and taken into Israel. In that world, a city that lost a war it chose to fight often lost everything. God's Law did not remove the harshness of ancient war, but it limited it. Peace had to be offered first. Women and children were not to be killed. And as the next chapter shows, a captive woman had rights that protected her (21:10-14).

"Thus you shall do to all the cities very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations." This is the key. These rules were for wars outside Canaan. The cities inside the land were a different case.

20:16-18 *Only, of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God is giving to you **as** an inheritance, you shall not keep alive any breath, for you shall utterly devote them to destruction: the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God.*

"Only, of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God is giving to you as an inheritance, you shall not keep alive any breath, for you shall utterly devote them to destruction: the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite."

This is the ban, the herem, that we studied in 7:1-2. I will not repeat all of it, but here is what we saw there, and what Scripture says.

It was God's judgment, not Israel's hatred. God had waited four hundred years, until "the iniquity of the Amorite" was complete (Genesis 15:16). These were nations that burned their children to their gods (12:31) and practiced every kind of occult evil (18:9-12).

It was not about race. God judged an Israelite town by the same standard (13:15), and He later sent Israel itself into exile for the same sins. Canaanites who turned to the LORD, like Rahab, were spared (Joshua 6:25).

It was limited to one land and one time. The verses just before draw a sharp line between these cities and all others (20:15). It was never a general rule for war, and it is never a command for anyone today.

And verse 18 gives the reason: "so that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God." The goal was to remove a deadly evil from the land God was giving His people, so that Israel would not learn it. Sadly, Israel did not finish the task, and the gods of Canaan did lead them astray (Judges 2:1-3, 11-13; Psalm 106:34-38).

We should still feel the weight of these words. God says He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). What we are asked to do is trust that the Judge of all the earth does right (Genesis 18:25), and to see how serious sin is before a holy God. One day every person will stand before Him. The same God who judged Canaan sent His own Son to bear the judgment for all who will believe. Jesus told us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44), and the church fights no war with swords: "our wrestling is not against blood and flesh" (Ephesians 6:12).

20:19-20 *When you besiege a city many days, fighting against it to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them, for from them you shall eat, and them you shall not cut down. For **is** the tree of the field a man, to go into the siege from before you? Only a tree which you know that it **is** not a tree for food, it you shall destroy and cut down, and you shall build siegeworks against the city which is making war with you, until it falls.*

"When you besiege a city many days, fighting against it to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them, for from them you shall eat." Armies in the ancient world often cut down every tree around a city, partly for siege works and partly to ruin the land for years to come. The Assyrians boasted of doing it. God forbade Israel to cut down fruit trees.

Then a question: "For is the tree of the field a man, to go into the siege from before you?" The tree was not the enemy. It had done nothing wrong. Why destroy it?

"Only a tree which you know that it is not a tree for food, it you shall destroy and cut down, and you shall build siegeworks." Trees that did not bear fruit could be used to build the siege.

Even in war, God cared about His creation and about the future. The land would need to feed people after the battle was over. This tells us something about God's heart. He made the earth and gave it to people to care for (Genesis 2:15). Even in the hardest moments, He sets limits on destruction. As His people, we should care for what He has made and not waste it.

Chapter 20 Summary

When Israel went to war and saw horses, chariots and larger armies, they were not to fear, because the LORD who brought them out of Egypt was with them. The priest was to encourage

them that the LORD would fight for them and save them. The officers were to send home the man with a new house, a new vineyard or a bride-to-be, so he would not die and another enjoy them, and the man who was afraid, so his fear would not spread. Distant cities were first to be offered peace; if they accepted, they became forced laborers, and if they fought, their men were killed and the women, children and goods taken as spoil. But the cities of the seven nations of Canaan were to be devoted to destruction, so that they could not teach Israel their abominations. This was God's judgment on those nations after long patience, limited to that land and time, and never a command for today. Even in a siege, Israel was not to cut down fruit trees, because the trees were not the enemy. God set limits even on war.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. What reason did God give Israel not to be afraid when they faced a larger army? (20:1)

2. What did the priest say to the army before battle? (20:2-4)

3. Which men were sent home before the battle, and why? (20:5-8)

4. How did Gideon's story show the truth behind these verses? (20:8; Judges 7:2-7)

5. What was Israel to do first when they approached a distant city? (20:10-11)

6. What was the difference between distant cities and the cities of Canaan? (20:15-16)

7. What reason does verse 18 give for the ban on the cities of Canaan?

8. Why were fruit trees not to be cut down, and what does this show about God? (20:19-20)

9. What "battle" are you facing that feels bigger than you? What has God already done for you that helps you not fear? (20:1-4)

10. Is fear or faith spreading from you to others? How can you encourage someone this week? (20:8)

Chapter 21: Laws on Blood, Family and the Hanged Man

Scripture

21:1-9 If a slain ***one*** is found on the ground which the LORD your God is giving to you to take possession of it, lying in the field, ***and*** it is not known who struck him, then your elders and your judges shall go out, and they shall measure to the cities which ***are*** around the slain ***one***. And it shall be ***that*** the city ***that is*** near to the slain ***one***, the elders of that city shall take a heifer of the herd which has not been worked with, which has not pulled in a yoke. And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer to an ever-flowing wadi which is not worked and is not sown, and they shall break the neck of the heifer there in the wadi. And the priests, the sons of Levi, shall draw near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD, and by their mouth every dispute and every stroke shall be ***settled***. And all the elders of that city who are near to the slain ***one*** shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi. And they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, and our eyes have not seen ***it***. Make atonement for Your people Israel, whom You have ransomed, O LORD, and do not put innocent blood in the midst of Your people Israel.' And the blood shall be atoned for them. And you, you shall purge the innocent blood from your midst, for you shall do what ***is*** right in the eyes of the LORD.

21:10-23 When you go out to the battle against your enemies, and the LORD your God gives them into your hand, and you take their captives captive, and you see among the captives a woman beautiful of form, and you desire her, and you take ***her*** for yourself as a wife, then you shall bring her into the midst of your house, and she shall shave her head and do her nails. And she shall remove the clothing of her captivity from on her, and she shall dwell in your house and weep for her father and her mother a month of days; and after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. And it shall be, if you do not delight in her, then you shall let her go according to her desire; and you shall certainly not sell her for silver; you shall not treat her as a slave, because you have humbled her. If a man has two wives, the one loved and the one hated, and they bear sons to him, the loved ***one*** and the hated ***one***, and the firstborn son belongs to the hated ***one***, then it shall be, on the day he causes his sons to inherit what he has, he shall not be able to make the son of the loved ***one*** firstborn in the face of the son of the hated ***one***, the firstborn. But the firstborn, the son of the hated ***one***, he shall acknowledge by giving to him a double portion of all that is found with him, for he ***is*** the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn ***belongs*** to him. If a man has a son stubborn and rebellious, who is not listening to the voice of his father and to the voice of his mother, and they discipline him, and he does not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall seize him and bring him out to the elders of his city and to the gate of his place, and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours ***is*** stubborn and rebellious; he is not listening to our voice; ***he is*** a glutton and a drunkard.' And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, and he shall die; and you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear and fear. And if there is in a man a sin ***worthy*** of a judgment of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on that day, for one who is hanged ***is*** a curse of God; and you shall not make unclean your ground which the LORD your God is giving to you ***as*** an inheritance.

Chapter 21 Preview

This chapter gathers several laws that may seem unrelated at first. What ties them together is the worth of human life and the guarding of the family. It begins with a murder no one can solve. A body is found in a field, and the nearest town must make atonement so that innocent blood does not stain the land. Then come three family laws: how a soldier must treat a woman taken captive in war if he wants to marry her, how a man with two wives must treat the son of the wife he loves less, and what parents must do with a son who is stubborn, rebellious and beyond correction.

The last two verses say that the body of an executed man hung on a tree must be buried that same day, "for one who is hanged is a curse of God." Paul quotes that verse to explain the cross: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Several of these laws are hard, and some of them describe a world very different from ours. We will look at them honestly, see how they protected the weak in that world, and see how they point to Christ.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1-2 *If a slain **one** is found on the ground which the LORD your God is giving to you to take possession of it, lying in the field, **and** it is not known who struck him, then your elders and your judges shall go out, and they shall measure to the cities which **are** around the slain **one**.*

"If a slain one is found on the ground which the LORD your God is giving to you to take possession of it, lying in the field, and it is not known who struck him." Someone has been murdered, and no one knows who did it. There is no witness, and so no trial.

What then? The case could not simply be dropped. "Your elders and your judges shall go out, and they shall measure to the cities which are around the slain one." The town closest to the body was responsible. In God's eyes, a murder was not only a private matter between the killer and the dead man's family. It touched the whole land.

21:3-4 *And it shall be **that** the city **that is** near to the slain **one**, the elders of that city shall take a heifer of the herd which has not been worked with, which has not pulled in a yoke. And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer to an ever-flowing wadi which is not worked and is not sown, and they shall break the neck of the heifer there in the wadi.*

The elders of the nearest town were to take "a heifer of the herd which has not been worked with, which has not pulled in a yoke." A heifer is a young cow. This one had never been put to work. They were to bring it down "to an ever-flowing wadi which is not worked and is not sown." A wadi is a valley with a stream. This one also had to be untouched land, never plowed.

"And they shall break the neck of the heifer there in the wadi." This was not a normal sacrifice on an altar. No blood was poured out at the sanctuary. It seems to have been a solemn act acting out the death the murderer deserved, in a place set apart from use.

21:5 *And the priests, the sons of Levi, shall draw near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD, and by their mouth every dispute and every stroke shall be* ***settled****.*

"And the priests, the sons of Levi, shall draw near." The priests were there as witnesses for God, because they were chosen "to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD, and by their mouth every dispute and every stroke shall be settled." The whole thing took place before the LORD.

21:6-9 *And all the elders of that city who are near to the slain* ***one*** *shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi. And they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, and our eyes have not seen* ***it****. Make atonement for Your people Israel, whom You have ransomed, O LORD, and do not put innocent blood in the midst of Your people Israel.' And the blood shall be atoned for them. And you, you shall purge the innocent blood from your midst, for you shall do what* ***is*** *right in the eyes of the LORD.*

"And all the elders of that city who are near to the slain one shall wash their hands over the heifer." To wash the hands was to declare innocence. Pilate washed his hands at the trial of Jesus to claim he was innocent of His blood (Matthew 27:24), though he was not.

The elders were to say, "Our hands have not shed this blood, and our eyes have not seen it." Then they prayed: "Make atonement for Your people Israel, whom You have ransomed, O LORD, and do not put innocent blood in the midst of Your people Israel." Atonement means covering sin so that a guilty people can be made right with God. "And the blood shall be atoned for them."

This law teaches us that every human life matters to God. Even an unknown man in a field, with no one to speak for him, was worth a public act before God. In our day, when life often seems cheap, this is worth remembering. It also teaches that sin can stain a whole community, and that God made a way to cover it. That way pointed ahead to a better blood, the blood of Christ, the "blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24).

21:10-11 *When you go out to the battle against your enemies, and the LORD your God gives them into your hand, and you take their captives captive, and you see among the captives a woman beautiful of form, and you desire her, and you take* ***her*** *for yourself as a wife,*

Now a hard law. "When you go out to the battle against your enemies, and the LORD your God gives them into your hand, and you take their captives captive, and you see among the captives a woman beautiful of form, and you desire her, and you take her for yourself as a wife."

This is about wars with distant cities, where the women and children were spared (20:14). It is not about the seven nations of Canaan (20:16). In the ancient world, women taken in war were often raped and enslaved by soldiers as a matter of course. This law stood against that. An Israelite soldier could not simply use a captive woman. If he wanted her, he had to marry her, with all the rights of a wife.

21:12-13 *then you shall bring her into the midst of your house, and she shall shave her head and do her nails. And she shall remove the clothing of her captivity from on her, and she shall dwell in your house and weep for her father and her mother a month of days; and after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife.*

"Then you shall bring her into the midst of your house, and she shall shave her head and do her nails. And she shall remove the clothing of her captivity." These were signs of mourning and of a new beginning. She was leaving her old life behind.

"She shall dwell in your house and weep for her father and her mother a month of days." She was given a full month to grieve before the marriage. Her loss was real, and the Law said so. The soldier had to wait. She was not to be treated as a prize.

"And after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife." Then she was his wife, not his slave. She shared his home, his name and the rights of any Israelite wife (Exodus 21:10).

21:14 *And it shall be, if you do not delight in her, then you shall let her go according to her desire; and you shall certainly not sell her for silver; you shall not treat her as a slave, because you have humbled her.*

"And it shall be, if you do not delight in her, then you shall let her go according to her desire; and you shall certainly not sell her for silver; you shall not treat her as a slave, because you have humbled her."

If the marriage failed, she was to go free, wherever she wanted. He could not sell her. He could not keep her as a servant. "Because you have humbled her" means he had taken her as his wife and so had changed her standing. She was owed her freedom.

How do we read this today? It is not God's ideal. God's plan for marriage from the beginning is one man and one woman, joined by God for life (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). Like the law on divorce in 24:1-4, this law allowed something because of the hardness of men's hearts, and then put limits on it (Matthew 19:8). In a cruel world, it gave a captive woman time to grieve, the full rights of a wife, and freedom if she was sent away. It protected the weakest person in the story. No one should ever use this passage to excuse taking advantage of a woman. In Christ, a husband is to love his wife "even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

21:15-17 *If a man has two wives, the one loved and the one hated, and they bear sons to him, the loved **one** and the hated **one**, and the firstborn son belongs to the hated **one**, then it shall be, on the day he causes his sons to inherit what he has, he shall not be able to make the son of the loved **one** firstborn in the face of the son of the hated **one**, the firstborn. But the firstborn, the son of the hated **one**, he shall acknowledge by giving to him a double portion of all that is found with him, for he **is** the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn **belongs** to him.*

"If a man has two wives, the one loved and the one hated." Hated here means loved less (compare Genesis 29:30-31, where Leah was "hated" because Jacob loved Rachel more). The Law did not command or approve having two wives. It dealt with it where it happened. Every story of more

than one wife in the Bible is a story of jealousy and pain: Abraham, Jacob, Elkanah, David, Solomon.

The law protected the son of the less-loved wife. If he was the firstborn, his father could not give the firstborn's rights to the son of the favorite wife. "He shall acknowledge by giving to him a double portion of all that is found with him." The firstborn received twice the share of each of the other sons. "For he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn belongs to him."

A father's feelings could not overrule justice for his children. Jacob gave Joseph the special honor over Reuben, but Reuben lost his place because of his own sin, not his mother (Genesis 49:3-4; 1 Chronicles 5:1-2). This law teaches parents not to play favorites. Favoritism tears families apart, as Jacob's own family showed.

21:18-19 *If a man has a son stubborn and rebellious, who is not listening to the voice of his father and to the voice of his mother, and they discipline him, and he does not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall seize him and bring him out to the elders of his city and to the gate of his place,*

Now another hard law. "If a man has a son stubborn and rebellious, who is not listening to the voice of his father and to the voice of his mother, and they discipline him, and he does not listen to them."

Notice what kind of son this is. He is not a small child who misbehaves. He is stubborn and rebellious, and he keeps refusing correction. The parents have already tried to discipline him. Verse 20 adds that he is "a glutton and a drunkard." That points to a son old enough to live a wild, wasteful life, a grown or nearly grown young man.

"Then his father and his mother shall seize him and bring him out to the elders of his city and to the gate." Both parents had to agree. One angry father could not do this alone. And the parents did not carry out any sentence. They brought him to the elders, the town's court.

21:20-21 *and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours **is** stubborn and rebellious; he is not listening to our voice; **he is** a glutton and a drunkard.' And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, and he shall die; and you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear and fear.*

The parents were to say, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he is not listening to our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard." Then "all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, and he shall die; and you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear and fear."

This is one of the hardest laws in the Bible. Here are some things that help us understand it.

First, in Israel the family was the foundation of the whole covenant nation. To honor father and mother was one of the Ten Commandments (5:16), and a son who cursed or struck his parents was under the death penalty (Exodus 21:15, 17). This son was not only a family problem. He was a danger to the town.

Second, this law actually limited a father's power. In many ancient nations a father could put his own son to death. Here he could not. He had to bring the case, with the mother's agreement, before the elders.

Third, Scripture never records this law being carried out. Later Jewish teachers set so many conditions on it that some of them said it had never been used. Its main purpose may have been to warn.

Even so, it shows how seriously God takes rebellion against the authority He has set in the home. It also points us to something better. Jesus told of another rebellious son, who wasted his father's money in wild living. When he came home, his father did not bring him to the gate to be stoned. He "was moved with compassion, and having run, he fell on his neck and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). That is how our Father in heaven receives every rebel who repents. We all deserve the sentence of this law, and in Christ we receive the welcome of the prodigal.

21:22-23 *And if there is in a man a sin **worthy** of a judgment of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on that day, for one who is hanged **is** a curse of God; and you shall not make unclean your ground which the LORD your God is giving to you **as** an inheritance.*

"And if there is in a man a sin worthy of a judgment of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree." In Israel a criminal was first put to death, usually by stoning. Then, in some cases, his body was hung on a tree or a post for all to see, as a warning (Joshua 10:26).

"His corpse shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on that day." The body had to be taken down and buried before night. Why? "For one who is hanged is a curse of God." A man hung up in public was shown to be under God's curse, cast out. Leaving him up would "make unclean your ground which the LORD your God is giving to you."

Now think of Jesus. He was not stoned first, but He was hung on a tree, nailed to a wooden cross. The apostles used this very language. Peter said, "Jesus, whom you put to death, having hanged Him on a tree" (Acts 5:30; also Acts 10:39). And because of this law, the Jewish leaders asked Pilate to have the bodies taken down before the Sabbath began (John 19:31). Jesus was buried the same day He died, just as Deuteronomy commanded.

Why would the sinless Son of God die in the way that marked a man as under God's curse? Paul answers: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us," and then he quotes this verse, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). The curse of the law is the curse on everyone who breaks it, and we all have (Galatians 3:10). Jesus took that curse on Himself. He "bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). He was cast out so that we could be brought in.

This is why the cross was a stumbling block to many Jews (1 Corinthians 1:23). How could the Messiah die under God's curse? The answer is the gospel. He was not cursed for His own sin, for He had none. He was cursed for ours.

Chapter 21 Summary

If a murdered man was found in a field and no one knew who killed him, the elders of the nearest town were to break the neck of an unworked heifer in an untouched valley, wash their hands over it, declare their innocence and ask the LORD to make atonement, so that innocent blood would not stain the land. A soldier who wanted to marry a woman captured in a distant war had to bring her into his home, give her a month to mourn her parents, and then marry her; if he later sent her away, she went free and could never be sold or treated as a slave. A man with two wives could not take the double portion of the firstborn away from the son of the wife he loved less. A son who was stubborn, rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard, and who would not listen to discipline, was to be brought by both parents to the elders and stoned. These hard laws limited cruelty and guarded the family in a hard world. The body of an executed man hung on a tree had to be buried the same day, because one who is hanged is a curse of God. Jesus was hanged on a tree and buried that day, and Paul says He became a curse for us to redeem us from the curse of the law.

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. What were the elders to do when a murdered man was found and no one knew who killed him? (21:1-9)

2. What does this law teach about the value of every human life?

3. How did the law of the captive woman protect her compared with the common practice of ancient war? (21:10-14)

4. Why does the Bible allow some things, like this law and divorce, that are not God's ideal? (21:14; Matthew 19:8)

5. What did the law of the two wives protect, and what does it teach parents about favoritism? (21:15-17)

6. What kind of son is described in verses 18 to 20, and what steps had to be taken before anything was done?

7. How is the father in Luke 15:20 different from the parents in this law, and what does that teach about God?

8. Why was the body of a hanged man to be buried the same day? (21:22-23; John 19:31)

9. How does Paul use 21:23 to explain what Jesus did on the cross? What does it mean to you that He became a curse for you? (Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24)

10. Are you holding a grudge or favoring one person in your family over another? What would justice and love look like there? (21:15-17)

Chapter 22: Laws of Kindness and Purity

Scripture

22:1-12 You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep straying, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother. And if your brother ***is*** not near to you, and you do not know him, then you shall gather it into the midst of your house, and it shall be with you until your brother seeks it, and you shall return it to him. And thus you shall do for his donkey, and thus you shall do for his garment, and thus you shall do for every lost thing of your brother which is lost from him and you find it; you shall not be able to hide yourself. You shall not see the donkey of your brother or his ox fallen on the way, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely raise ***them*** up with him. The article of a man shall not be on a woman, and a man shall not put on the garment of a woman, for everyone who does these ***things is*** an abomination to the LORD your God. If a bird's nest happens ***to be*** before you on the way, in any tree or on the ground, ***with*** young ones or eggs, and the mother ***is*** sitting on the young ones or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. You shall surely let the mother go, and the young you may take for yourself, so that it may go well with you, and you may prolong ***your*** days. When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, and you shall not put blood on your house if the one who falls should fall from it. You shall not sow your vineyard ***with*** two kinds, lest the full yield become holy, the seed which you sow and the produce of the vineyard. You shall not plow with an ox and with a donkey together. You shall not wear mixed material, wool and linen together. Tassels you shall make for yourself on the four corners of your covering with which you cover ***yourself***.

22:13-30 If a man takes a wife and goes in to her and hates her, and he lays charges of ***shameful*** deeds against her and brings out a bad name on her, and says, 'This woman I took, and I came near to her, and I did not find in her ***the evidence of*** virginity,' then the father of the young woman and her mother shall take and bring out the ***evidence of*** virginity of the young woman to the elders of the city at the gate. And the father of the young woman shall say to the elders, 'My daughter I gave to this man as a wife, and he hates her. And look, he has laid charges of ***shameful*** deeds, saying, "I did not find in your daughter ***the evidence of*** virginity." And these ***are the evidence of*** my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread out the garment before the elders of the city. And the elders of that city shall take the man and discipline him, and they shall fine him a hundred ***shekels of*** silver and give ***them*** to the father of the young woman, because he has brought out a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife; he shall not be able to send her away all his days. And if this thing was truth, ***and the evidence of*** virginity was not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the entrance of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones, and she shall die, for she has done folly in Israel by acting as a prostitute ***in*** her father's house; and you shall purge the evil from your midst. If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they shall die, even both of them, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; and you shall purge the evil from Israel. If there is a young woman, a virgin, betrothed to a man, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and stone them with stones, and they shall die: the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man

because he has humbled the wife of his neighbor; and you shall purge the evil from your midst. And if in the field the man finds the betrothed young woman, and the man takes hold of her and lies with her, then the man who lay with her shall die, him alone. And to the young woman you shall not do anything; ***there is*** no sin ***worthy*** of death for the young woman, for just as a man rises up against his neighbor and kills him mortally, so ***is*** this matter. For in the field he found her; the betrothed young woman cried out, and ***there was*** no one to save her. If a man finds a young woman, a virgin who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty ***shekels of*** silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has humbled her; he shall not be able to send her away all his days. A man shall not take the wife of his father, and he shall not uncover the skirt of his father.

Chapter 22 Preview

The first half of this chapter is a set of short laws about everyday kindness. If you find your neighbor's lost animal, take it home and keep it until he comes for it. If his donkey falls down on the road, help him lift it. Do not take a mother bird along with her young. Build a railing around your roof so no one falls off. Do not mix seeds, animals or fabrics. Put tassels on the corners of your cloak. These laws show that loving God reaches into the barnyard, the roof and the closet.

The second half turns to marriage and sexual sin, and it is one of the hardest passages in Deuteronomy. It deals with a husband who falsely accuses his new bride, with adultery, and with sexual sin involving a woman pledged to be married and one who was not. Some of these laws carried the death penalty. One of them, in verses 28 and 29, is very hard for us to read today. I will try to handle each one honestly, in plain and modest words, and to show both how they protected women in that world and how they point us to God's holiness and to the mercy we find in Christ. If you lead a group, read this section ahead of time. Some in your group may carry deep hurts in this area.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1-3 *You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep straying, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother. And if your brother **is** not near to you, and you do not know him, then you shall gather it into the midst of your house, and it shall be with you until your brother seeks it, and you shall return it to him. And thus you shall do for his donkey, and thus you shall do for his garment, and thus you shall do for every lost thing of your brother which is lost from him and you find it; you shall not be able to hide yourself.*

"You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep straying, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother." To hide yourself means to look the other way, to pretend you did not see. God says you cannot do that.

If the owner lived far away or was unknown, "you shall gather it into the midst of your house, and it shall be with you until your brother seeks it." The finder had to care for the animal at his own

cost until it was claimed. The same went for "his donkey," "his garment," and "every lost thing of your brother." "You shall not be able to hide yourself."

Exodus 23:4 says the same even of an enemy's ox. This is love for neighbor in practical form. Finders keepers was not God's rule. Jesus told of a Samaritan who did not look the other way (Luke 10:33-34). What do we walk past because it is not our problem?

22:4 *You shall not see the donkey of your brother or his ox fallen on the way, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely raise **them** up with him.*

"You shall not see the donkey of your brother or his ox fallen on the way, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely raise them up with him." A loaded animal that had fallen could not get up on its own. The owner needed help. Notice the words "with him." You help your neighbor, working beside him. Paul says, "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

22:5 *The article of a man shall not be on a woman, and a man shall not put on the garment of a woman, for everyone who does these **things is** an abomination to the LORD your God.*

"The article of a man shall not be on a woman, and a man shall not put on the garment of a woman, for everyone who does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God."

The word article is broad. It can mean clothing, tools or weapons. God made us male and female (Genesis 1:27), and He wanted that difference honored, not blurred. Some also think this law guarded against pagan worship, where men and women sometimes dressed as the other sex in their rites.

Clothing styles change from culture to culture, so this is not a rule about pants or robes. The principle is that men and women should not present themselves as the other sex. That still matters in our day, and we should hold to God's design with conviction and with kindness toward people who struggle.

22:6-7 *If a bird's nest happens **to be** before you on the way, in any tree or on the ground, **with** young ones or eggs, and the mother **is** sitting on the young ones or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. You shall surely let the mother go, and the young you may take for yourself, so that it may go well with you, and you may prolong **your** days.*

"If a bird's nest happens to be before you on the way," with "the mother is sitting on the young ones or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. You shall surely let the mother go, and the young you may take for yourself."

A hungry traveler could take the eggs or young birds for food. But he had to let the mother go. It was kind. A mother bird stays on her nest to protect her young, and it would be cruel to use her love to trap her. It also left her to lay again.

"So that it may go well with you, and you may prolong your days." This same promise is attached to honoring father and mother (5:16). Respect for motherhood, even in a bird, is tied to blessing.

Jesus said not one sparrow "will fall to the ground apart from your Father" (Matthew 10:29). God cares about small things, and so should we. "A righteous one knows the life of his animal" (Proverbs 12:10).

22:8 *When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, and you shall not put blood on your house if the one who falls should fall from it.*

"When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof." Houses in Israel had flat roofs. People used them like porches, to work, sleep in the summer, or pray (Acts 10:9). A parapet is a low wall or railing around the edge.

"And you shall not put blood on your house if the one who falls should fall from it." If someone fell because you did not build the railing, you were guilty of his blood. This is a law about safety and responsibility. Loving my neighbor means thinking ahead about how my choices could hurt him. Today that might mean a fence around a pool or safe driving. "Love does not work evil to the neighbor" (Romans 13:10).

22:9-11 *You shall not sow your vineyard **with** two kinds, lest the full yield become holy, the seed which you sow and the produce of the vineyard. You shall not plow with an ox and with a donkey together. You shall not wear mixed material, wool and linen together.*

Three laws about mixing. "You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds, lest the full yield become holy." To become holy here means it would be forfeited to the sanctuary, no longer yours. "You shall not plow with an ox and with a donkey together." "You shall not wear mixed material, wool and linen together." Leviticus 19:19 gives a similar list.

Why? Scripture does not explain each one. The ox and donkey are different in size and strength, so yoking them together would be hard on both, and the donkey was unclean while the ox was clean. But the main point seems to be a lesson in holiness. Israel was to be a separate people, not mixed with the nations. These everyday rules kept reminding them of that. Some also note that the priests' garments did mix wool and linen (Exodus 28:6; 39:29), so mixed cloth may have been reserved for holy use.

Paul seems to draw on the picture of the yoke when he says, "Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Like the food laws, these laws were a shadow fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:16-17), but the lesson remains: God's people are set apart for Him.

22:12 *Tassels you shall make for yourself on the four corners of your covering with which you cover **yourself**.*

"Tassels you shall make for yourself on the four corners of your covering with which you cover yourself." Numbers 15:38-40 explains the purpose. The tassels had a blue cord, and when Israel saw them they were to "remember all the commandments of the LORD, and you shall do them."

Jesus wore these. The woman with the flow of blood "touched the fringe of His garment" and was healed (Matthew 9:20). But He warned the Pharisees, who made their fringes big to be seen by others (Matthew 23:5). The tassels were for remembering God, not for impressing people.

22:13-14 *If a man takes a wife and goes in to her and hates her, and he lays charges of* ***shameful*** *deeds against her and brings out a bad name on her, and says, 'This woman I took, and I came near to her, and I did not find in her* ***the evidence of*** *virginity,'*

Now the marriage laws. "If a man takes a wife and goes in to her and hates her." He married her, slept with her, and then turned against her. So he "lays charges of shameful deeds against her and brings out a bad name on her." He claims she was not a virgin when they married.

Why would a man do this? Perhaps to get out of the marriage and get back the bride-price he had paid her father. Whatever his reason, it was a cruel lie meant to destroy her. In that culture, a woman accused of this would be shamed for life, and could face death.

22:15-17 *then the father of the young woman and her mother shall take and bring out the* ***evidence of*** *virginity of the young woman to the elders of the city at the gate. And the father of the young woman shall say to the elders, 'My daughter I gave to this man as a wife, and he hates her. And look, he has laid charges of* ***shameful*** *deeds, saying, "I did not find in your daughter* ***the evidence of*** *virginity." And these* ***are the evidence of*** *my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread out the garment before the elders of the city.*

Her parents could defend her. They were to "bring out the evidence of virginity of the young woman to the elders of the city at the gate." This was probably the cloth or garment from the wedding night, which the bride's family kept as proof. Her father would speak for her: "My daughter I gave to this man as a wife, and he hates her." Then "they shall spread out the garment before the elders of the city."

This was a public court, with evidence. The woman was not left alone to defend herself against her husband. Her family stood with her.

22:18-19 *And the elders of that city shall take the man and discipline him, and they shall fine him a hundred* ***shekels of*** *silver and give* ***them*** *to the father of the young woman, because he has brought out a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife; he shall not be able to send her away all his days.*

If she was found innocent, the elders were to "take the man and discipline him." This likely meant a beating (25:2-3). They also fined him "a hundred shekels of silver," paid to her father. A shekel was about two-fifths of an ounce of silver, so this was a large sum, likely twice the usual bride-price. "Because he has brought out a bad name on a virgin of Israel."

"And she shall be his wife; he shall not be able to send her away all his days." To us this seems strange. Why make her stay with him? In that world a woman sent away after such a charge would have little hope of another marriage or a home. This law gave her security for life. He could never divorce her.

God takes slander seriously. A false charge that would ruin someone's name brought heavy punishment. That is a lesson for us. Gossip and false accusation can destroy a life. "You shall not answer against your neighbor as a witness of falsehood" (5:20).

22:20-21 *And if this thing was truth,* ***and the evidence of*** *virginity was not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the entrance of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones, and she shall die, for she has done folly in Israel by acting as a prostitute* ***in*** *her father's house; and you shall purge the evil from your midst.*

"And if this thing was truth," and she had not been a virgin, then "the men of her city shall stone her with stones, and she shall die, for she has done folly in Israel by acting as a prostitute in her father's house."

This is a hard law. Here is what it was about. The young woman had been pledged as a virgin and had deceived her husband and her family. Sexual sin before marriage was treated as a grave wrong against her father's house, her husband and the whole community. The phrase "folly in Israel" marks a shameful sin that disgraced the whole nation, and similar words are used in Genesis 34:7 and Judges 20:6. The punishment took place at her father's door, because the shame was on his house.

We may find this very severe. Under the Mosaic covenant, God's holiness was shown in the strongest terms. These laws show how seriously God takes sexual sin, which the New Testament still calls sin (1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3). But the church is not Israel under the Law, and it does not punish sin with death. When the Pharisees brought Jesus a woman caught in adultery, quoting Moses, He did not deny her sin. He said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). The earliest Greek manuscripts of John do not have this account (John 7:53-8:11), but many believe it is a true event from the life of Jesus. Whatever our past, the cross offers a full pardon and a new start (1 Corinthians 6:11).

22:22 *If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they shall die, even both of them, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; and you shall purge the evil from Israel.*

"If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they shall die, even both of them, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman." Adultery is the breaking of the seventh commandment (5:18). Under the Law, both were guilty, and both were punished. The law did not punish only the woman, as some nations did. Leviticus 20:10 says the same.

"And you shall purge the evil from Israel." Adultery was not only a private sin. It broke a covenant made before God and tore families and communities apart.

Jesus went further. He said that a man who looks at a woman to lust after her "has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). By that standard, all of us stand guilty. That is why we need a Savior. "Marriage is to be honorable among all, and the bed undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4), and the same Lord who calls us to purity forgives and restores those who repent.

22:23-24 *If there is a young woman, a virgin, betrothed to a man, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and stone them with stones, and they shall die: the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he has humbled the wife of his neighbor; and you shall purge the evil from your midst.*

"If there is a young woman, a virgin, betrothed to a man, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her." Betrothal in Israel was a binding pledge, almost the same as marriage. She was already called "the wife of his neighbor." So this was treated as adultery.

"You shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and stone them with stones." Why both? "The young woman because she did not cry out in the city." In a town, with houses close together, a cry for help would be heard. If she did not cry out, the law assumed she consented. "And the man because he has humbled the wife of his neighbor."

22:25-27 *And if in the field the man finds the betrothed young woman, and the man takes hold of her and lies with her, then the man who lay with her shall die, him alone. And to the young woman you shall not do anything; **there is** no sin **worthy** of death for the young woman, for just as a man rises up against his neighbor and kills him mortally, so **is** this matter. For in the field he found her; the betrothed young woman cried out, and **there was** no one to save her.*

"And if in the field the man finds the betrothed young woman, and the man takes hold of her and lies with her, then the man who lay with her shall die, him alone." This is rape. "To the young woman you shall not do anything; there is no sin worthy of death for the young woman."

Moses gives a comparison: "just as a man rises up against his neighbor and kills him mortally, so is this matter." Rape is like murder. It is a violent attack on a person. The victim is not guilty.

And then the law gives her the benefit of the doubt. "For in the field he found her; the betrothed young woman cried out, and there was no one to save her." No one was there to hear, so the court was to assume she cried out. She was to be believed.

Victims of sexual assault have often been blamed or shamed, and still are. God's Law did not do that. The guilty man was punished, and the woman was protected. If someone has done this to you, hear this plainly: it was not your fault, and the LORD "is near to the broken of heart" (Psalm 34:18). Please tell someone you trust and get help. And if you know of such a crime, it must be reported to the authorities.

22:28-29 *If a man finds a young woman, a virgin who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty **shekels of** silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has humbled her; he shall not be able to send her away all his days.*

"If a man finds a young woman, a virgin who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has humbled her; he shall not be able to send her away all his days."

This is one of the hardest verses in the Law for us to read, and I want to be honest about it. On its face it seems to say that a woman who was forced must marry the man who forced her. That troubles many readers, and it should not be brushed aside.

First, Bible scholars differ on what the word seizes means here. It is a different word from the one in verse 25, takes hold of, which clearly means force. The word in verse 28 often means to take hold of or to catch, and it can be used of seizing by force. Many scholars think this law is parallel to Exodus 22:16-17, which speaks of a man who "seduces a virgin who is not betrothed." In that case the act was wrong but not forced, and the law is about sex before marriage. Others believe force is meant here.

Second, Exodus 22:17 says that if "her father utterly refuses to give her to him," the man still had to pay. Many teachers believe the same applied here, so the marriage was not automatic. The father could refuse it.

Third, in that world a woman who had lost her virginity before marriage had very little hope of ever marrying, and an unmarried woman with no husband or father often had no way to live. This law made the man bear the cost of what he did. He had to pay a heavy price, fifty shekels, which was likely more than a normal bride-price, and if the marriage went ahead, he could never divorce her. She would be provided for all her life. The burden fell on him, not on her.

Even with all of that, we should not pretend this law fits our world, or that it shows God's ideal. Like the laws on divorce and the captive woman, it set limits in a hard and fallen world (Matthew 19:8). It is never a reason to force any woman to marry someone who harmed her. Today a sexual assault is a crime that must be reported, and the victim must be protected, believed and cared for. Jesus treated women with dignity and honor in a world that often did not, and His people must do the same.

22:30 *A man shall not take the wife of his father, and he shall not uncover the skirt of his father.*

"A man shall not take the wife of his father, and he shall not uncover the skirt of his father." This means a man was not to marry or sleep with his father's wife, likely a stepmother after his father's death or divorce. To uncover his father's skirt is a modest Hebrew way of saying he would dishonor his father's marriage bed. Leviticus 18:8 gives the same law. Reuben did this with his father's concubine and lost his birthright (Genesis 35:22; 49:3-4).

Paul faced this very sin in the church at Corinth, where "someone has the wife of his father," a sin "not even named among the Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 5:1). He told the church to put the man out until he repented. God's design for marriage and family still stands.

Chapter 22 Summary

God's people were not to look the other way when a neighbor's animal or goods were lost or his animal had fallen. Men and women were not to wear what belonged to the other sex. A mother bird was to be let go, a new roof needed a railing, mixtures of seed, animals and cloth were forbidden, and tassels reminded Israel of God's commands. A man who falsely accused his bride

was disciplined, fined and could never divorce her; if the charge was true, she was stoned. Adultery brought death to both. With a betrothed woman, both died if it happened in the city, but if he forced her in the field, he alone died and she was believed. A man who lay with an unbetrothed virgin had to pay her father and marry her for life, unless the father refused. No man was to take his father's wife. These laws show God's care for neighbors and the weak and His holiness in marriage; the church does not carry out these penalties, and in Christ there is forgiveness and a new start.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. What was an Israelite to do if he found his neighbor's lost animal or saw it fallen on the road? (22:1-4)

2. Why do you think God cared about a mother bird and a railing on a roof? (22:6-8)

3. What lesson did the laws on mixing seeds, animals and fabrics teach Israel? (22:9-11; 2 Corinthians 6:14)

4. What were the tassels for, and how did Jesus warn against misusing them? (22:12; Numbers 15:38-40; Matthew 23:5)

5. How did the law protect a bride whose husband falsely accused her? (22:13-19)

6. How does this chapter show that God takes slander and false accusation seriously?

7. What was the difference between the cases in the city and in the field, and how did the law protect a woman who was attacked? (22:23-27)

8. What are some of the ways teachers understand verses 28 and 29, and why is it important to read it honestly? (22:28-29; Exodus 22:16-17)

9. Where are you tempted to "hide yourself" from a neighbor's need? What would it look like to help? (22:1-4)

10. How does Jesus' word to the woman in John 8:11, "go, and sin no more," give both mercy and a call to purity? Where do you need that today?

Chapter 23: The Assembly of the LORD and a Clean Camp

Scripture

23:1-8 One who is wounded by crushing, and one who is cut off ***in*** the male organ, shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD. A bastard shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD; even a tenth generation of his shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD. An Ammonite and a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD; even a tenth generation of theirs shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD, forever, because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way when you came out from Egypt, and because he hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia to curse you. And the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, and the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you. You shall not seek their peace and their good all your days, forever. You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he ***is*** your brother; you shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land. Sons who are born to them, a third generation of theirs, may enter into the assembly of the LORD.

23:9-18 When you go out ***as*** a camp against your enemies, then you shall keep yourself from every evil thing. If there is among you a man who is not clean because of an occurrence of night, then he shall go out to the outside of the camp; he shall not come into the midst of the camp. And it shall be, at the turning of evening, he shall wash with water, and as the sun sets, he may come into the midst of the camp. And you shall have a place outside the camp, and you shall go out there, outside. And you shall have a peg among your equipment, and it shall be, when you sit down outside, that you shall dig with it, and turn back and cover your excrement. For the LORD your God walks about in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to give your enemies before you; and your camp shall be holy, and He shall not see among you the nakedness of a thing and turn away from after you. You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped to you from his master. With you he shall dwell, in your midst, in the place which he chooses in one of your gates, in what ***is*** good to him; you shall not oppress him. ***There*** shall not be a female cult prostitute among the daughters of Israel, and ***there*** shall not be a male cult prostitute among the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the wages of a prostitute and the price of a dog ***into*** the house of the LORD your God for any vow, for even both of them ***are*** an abomination to the LORD your God.

23:19-25 You shall not charge interest to your brother: interest of silver, interest of food, interest of any thing which bears interest. To the foreigner you may charge interest, and to your brother you shall not charge interest, so that the LORD your God may bless you in every undertaking of your hand on the land to which you are going to take possession of it. When you vow a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for the LORD your God will surely require it from you, and it shall be sin in you. And if you refrain from vowing, it shall not be sin in you. That which goes out of your lips you shall keep and do, just as you have vowed to the LORD your God, a freewill offering which you have spoken with your mouth. When you go into the vineyard of your neighbor, then you may eat grapes according to your desire, your fill, and into your vessel you shall not put ***any***. When you go into the standing grain of your neighbor, then you may pluck off ears with your hand, and a sickle you shall not wave over the standing grain of your neighbor.

Chapter 23 Preview

This chapter begins with a question that sounds strange to us: who may "enter into the assembly of the LORD"? The assembly was Israel gathered as God's people for worship and for the life of the covenant. Moses names some who could not enter: men who had been castrated or mutilated, those born of a forbidden union, and Ammonites and Moabites, because of how they treated Israel on the way from Egypt. Edomites and Egyptians, on the other hand, could enter in the third generation. These verses raise hard questions. Did God shut people out because of how they were born? What about Ruth the Moabite? We will look at what these laws meant, and at how the prophets and the New Testament open the door wide in Christ.

The rest of the chapter is a mix of practical laws. The army camp was to be kept clean, because the LORD walked in the midst of it. A slave who escaped to Israel was not to be handed back. There were to be no cult prostitutes in Israel. Israelites were not to charge each other interest. Vows to God were to be kept. And a hungry person could eat from a neighbor's field or vineyard, but not fill a basket. Each of these laws, in its own way, teaches holiness and kindness.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1 *One who is wounded by crushing, and one who is cut off **in** the male organ, shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD.*

"One who is wounded by crushing, and one who is cut off in the male organ, shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD." This refers to men who had been castrated or mutilated. In the ancient world, some men were made eunuchs to serve in royal courts, and some pagan priests mutilated themselves in the worship of their gods.

What does "enter into the assembly" mean? It does not seem to mean these men could not live in Israel or trust in the LORD. It most likely means they could not take full part in the gathered worship and life of the nation, perhaps including marriage within Israel or serving as leaders. The priests also had to be without physical defect (Leviticus 21:17-23). God was using the body as a picture of wholeness and holiness.

But that was not God's last word. Isaiah later wrote, "let not the eunuch say, Look, I am a dry tree." God promised that eunuchs who hold to His covenant would receive "in My house and within My walls a monument and a name better than sons and than daughters" (Isaiah 56:3-5). And in Acts 8, one of the first people from far outside Israel to believe after Pentecost is an Ethiopian eunuch, who heard the gospel from Philip and was baptized (Acts 8:27-38). In Christ, what was shut out under the Law is welcomed by grace.

23:2 *A bastard shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD; even a tenth generation of his shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD.*

"A bastard shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD; even a tenth generation of his shall not enter." The Hebrew word here is mamzer. Its exact meaning is not certain. It does not seem to mean any child born outside marriage. Jewish tradition took it to mean a child born of incest or

adultery, a union the Law forbade. Some think it refers to children of pagan temple prostitution. "A tenth generation" is a way of saying never.

Why would God bar a child for what his parents did? Deuteronomy itself says children are not to be punished for their fathers' sins (24:16). This was not about personal guilt or salvation. It was about the public life of Israel's worship. The law put a strong wall around marriage, so that no one in Israel would think forbidden unions did not matter. Jephthah, the son of a prostitute, was driven out by his brothers, yet God used him as a judge (Judges 11:1-2, 29). God is never limited by how a person was born. In Christ, "you are no longer strangers and resident aliens, but fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

23:3-6 *An Ammonite and a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD; even a tenth generation of theirs shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD, forever, because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way when you came out from Egypt, and because he hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia to curse you. And the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, and the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you. You shall not seek their peace and their good all your days, forever.*

"An Ammonite and a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD; even a tenth generation of theirs shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD, forever." Moab and Ammon were descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:36-38). They were relatives of Israel.

Two reasons are given. First, "they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way when you came out from Egypt." They refused even simple kindness to their own relatives in the wilderness. Second, Moab's king "hired against you Balaam the son of Beor" from Mesopotamia "to curse you" (Numbers 22-24). And after Balaam failed to curse them, Moab's women drew Israel into idolatry and sexual sin at Peor (Numbers 25:1-3).

"And the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, and the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you." What a verse. Every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse, God made him bless. No one can curse those God has chosen to bless. Paul asks, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31).

"You shall not seek their peace and their good all your days." Israel was not to make treaties with them. Nehemiah read this law in his day and acted on it (Nehemiah 13:1-3).

What about Ruth? Ruth was a Moabite woman, and she married Boaz and became the great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 4:13-17) and an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). How could that be? Bible teachers have given several answers. Jewish tradition said the law applied to Moabite men, not women, since it was the men who failed to meet Israel with bread. Others point out that Ruth had left her people and her gods and taken refuge under the wings of the LORD (Ruth 1:16; 2:12). Her faith made her an Israelite in heart. Either way, the book of Ruth shows that God's grace reaches even those the Law kept at a distance, when they come to Him in faith.

23:7-8 *You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he **is** your brother; you shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land. Sons who are born to them, a third generation of theirs, may enter into the assembly of the LORD.*

"You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother." Edom came from Esau, Jacob's twin brother (Genesis 36:1). Even though Edom refused to let Israel pass through (Numbers 20:14-21), they were family.

"You shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land." This is surprising. Egypt had enslaved Israel and killed their baby boys. But Egypt had also welcomed Jacob's family in the famine and given them a home in Goshen (Genesis 47:5-6). God told Israel to remember the good, not only the bad.

"Sons who are born to them, a third generation of theirs, may enter into the assembly of the LORD." The door was open to them.

There is a lesson here about grudges. Israel had real reasons to hate Egypt. God said, do not abhor them. How much more should we, who have been forgiven so much, let go of old wrongs? This also shows that the laws of the assembly were not about race. Moab and Edom were both related to Israel. The difference was in how they had treated God's people.

23:9-11 *When you go out **as** a camp against your enemies, then you shall keep yourself from every evil thing. If there is among you a man who is not clean because of an occurrence of night, then he shall go out to the outside of the camp; he shall not come into the midst of the camp. And it shall be, at the turning of evening, he shall wash with water, and as the sun sets, he may come into the midst of the camp.*

Now the army camp. "When you go out as a camp against your enemies, then you shall keep yourself from every evil thing." Every evil thing here includes moral evil and also ceremonial uncleanness.

"If there is among you a man who is not clean because of an occurrence of night, then he shall go out to the outside of the camp." This refers in a modest way to a man's bodily discharge in his sleep, which under the Law made him ceremonially unclean until evening (Leviticus 15:16). Unclean did not mean sinful. It meant not fit for the holy presence of God for a time. He was to stay outside the camp for the day, wash, "and as the sun sets, he may come into the midst of the camp."

23:12-14 *And you shall have a place outside the camp, and you shall go out there, outside. And you shall have a peg among your equipment, and it shall be, when you sit down outside, that you shall dig with it, and turn back and cover your excrement. For the LORD your God walks about in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to give your enemies before you; and your camp shall be holy, and He shall not see among you the nakedness of a thing and turn away from after you.*

"And you shall have a place outside the camp, and you shall go out there, outside. And you shall have a peg among your equipment," a small digging tool, and "you shall dig with it, and turn back and cover your excrement." A latrine outside the camp, with waste buried. This was simple,

healthy and wise, centuries before anyone understood germs. Many armies in history lost more men to disease than to battle.

But God's reason was not mainly health. "For the LORD your God walks about in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to give your enemies before you; and your camp shall be holy." God was present among them. He would not "see among you the nakedness of a thing and turn away from after you." Nakedness of a thing means something shameful or indecent.

If God cared about the cleanness of a camp because He walked in it, what about us? Paul says, "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you" (1 Corinthians 6:19). God does not live in a tent among us. He lives in us. That should shape what we allow in our lives.

23:15-16 *You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped to you from his master. With you he shall dwell, in your midst, in the place which he chooses in one of your gates, in what good to him; you shall not oppress him.*

"You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped to you from his master." This is remarkable. Other nations in that time had treaties requiring that runaway slaves be returned, and harsh penalties for hiding them. Israel was to do the opposite.

This seems to mean a slave who fled from a foreign master into Israel. "With you he shall dwell, in your midst, in the place which he chooses in one of your gates, in what is good to him; you shall not oppress him." He could choose where to live. He was not to be oppressed. Israel, a nation of former slaves, was to be a refuge for the oppressed.

God's heart for the escaped slave is clear. It is the same heart that sent His Son "to proclaim release to captives" (Luke 4:18). Christians in later centuries who sheltered escaped slaves were acting in the spirit of this verse.

23:17-18 ***There*** *shall not be a female cult prostitute among the daughters of Israel, and* ***there*** *shall not be a male cult prostitute among the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the wages of a prostitute and the price of a dog* ***into*** *the house of the LORD your God for any vow, for even both of them* ***are*** *an abomination to the LORD your God.*

"There shall not be a female cult prostitute among the daughters of Israel, and there shall not be a male cult prostitute among the sons of Israel." In Canaanite religion, sexual acts at the temple were thought to make the land fertile. Men and women served at the shrines for this purpose. Israel was to have none of it. Sadly, it crept in more than once (1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 23:7).

"You shall not bring the wages of a prostitute and the price of a dog into the house of the LORD your God for any vow." The price of a dog most likely means the earnings of a male prostitute, using a word of contempt. God would not accept money gained by sin as an offering. He does not want what we gain by dishonoring Him. Sexual sin was never to be mixed with worship.

23:19-20 *You shall not charge interest to your brother: interest of silver, interest of food, interest of any thing which bears interest. To the foreigner you may charge interest, and to your brother you shall not charge interest, so that the LORD your God may bless you in every undertaking of your hand on the land to which you are going to take possession of it.*

"You shall not charge interest to your brother: interest of silver, interest of food, interest of any thing which bears interest." Loans in Israel were mostly to help a poor neighbor (15:7-8). To charge him interest was to profit from his trouble. Exodus 22:25 says the same of loans to the poor.

"To the foreigner you may charge interest." As in 15:3, the foreigner was an outsider doing business, not the poor sojourner. Business loans were treated differently from charity.

Does this mean Christians can never charge or pay interest? Most believers understand this law as being about loans to the poor and to God's people, not about all business. But the heart of it remains. We should never profit from someone else's desperation. Jesus said, "lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great" (Luke 6:35).

23:21-23 *When you vow a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for the LORD your God will surely require it from you, and it shall be sin in you. And if you refrain from vowing, it shall not be sin in you. That which goes out of your lips you shall keep and do, just as you have vowed to the LORD your God, a freewill offering which you have spoken with your mouth.*

"When you vow a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for the LORD your God will surely require it from you." A vow was a promise to God, often to give an offering if He answered a prayer (Genesis 28:20-22; 1 Samuel 1:11).

"And if you refrain from vowing, it shall not be sin in you." No one was forced to make a vow. But once made, it must be kept. "That which goes out of your lips you shall keep and do." Ecclesiastes says, "Better is it that you do not vow than that you vow and do not pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:5).

Jesus taught His followers to be people whose plain word can be trusted, so that they do not need oaths to back it up (Matthew 5:33-37). We should be slow to make promises to God or to people, and faithful to keep the ones we make. How many times have we promised God something in a hard moment and then forgotten it when the moment passed?

23:24-25 *When you go into the vineyard of your neighbor, then you may eat grapes according to your desire, your fill, and into your vessel you shall not put **any**. When you go into the standing grain of your neighbor, then you may pluck off ears with your hand, and a sickle you shall not wave over the standing grain of your neighbor.*

"When you go into the vineyard of your neighbor, then you may eat grapes according to your desire, your fill, and into your vessel you shall not put any." A traveler or a hungry worker could eat what he needed from a neighbor's vineyard. But he could not fill a basket and carry it off. That would be stealing.

"When you go into the standing grain of your neighbor, then you may pluck off ears with your hand, and a sickle you shall not wave over the standing grain." The same rule: eat what you need by hand, but do not harvest your neighbor's field.

This is exactly what Jesus' disciples did when they walked through the grainfields and "began to pluck heads of grain and to eat" (Matthew 12:1). The Pharisees did not accuse them of stealing, because this law allowed it. They accused them of working on the Sabbath. Jesus answered that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8).

This law balanced two good things. The owner's property was protected, and the hungry were fed. Generosity and honesty both matter.

Chapter 23 Summary

Some were barred from the assembly of the LORD: men who had been castrated or mutilated, those born of a forbidden union, and Ammonites and Moabites, because they did not meet Israel with bread and water and hired Balaam to curse them, though God turned the curse into a blessing because He loved Israel. Edomites, who were Israel's brothers, and Egyptians, in whose land Israel had lived, could enter in the third generation. These laws guarded Israel's worship; the prophets and the gospel show God welcoming eunuchs, Moabites like Ruth, and all who come to Him in faith. The army camp was to be kept holy: a man unclean from the night was to stay outside until evening, and waste was to be buried outside the camp, because the LORD walked in its midst. An escaped slave was not to be handed back but allowed to live where he chose. There were to be no cult prostitutes in Israel, and money from prostitution was not to be offered to God. Israelites were not to charge each other interest. Vows to the LORD were to be paid without delay, though no one had to vow. A hungry person could eat from a neighbor's vineyard or field by hand, but not carry it away.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. Who was barred from the assembly of the LORD, and what does "enter into the assembly" most likely mean? (23:1-3)

2. Why were the Ammonites and Moabites barred, and what did God do with Balaam's curse? (23:4-5)

3. How do Isaiah 56:3-5 and Acts 8 show God's welcome to those once shut out?

4. How can Ruth, a Moabite, be part of Israel and an ancestor of Jesus? (23:3; Ruth 1:16; Matthew 1:5)

5. Why were Edomites and Egyptians treated differently from Moabites? (23:7-8)

6. Why was the army camp to be kept clean, and how does Paul apply that idea to believers? (23:14; 1 Corinthians 6:19)

7. What was Israel to do for an escaped slave, and what does this show about God? (23:15-16)

8. What two good things does the law about a neighbor's grain and grapes balance? (23:24-25; Matthew 12:1)

9. Is there a person or group you have been holding a grudge against, as Israel might have against Egypt? What would it take to let it go? (23:7)

10. Have you made a promise to God or to someone else that you have not kept? What step can you take to keep it? (23:21-23)

Chapter 24: Divorce, Pledges and Care for the Poor

Scripture

24:1-9 When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it shall be, if she does not find favor in his eyes because he has found in her the nakedness of a thing, and he writes for her a document of divorce and puts ***it*** in her hand and sends her away from his house, and she goes out from his house and goes and becomes another man's, and the latter man hates her and writes for her a document of divorce and puts ***it*** in her hand and sends her away from his house, or if the latter man dies who took her for himself as a wife, her former husband who sent her away shall not be able to take her again to be his wife after she has been made unclean, for that ***is*** an abomination before the LORD; and you shall not cause the land to sin which the LORD your God is giving to you ***as*** an inheritance. When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army, and nothing shall be imposed on him for any matter; he shall be free for his house one year, and he shall make his wife whom he has taken rejoice. No one shall take a hand mill or an upper millstone in pledge, for he is taking a life in pledge. If a man is found stealing a person of his brothers, of the sons of Israel, and he treats him as a slave and sells him, then that thief shall die; and you shall purge the evil from your midst. Take heed in the plague of leprosy, to be very careful and to do according to all that the priests, the Levites, instruct you; just as I commanded them, you shall be careful to do. Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out from Egypt.

24:10-22 When you lend your neighbor a loan of anything, you shall not go into his house to take his pledge. You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you are lending shall bring out the pledge to you outside. And if he ***is*** a poor man, you shall not lie down in his pledge. You shall surely return the pledge to him as the sun sets, and he shall lie down in his garment and bless you; and it shall be righteousness for you before the LORD your God. You shall not oppress a hired worker ***who is*** poor and needy, of your brothers or of your sojourner who ***is*** in your land within your gates. On his day you shall give his wages, and the sun shall not set on it, for he ***is*** poor, and to it he is lifting up his soul, lest he cry against you to the LORD, and it be sin in you. Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, and sons shall not be put to death for fathers; each man for his ***own*** sin they shall be put to death. You shall not turn aside the judgment of a sojourner ***or*** a fatherless one, and you shall not take the clothing of a widow in pledge. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD your God ransomed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing. When you reap your harvest in your field, and you forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not return to take it; it shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless one, and for the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs after you; it shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless one, and for the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean after you; it shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless one, and for the widow. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.

Chapter 24 Preview

Chapter 24 opens with the best-known law on divorce in the Old Testament. It does not command divorce, and it does not give rules for when divorce is allowed. It deals with one case: a man

divorces his wife, she marries another man, and that marriage ends. The first husband may not take her back. Jesus was asked about this passage, and His answer in Matthew 19 takes us back to God's plan for marriage from the beginning. We will look at what Moses said, what Jesus said, and how believers have understood it.

The rest of the chapter is full of laws that protect the weak. A newly married man stays home for a year to make his wife happy. No one may take a family's millstone as a pledge. Kidnapping a person to sell him is punished by death. A lender may not go into a poor man's house to take his pledge, and must return his cloak by night. Wages must be paid the same day. Each person dies for his own sin. And at harvest time, the forgotten sheaf and the last olives and grapes are left for the foreigner, the orphan and the widow. Twice Moses gives the reason: "remember that you were a slave in Egypt." God's people are to treat the poor the way God treated them.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1 *When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it shall be, if she does not find favor in his eyes because he has found in her the nakedness of a thing, and he writes for her a document of divorce and puts* ***it*** *in her hand and sends her away from his house,*

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it shall be, if she does not find favor in his eyes because he has found in her the nakedness of a thing, and he writes for her a document of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her away from his house."

Notice that this verse is all "if." It describes what was already happening. It does not say a man should divorce his wife, or that he may for any reason. The command does not come until verse 4.

What is "the nakedness of a thing"? The phrase means something shameful or indecent. The same words appear in 23:14 for something indecent in the camp. It is not adultery, because adultery was punished by death (22:22). In Jesus' day there were two main schools of Jewish teachers. The school of Shammai said it meant some kind of sexual indecency. The school of Hillel said it could mean almost anything that displeased the husband, even burning his food. That is why the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause?" (Matthew 19:3).

"He writes for her a document of divorce." This written certificate protected the woman. It proved she was free and could marry again without being accused of adultery. A man could not simply throw her out with a word and later claim she was still his.

24:2-4 *and she goes out from his house and goes and becomes another man's, and the latter man hates her and writes for her a document of divorce and puts* ***it*** *in her hand and sends her away from his house, or if the latter man dies who took her for himself as a wife, her former husband who sent her away shall not be able to take her again to be his wife after she has been made unclean, for that* ***is*** *an abomination before the LORD; and you shall not cause the land to sin which the LORD your God is giving to you* ***as*** *an inheritance.*

"And she goes out from his house and goes and becomes another man's." She remarries. Then "the latter man hates her" and divorces her, or he dies.

Now comes the actual command: "her former husband who sent her away shall not be able to take her again to be his wife after she has been made unclean, for that is an abomination before the LORD."

Why? Scripture does not give every reason, but several are clear. It kept men from treating divorce lightly. A man who sent his wife away had to know it might be final. It protected the woman from being passed back and forth like property. And it guarded the holiness of marriage. "Made unclean" seems to mean that, as far as the first husband was concerned, her second marriage had made her off-limits to him. "You shall not cause the land to sin." The way a nation treats marriage affects the whole nation.

Jeremiah uses this very law in a moving way. God says, "a man sends away his wife, and she goes from him and belongs to another man; will he return to her again?" Then He says to faithless Israel, who had chased many false gods, "return to Me" (Jeremiah 3:1). Under the Law, a husband could not take back such a wife. But God, in His grace, calls His unfaithful people to come home. His love goes beyond what the Law allowed.

So what did Jesus say about this passage? When the Pharisees asked whether a man could divorce his wife "for every cause," Jesus did not start with Deuteronomy 24. He went back to Genesis. God "made them male and female," and "the two will become one flesh." "Therefore what God joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4-6). Marriage is God's work, not just a human contract.

They pushed back: "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to divorce her?" Jesus corrected them. Moses did not command it. "Moses, in view of your hardness of heart, permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been so" (Matthew 19:7-8). Deuteronomy 24 was a limit on sin, not God's plan. Then He said, "whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9).

Sincere Bible teachers differ on how to apply this today. Some believe divorce is allowed only for sexual immorality, as Jesus said, and that the innocent spouse may remarry. Many also see a second ground in 1 Corinthians 7:15, when an unbelieving spouse leaves. Others believe remarriage is not allowed while the first spouse lives, pointing to Mark 10:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, where no exception is given. All agree on what matters most: God hates the breaking of marriage (Malachi 2:16), marriage is meant for life, and no one should look for a way

out. Many readers have been through a divorce, some by their own sin and some by no choice of their own. The God who called faithless Israel to "return to Me" is still the God of grace. There is forgiveness and healing in Christ. A spouse who is in danger from abuse should get to safety and get help; that is not a sin.

24:5 *When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army, and nothing shall be imposed on him for any matter; he shall be free for his house one year, and he shall make his wife whom he has taken rejoice.*

"When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army." Chapter 20 sent home a man who was engaged (20:7). This goes further. For one year after the wedding he was free from war and from any public duty. "He shall be free for his house one year, and he shall make his wife whom he has taken rejoice."

What a beautiful law. The first year of marriage was to be protected. God wanted the new couple to have time to build their home and their love. The husband's job that year was to make his wife happy. Many marriages today would be stronger if husbands took that seriously. Is your marriage given the time and care it needs, or does everything else come first?

24:6 *No one shall take a hand mill or an upper millstone in pledge, for he is taking a life in pledge.*

"No one shall take a hand mill or an upper millstone in pledge, for he is taking a life in pledge." A pledge was something a borrower gave the lender to hold until the loan was repaid. A hand mill was two stones used to grind grain into flour every day. Without the upper stone, a family could not make bread. To take it was to take their daily food, their life. Lenders could not demand the things a family needed to live.

24:7 *If a man is found stealing a person of his brothers, of the sons of Israel, and he treats him as a slave and sells him, then that thief shall die; and you shall purge the evil from your midst.*

"If a man is found stealing a person of his brothers, of the sons of Israel, and he treats him as a slave and sells him, then that thief shall die." This is kidnapping for the slave trade. Exodus 21:16 gives the same law. Joseph's brothers did exactly this to him (Genesis 37:28), and it caused years of grief.

This law shows plainly that the Law of Moses did not allow slavery based on capturing and selling people. Paul lists "enslavers" among those the law condemns (1 Timothy 1:10). Those who later used the Bible to defend the Atlantic slave trade were defending the very thing this verse punishes by death.

24:8-9 *Take heed in the plague of leprosy, to be very careful and to do according to all that the priests, the Levites, instruct you; just as I commanded them, you shall be careful to do. Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out from Egypt.*

"Take heed in the plague of leprosy, to be very careful and to do according to all that the priests, the Levites, instruct you." Leprosy in the Bible covers a range of skin diseases, and even mold in

clothes and houses (Leviticus 13-14). The priests were to judge these cases and declare a person clean or unclean.

"Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out from Egypt." Miriam, Moses' sister, spoke against Moses, and God struck her with leprosy for seven days (Numbers 12:1-15). Why mention her here? Perhaps as a warning that no one was above these laws, not even Moses' own sister, and that God takes it seriously when we speak against those He has appointed.

Jesus touched lepers and healed them, and then sent them to show themselves to the priest, just as the Law said (Mark 1:40-44). He kept the Law while showing a compassion no priest could give.

24:10-11 *When you lend your neighbor a loan of anything, you shall not go into his house to take his pledge. You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you are lending shall bring out the pledge to you outside.*

"When you lend your neighbor a loan of anything, you shall not go into his house to take his pledge. You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you are lending shall bring out the pledge to you outside."

A poor man's home was still his own. The lender could not walk in and pick out what he wanted. The borrower chose what to give. This guarded the dignity of the poor. Being in debt did not mean losing your privacy or your self-respect. How we treat people when they owe us something says a lot about our hearts.

24:12-13 *And if he **is** a poor man, you shall not lie down in his pledge. You shall surely return the pledge to him as the sun sets, and he shall lie down in his garment and bless you; and it shall be righteousness for you before the LORD your God.*

"And if he is a poor man, you shall not lie down in his pledge." A very poor man might have nothing to give as a pledge except his cloak. The cloak was also his blanket at night. So "you shall surely return the pledge to him as the sun sets, and he shall lie down in his garment and bless you." Exodus 22:27 says God will hear the poor man who cries out because he is cold.

"And it shall be righteousness for you before the LORD your God." Kindness to the poor is counted as righteousness, right living before God. It is not how we are saved. It is how saved people live.

24:14-15 *You shall not oppress a hired worker **who is** poor and needy, of your brothers or of your sojourner who **is** in your land within your gates. On his day you shall give his wages, and the sun shall not set on it, for he **is** poor, and to it he is lifting up his soul, lest he cry against you to the LORD, and it be sin in you.*

"You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, of your brothers or of your sojourner." A hired worker was a day laborer. He worked for a day's wage and used it to feed his family that night.

"On his day you shall give his wages, and the sun shall not set on it, for he is poor, and to it he is lifting up his soul." He was counting on that money. To hold it back, even until morning, could mean his family went hungry. "Lest he cry against you to the LORD, and it be sin in you."

James warns rich employers who held back wages: "the cries of those who reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of armies" (James 5:4). Paying people fairly and on time is a matter of righteousness. If you employ people, pay them what you owe, when you owe it.

24:16 *Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, and sons shall not be put to death for fathers; each man for his **own** sin they shall be put to death.*

"Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, and sons shall not be put to death for fathers; each man for his own sin they shall be put to death." In many ancient nations, a whole family could be punished for one member's crime. Israel's courts were not to do that. Each person was responsible for his own sin.

King Amaziah obeyed this law when he executed the men who had murdered his father but spared their children (2 Kings 14:5-6). Ezekiel said the same: "A son shall not bear the iniquity of the father" (Ezekiel 18:20).

This helps us understand 5:9, where God visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children of those who hate Him. That speaks of the effects of sin passing down through families who keep following it, not of courts punishing the innocent. And there is one great exception, by God's own choice. The innocent Son of God did die for the sins of others, willingly, so that the guilty could go free (1 Peter 3:18).

24:17-18 *You shall not turn aside the judgment of a sojourner **or** a fatherless one, and you shall not take the clothing of a widow in pledge. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD your God ransomed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.*

"You shall not turn aside the judgment of a sojourner or a fatherless one, and you shall not take the clothing of a widow in pledge." The foreigner, the orphan and the widow had no one to stand up for them in court. God stood up for them. Judges were not to twist justice against them. And a widow's clothing was not to be taken as a pledge at all.

"And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD your God ransomed you from there." Israel had been the helpless ones once. God had rescued them. Now they were to protect the helpless. Those who know they have been rescued by grace should be the most generous people on earth.

24:19-22 *When you reap your harvest in your field, and you forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not return to take it; it shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless one, and for the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs after you; it shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless one, and for the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean after you; it shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless one, and for the widow. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.*

Three laws for the harvest. "When you reap your harvest in your field, and you forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not return to take it; it shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless one, and for the widow." A sheaf is a bundle of cut grain. If one was left behind, it belonged to the poor.

The same for olives. "When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs after you." Olives were knocked down with sticks. The farmer was to beat the tree once and leave what remained. The same for grapes: "you shall not glean after you." To glean is to go back and gather what was missed.

This was not a handout. The poor had to go into the fields and work to gather what was left. It gave them both food and dignity. Leviticus 19:9-10 adds that the corners of the field were to be left as well.

The book of Ruth shows this law at work. Ruth, a widow and a foreigner, went out to glean in the fields, and she came to the field of Boaz (Ruth 2:2-3). Boaz went beyond the law and told his workers to leave extra grain for her. That act of kindness led to a marriage, and the line of David, and in time the birth of Jesus Christ.

"So that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." God blesses the generous. "And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing." Do we leave room at the edges of our lives for those in need? Our time, our money and our attention can all be "gleaned" by others if we do not grab every last bit for ourselves.

Chapter 24 Summary

If a man divorced his wife because he found something indecent in her and gave her a certificate of divorce, and she married another man who also divorced her or died, the first husband could not take her back, for that was an abomination to the LORD. Moses allowed divorce because of the hardness of men's hearts, but Jesus pointed back to God's plan from the beginning: one man and one woman joined by God, whom no one should separate. A newly married man was free from war and public duty for a year to make his wife happy. No one could take a family's millstone in pledge. Kidnapping a person to sell him was punished by death. A lender could not enter a borrower's house to take a pledge, and a poor man's cloak had to be returned by night. A hired worker was to be paid the same day. Each person was put to death only for his own sin. Justice was not to be twisted against the foreigner, the orphan or the widow, and the forgotten sheaf and the last olives and grapes were to be left for them. Israel was to remember that they had been slaves in Egypt and the LORD had ransomed them.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. What case does 24:1-4 describe, and what is the only thing it actually commands? (24:4)

2. Why did the certificate of divorce protect the woman? (24:1)

3. How did Jesus answer the Pharisees' question about divorce, and why did Moses allow it? (Matthew 19:3-9)

4. How does Jeremiah 3:1 use this law to show God's grace toward unfaithful Israel?

5. Why was a newly married man to stay home for a year? (24:5)

6. Why could a lender not take a millstone, enter a borrower's house, or keep a poor man's cloak overnight? (24:6, 10-13)

7. What does 24:7 teach about kidnapping and selling people, and how does that bear on the history of slavery? (24:7; 1 Timothy 1:10)

8. Why were the harvest leftovers to be left for the poor, and how did this help Ruth? (24:19-22; Ruth 2:2-3)

9. If you are married, how are you guarding your marriage and seeking your spouse's joy? If you are not, how can you honor marriage in others? (24:5; Hebrews 13:4)

10. What "gleanings" of your time, money or attention could you leave for someone in need this week? (24:19-22)

Chapter 25: Fair Justice and the Brother's Widow

Scripture

25:1-10 If there is a dispute between men, and they draw near to the judgment, and they judge them, then they shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. And it shall be, if the wicked ***one is*** worthy of striking, then the judge shall make him lie down, and he shall be struck before him, as his wickedness deserves, by number. Forty ***strokes*** he may strike him; he shall not add, lest he add to strike him beyond these ***with*** a great striking, and your brother be dishonored in your eyes. You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing. When brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead ***man*** shall not be ***married*** outside to a strange man; her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her for himself as a wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be ***that*** the firstborn whom she bears shall stand on the name of his dead brother, and his name shall not be wiped out from Israel. And if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate, to the elders, and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to raise up for his brother a name in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' And the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and he shall stand and say, 'I do not desire to take her,' then his brother's wife shall draw near to him before the eyes of the elders, and draw his sandal off his foot, and spit in his face; and she shall answer and say, 'Thus it shall be done to the man who does not build the house of his brother.' And his name shall be called in Israel, 'The house of the ***one whose*** sandal ***was*** drawn off.'

25:11-19 When men struggle together, a man and his brother, and the wife of the one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the ***one*** striking him, and she stretches out her hand and takes hold of his private parts, then you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity. You shall not have in your bag a stone and a stone, a large and a small. You shall not have in your house an ephah and an ephah, a large and a small. A full and righteous stone you shall have, a full and righteous ephah you shall have, so that your days may be long on the ground which the LORD your God is giving to you. For everyone who does these ***things***, everyone who does injustice, ***is*** an abomination to the LORD your God. Remember what Amalek did to you on the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked among you in the rear all the stragglers behind you, and you ***were*** faint and weary; and he did not fear God. And it shall be, when the LORD your God gives you rest from all your enemies around, in the land which the LORD your God is giving to you ***as*** an inheritance to take possession of it, ***that*** you shall wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens; you shall not forget.

Chapter 25 Preview

Chapter 25 is the last group of short laws before Moses closes his long second sermon. They cover a lot of ground. A guilty man may be beaten, but never more than forty strokes, so that he is not shamed beyond what he deserves. An ox that threshes grain must not be muzzled. Paul quotes that little law twice to teach that those who serve the Lord should be supported. Then comes the law of the husband's brother: if a man died with no son, his brother was to marry the widow so

the dead man's name would not be wiped out of Israel. This law sits behind the story of Ruth and Boaz, and the Sadducees used it to try to trap Jesus.

The chapter ends with two hard passages. One is a strange and severe law about a woman who grabs a man in a fight. The other is the command to remember what Amalek did and to blot out its memory. I will handle both plainly and with care. In between them is a law about honest weights and measures, which still speaks to every business owner and every shopper today.

Chapter 25 Study

25:1-3 *If there is a dispute between men, and they draw near to the judgment, and they judge them, then they shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. And it shall be, if the wicked* ***one is*** *worthy of striking, then the judge shall make him lie down, and he shall be struck before him, as his wickedness deserves, by number. Forty* ***strokes*** *he may strike him; he shall not add, lest he add to strike him beyond these* ***with*** *a great striking, and your brother be dishonored in your eyes.*

"If there is a dispute between men, and they draw near to the judgment, and they judge them, then they shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked." That sounds obvious, but it is the heart of justice. Judges in Israel were not to take bribes or show favor (16:19). The innocent were to be cleared and the guilty found guilty. "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, even both of them are an abomination of the LORD" (Proverbs 17:15).

If the guilty man was "worthy of striking," the judge was to have him lie down and be beaten "before him, as his wickedness deserves, by number." The judge had to be there and count. The punishment had to fit the crime. It was not left to an angry crowd.

And there was a limit: "Forty strokes he may strike him; he shall not add." Why? "Lest he add to strike him beyond these with a great striking, and your brother be dishonored in your eyes." Notice that the guilty man is still called "your brother." Even when he was punished, he did not stop being a person made in God's image and a member of God's people. In later times the Jews gave forty strokes minus one, to be sure they never went over by mistake. Paul received that five times for preaching Christ (2 Corinthians 11:24).

What does this say to us? Justice and mercy are not enemies. A wrong must be dealt with, but even the guilty must not be crushed or humiliated beyond what is right.

25:4 *You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing.*

"You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing." In Israel, grain was threshed by driving an ox over the cut stalks, often pulling a heavy sled, to knock the grain loose. A muzzle would keep the ox from eating as it worked. God said no. Let the animal eat from the grain it is working to bring in. "A righteous one knows the life of his animal" (Proverbs 12:10).

But Paul saw more in this verse. He quoted it to show that those who preach the gospel have a right to be supported by the people they serve. "Is it for the oxen that God cares? Or does He say it entirely because of us? For it was written because of us" (1 Corinthians 9:9-10). Paul is not saying

God does not care about oxen. He is saying that if God wants even an ox to share in the harvest it helps bring in, how much more the men who labor for the souls of His people. He used the verse again for elders who work hard at preaching and teaching, and set it beside the words of Jesus, "The worker is worthy of his wages" (1 Timothy 5:18; Luke 10:7).

This is a good example of how the New Testament reads the Law. The plain meaning stands: be kind to your animals. And the principle behind it reaches further: be fair to those who work for you, and support those who serve you in the Lord. Paul himself often chose not to use that right so that no one could say he preached for money (1 Corinthians 9:12, 15). But the church should still take care of those who labor among them.

25:5-6 *When brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead* ***man*** *shall not be* ***married*** *outside to a strange man; her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her for himself as a wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be* ***that*** *the firstborn whom she bears shall stand on the name of his dead brother, and his name shall not be wiped out from Israel.*

"When brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside to a strange man." Here "a strange man" means a man outside the family. Instead, "her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her for himself as a wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her."

This is called levirate marriage, from the Latin word levir, which means a husband's brother. It was already practiced before the Law. In Genesis 38, Judah's son Onan refused to raise up a child for his dead brother, and the LORD put him to death for it (Genesis 38:8-10).

What was the purpose? "The firstborn whom she bears shall stand on the name of his dead brother, and his name shall not be wiped out from Israel." The first son of this marriage would be counted as the dead man's son. He would carry on his name and inherit his share of the land. In Israel, land was tied to families, and God had given each family its portion (Numbers 27:1-11). This law kept a family line and its land from disappearing.

It also protected the widow. A woman with no husband and no son often had no one to provide for her. This law gave her a home, a husband and a future within her husband's family.

The law has the words "when brothers dwell together," so it seems to have applied when the brothers lived near each other, probably on the family land. It was not meant to force a married brother far away to take a second household. Like the other marriage laws, it was given to Israel under the Mosaic covenant, and it is not a command for Christians today.

25:7-10 *And if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate, to the elders, and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to raise up for his brother a name in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' And the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and he shall stand and say, 'I do not desire to take her,' then his brother's wife shall draw near to him before the eyes of the elders, and draw his sandal off his foot, and spit in his face; and she shall answer and say, 'Thus it shall be done to the man who does not build the house of his brother.' And his name shall be called in Israel, 'The house of the* ***one whose*** *sandal* ***was*** *drawn off.'*

What if the brother refused? Then the widow could go "up to the gate, to the elders." The city gate was where the elders sat as a court. She was to say, "My husband's brother refuses to raise up for his brother a name in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me."

The elders would call him and speak to him. If he still said, "I do not desire to take her," the widow was to come to him before the elders, "draw his sandal off his foot, and spit in his face." Then she would say, "Thus it shall be done to the man who does not build the house of his brother." His family would be known as "The house of the one whose sandal was drawn off."

The sandal was a sign of a man's right to walk on and claim land. Taking it off showed that he had given up his right and his duty. The spitting was a public shame. He had not been forced to marry her. He could refuse. But he could not refuse quietly. He had put his own interest ahead of his brother's name and his brother's widow, and the whole town would know it.

The book of Ruth shows a form of this law at work. Ruth was a widow from Moab. Boaz was a relative of her dead husband, a kinsman-redeemer. A kinsman-redeemer, in Hebrew go'el, was a close relative with the right and duty to buy back family land, free a relative sold into slavery, and care for the family. A closer relative would not take Ruth, and he drew off his sandal and gave it to Boaz (Ruth 4:6-8). Boaz said he was taking Ruth as his wife "to raise up the name of the dead man over his inheritance" (Ruth 4:10). From that marriage came Obed, the grandfather of King David, and in time Jesus Christ (Ruth 4:17; Matthew 1:5-6).

The Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, once used this law to try to trap Jesus. They told of a woman who married seven brothers in turn, and asked whose wife she would be in the resurrection. Jesus told them they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God: "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:23-30).

And here is a picture of Christ. Like Boaz, Jesus became our near Relative by becoming a man. He was willing to pay the price to redeem us when no one else could (Galatians 4:4-5; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

25:11-12 *When men struggle together, a man and his brother, and the wife of the one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the **one** striking him, and she stretches out her hand and takes hold of his private parts, then you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity.*

This is one of the strangest laws in the Bible, and one of the hardest. Two men are fighting. The wife of one of them comes to help her husband, "and she stretches out her hand and takes hold of his private parts." The penalty: "you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity."

Why such a severe law? We should be honest that it is hard to read. Here is what it seems to be about. The woman was not defending her own life. She was helping her husband in a fight, and she did it by an act that was both shameful and could injure the other man so that he could never father children. In Israel, a man's ability to have children and carry on his name was guarded closely. That is why this law sits right after the law about raising up a name for a dead brother. To destroy that ability was a grave wrong, and the law treated it as such.

This is the only place in the Law of Moses where a punishment of this kind is commanded. The law of "eye for eye" (19:21) set a limit so that the punishment would fit the crime. Here, since the woman could not suffer the same injury, a different penalty was given. Later Jewish teachers commonly read this law as requiring a payment of money for the shame and the harm done, not the cutting off of a hand. Bible teachers today hold both views.

What do we take from this? God guards the dignity of the body and the gift of having children. Even in a fight, there are lines that must not be crossed. And like the other penalties of the Law, this one was given to Israel's courts under the Mosaic covenant. It is not a law for the church, and it is never a reason for anyone to harm another person.

25:13-16 *You shall not have in your bag a stone and a stone, a large and a small. You shall not have in your house an ephah and an ephah, a large and a small. A full and righteous stone you shall have, a full and righteous ephah you shall have, so that your days may be long on the ground which the LORD your God is giving to you. For everyone who does these **things**, everyone who does injustice, **is** an abomination to the LORD your God.*

"You shall not have in your bag a stone and a stone, a large and a small." Merchants weighed goods on a balance scale with stones as weights. A dishonest seller kept two sets: a heavy stone for buying, so he got more, and a light one for selling, so he gave less. "You shall not have in your house an ephah and an ephah, a large and a small." An ephah was a dry measure of grain, about 20 quarts, a little over half a bushel.

Instead: "A full and righteous stone you shall have, a full and righteous ephah you shall have." Honest business was tied to blessing: "so that your days may be long on the ground."

Then a strong word: "everyone who does injustice, is an abomination to the LORD your God." We often think of an abomination as idolatry or sexual sin. God puts cheating in business in the same list. "Scales of deceit are an abomination of the LORD, and a perfect weight is His delight" (Proverbs 11:1). The prophets later condemned Israel for this very sin (Amos 8:5; Micah 6:11).

How does this apply today? Most of us do not carry weighing stones. But we do set prices, fill out time sheets, report income, describe what we are selling and keep promises to customers. God sees all of it. A Christian should be the most honest person in any deal. Paul says, "whatever you do, work from the soul, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23).

25:17-19 *Remember what Amalek did to you on the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked among you in the rear all the stragglers behind you, and you **were** faint and weary; and he did not fear God. And it shall be, when the LORD your God gives you rest from all your enemies around, in the land which the LORD your God is giving to you **as** an inheritance to take possession of it, **that** you shall wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens; you shall not forget.*

"Remember what Amalek did to you on the way when you came out from Egypt." The Amalekites were a desert people who descended from Esau's grandson Amalek (Genesis 36:12). When Israel had just left Egypt, "Amalek came, and he fought with Israel at Rephidim" (Exodus 17:8). Moses prayed on the hill while Joshua fought below, and the LORD gave the victory.

Moses tells us here what Exodus did not: how Amalek attacked. "He met you on the way and attacked among you in the rear all the stragglers behind you, and you were faint and weary." They did not face Israel's fighting men. They picked off the weak, the old, the sick and the tired who lagged behind. "And he did not fear God."

So God gave this command: "when the LORD your God gives you rest from all your enemies around," then "you shall wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens; you shall not forget." God had already said this in Exodus 17:14: "I will surely wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens."

This is a hard command, and it raises the same honest questions as the destruction of the nations of Canaan in chapters 7 and 20. Here is what I believe the Bible shows. This was God's judgment, not Israel's private revenge. It was aimed at a nation that preyed on the helpless and kept on making war against God's people for generations (Judges 6:3; 1 Samuel 30:1-2). God waited hundreds of years before carrying it out. It was not given to Israel to act on whenever they pleased, but "when the LORD your God gives you rest." And it was a command for that people at that time, given by God Himself through His prophet. It is never a license for any person or nation today to hate or attack a people group.

The command came due in the days of King Saul. God told him through Samuel to destroy Amalek, and Saul disobeyed and spared the king and the best of the animals. It cost him his kingdom (1 Samuel 15:1-23). Many years later, Haman, the man who tried to destroy every Jew in Persia, was "the Agagite," which likely means he came from the line of Agag, the king of Amalek (Esther 3:1; 1 Samuel 15:8).

What does this teach us? God sees how the weak are treated. Those who prey on the faint and weary will answer to Him. And God does not forget evil, even when people do. But for us, vengeance belongs to God, not to us. Paul writes, "not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath," for God has said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Romans 12:19). Jesus calls His

people to love even their enemies (Matthew 5:44). And He Himself is the One who cares for the stragglers. He is the Good Shepherd who goes after the one that is lost and carries the weak (Luke 15:4-5; Isaiah 40:11).

Chapter 25 Summary

Judges were to clear the righteous and condemn the wicked, and a guilty man could be beaten only under the judge's eye and never more than forty strokes, because he was still a brother. An ox threshing grain was not to be muzzled, a law Paul used to teach that gospel workers should be supported. If a man died with no son, his brother was to marry the widow so the first son would carry on the dead man's name and land; a brother who refused was shamed before the elders by having his sandal drawn off. This law stands behind the story of Ruth and Boaz, which leads to David and to Christ. A woman who seized a man's private parts in a fight was to lose her hand, a hard law that guarded a man's ability to have children. Weights and measures had to be honest, for cheating is an abomination to the LORD. Israel was to remember how Amalek attacked the weary stragglers and, when God gave them rest, to blot out Amalek's memory, a judgment God Himself had decreed.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. What limits did the Law put on a court beating, and why does it call the guilty man "your brother"? (25:1-3)

2. How does Paul use the law about not muzzling an ox? (25:4; 1 Corinthians 9:9-10; 1 Timothy 5:18)

3. What was the duty of a husband's brother, and what two things did it protect? (25:5-6)

4. What happened if the brother refused, and why was it done in public? (25:7-10)

5. How does the story of Ruth and Boaz show this kind of law at work, and where did it lead? (Ruth 4:6-17; Matthew 1:5-6)

6. How did Jesus answer the Sadducees who used this law to question the resurrection? (Matthew 22:23-30)

7. Why does God call dishonest weights an abomination? (25:13-16; Proverbs 11:1)

8. What did Amalek do, and why did God judge them? (25:17-19; Exodus 17:8-16)

9. Where in your work or business are you tempted to use "a large and a small" measure, one standard for yourself and another for others?

10. Who are the "faint and weary" stragglers around you, and how can you protect and help them instead of passing them by? (25:18; Isaiah 40:11)

Chapter 26: Firstfruits and the Tithe

Scripture

26:1-11 And it shall be, when you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you ***as*** an inheritance, and you take possession of it and dwell in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground which you bring in from your land which the LORD your God is giving to you, and you shall put ***it*** in the basket and go to the place which the LORD your God will choose to cause His name to dwell there. And you shall come to the priest who shall be in those days, and say to him, 'I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land which the LORD swore to our fathers to give to us.' And the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. And you shall answer and say before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean ***was*** my father, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and numerous. And the Egyptians treated us badly and afflicted us, and put hard labor on us. And we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression. And the LORD brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and with wonders. And He brought us to this place and gave to us this land, a land flowing ***with*** milk and honey. And now, look, I have brought the first of the fruit of the ground which You have given to me, O LORD.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and bow down before the LORD your God. And you shall rejoice in all the good which the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you and the Levite and the sojourner who ***is*** in your midst.

26:12-19 When you have finished tithing all the tithe of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, and you have given ***it*** to the Levite, to the sojourner, to the fatherless one, and to the widow, and they have eaten within your gates and been satisfied, then you shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the holy ***portion*** from the house, and also I have given it to the Levite and to the sojourner, to the fatherless one, and to the widow, according to all Your commandment which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed ***any*** of Your commandments, and I have not forgotten ***them***. I have not eaten of it in my mourning, and I have not removed ***any*** of it while unclean, and I have not given ***any*** of it for the dead; I have listened to the voice of the LORD my God; I have done according to all that You have commanded me. Look down from the habitation of Your holiness, from the heavens, and bless Your people Israel and the ground which You have given to us, just as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing ***with*** milk and honey.' This day the LORD your God is commanding you to do these statutes and the judgments; and you shall be careful and do them with all your heart and with all your soul. The LORD you have declared today to be your God, and to walk in His ways, and to keep His statutes and His commandments and His judgments, and to listen to His voice. And the LORD has declared you today to be for Him a people of treasured possession, just as He spoke to you, and to keep all His commandments, and to set you high above all the nations which He has made, for praise and for a name and for beauty, and for you to be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He spoke."

Chapter 26 Preview

Moses has spent fifteen chapters on the laws for life in the land. He closes that long section the way it began, with worship at the place the LORD would choose (12:5). Chapter 26 gives two short services an Israelite farmer would carry out once he was living in the land. The first is the offering of firstfruits. He brings a basket of the first produce of his ground to the priest and says a short confession of faith that tells Israel's whole story in a few lines: a wandering Aramean, slavery in Egypt, a cry to God, a mighty rescue, and a good land. The second is a prayer after the tithe of the third year, given to the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan and the widow.

The chapter ends with both sides of the covenant spoken out loud. Israel declares that the LORD is their God and that they will walk in His ways. The LORD declares that Israel is His treasured possession, a holy people. A covenant is a binding agreement, and here it is sealed in words before the blessings and curses of chapters 27 and 28.

Chapter 26 Study

26:1-2 *And it shall be, when you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you **as** an inheritance, and you take possession of it and dwell in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground which you bring in from your land which the LORD your God is giving to you, and you shall put **it** in the basket and go to the place which the LORD your God will choose to cause His name to dwell there.*

"When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you as an inheritance, and you take possession of it and dwell in it." Moses is looking ahead. Israel had no fields yet. They had eaten manna for forty years. But one day they would plant and harvest, and God wanted their first harvest to be marked with thanks.

"You shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground." The firstfruits were the first and best of the harvest, given before the rest was gathered. The farmer was to put it "in the basket and go to the place which the LORD your God will choose to cause His name to dwell there." That place would one day be Jerusalem.

Why the first? Giving God the first, not the leftovers, was a way of saying that it all belongs to Him and that He comes first. "Honor the LORD from your wealth, and from the first of all your yield" (Proverbs 3:9). It was also an act of faith. The farmer gave the first before he knew how big the rest of the harvest would be.

26:3-4 *And you shall come to the priest who shall be in those days, and say to him, 'I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land which the LORD swore to our fathers to give to us.' And the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.*

"You shall come to the priest who shall be in those days, and say to him, 'I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land which the LORD swore to our fathers to give to us.'"

Think about what that sentence meant. God had sworn to give the land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob hundreds of years before (Genesis 12:7; 15:18). They never owned more than a burial plot. Now an ordinary farmer could stand at the altar with a basket of grain and say, I am living in it. God kept His word. Every basket was proof.

"The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God." The gift went to God, and then, as 18:4 says, it went to support the priests.

26:5 *And you shall answer and say before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean **was** my father, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and numerous.*

Now comes the confession. "A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and numerous."

Who is the wandering Aramean? Most teachers believe it is Jacob. His mother's family came from Aram, the land north and east of Canaan, and he lived there twenty years with his uncle Laban, who is called "Laban the Aramean" (Genesis 31:20). Hosea says, "Jacob fled to the field of Syria" (Hosea 12:12), Syria being the Greek name for Aram. Jacob went down to Egypt with about seventy people (Genesis 46:27), and they grew into a nation. Some think the verse may also look back to Abraham, who came from that same region.

Notice how humble this is. Israel did not begin with kings and armies. They began with a homeless, wandering man. Every Israelite was to remember that. God chose them, not because they were great, but because He loved them (7:7-8).

Notice also the word "my." The farmer did not say "their father." He said "my father." Israel's history was his own history.

26:6-9 *And the Egyptians treated us badly and afflicted us, and put hard labor on us. And we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression. And the LORD brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and with wonders. And He brought us to this place and gave to us this land, a land flowing **with** milk and honey.*

The confession goes on. "And the Egyptians treated us badly and afflicted us, and put hard labor on us." Notice the change from "my father" to "us." The farmer counts himself with the slaves in Egypt, though he was born in the wilderness or later. God's people share one story.

"And we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression." This is what God does. He hears and He sees (Exodus 3:7).

"And the LORD brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and with wonders." The ten plagues, the Passover and the crossing of the sea are all summed up in that line.

"And He brought us to this place and gave to us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey." Milk and honey describe a rich land, with good pasture for herds and flowers for bees.

This short confession is sometimes called Israel's creed, a statement of what they believed. Notice that it is not a list of ideas. It is a list of things God did in history. Israel's faith was built on real events.

The Christian faith is built the same way. Paul gives the gospel this way: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Our faith rests on what God has done, not on what we feel.

26:10-11 *And now, look, I have brought the first of the fruit of the ground which You have given to me, O LORD.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and bow down before the LORD your God. And you shall rejoice in all the good which the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you and the Levite and the sojourner who **is** in your midst.*

"And now, look, I have brought the first of the fruit of the ground which You have given to me, O LORD." Notice the words "which You have given to me." The farmer had plowed, planted and harvested. But he knew the land and the rain and the growth all came from God. "Every good giving and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17).

"And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and bow down before the LORD your God." Giving was worship.

"And you shall rejoice in all the good which the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you and the Levite and the sojourner who is in your midst." The offering ended in a celebration. And the Levite, who had no land, and the sojourner, the foreigner living among them, were to share in the joy. Thanksgiving to God always spills over into generosity to others.

There is a picture of Christ here that the New Testament itself gives. Paul says Christ "became the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). His resurrection is the first part of the harvest, and it guarantees that the rest will follow. Because He rose, all who belong to Him will rise too.

26:12 *When you have finished tithing all the tithe of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, and you have given **it** to the Levite, to the sojourner, to the fatherless one, and to the widow, and they have eaten within your gates and been satisfied,*

"When you have finished tithing all the tithe of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe." A tithe is a tenth. Every third year, the tithe was not taken to the central sanctuary but stored in the local towns, as 14:28-29 explains. It was given "to the Levite, to the sojourner, to the fatherless one, and to the widow, and they have eaten within your gates and been satisfied."

This was something like a welfare system built into Israel's worship. The people who had no land and no one to provide for them were fed out of the harvest of their neighbors, in their own town, every third year. God's care for the poor was not left to chance.

26:13-14 *then you shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the holy **portion** from the house, and also I have given it to the Levite and to the sojourner, to the fatherless one, and to the widow, according to all Your commandment which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed **any** of Your commandments, and I have not forgotten **them**. I have not eaten of it in my mourning, and I have not removed **any** of it while unclean, and I have not given **any** of it for the dead; I have listened to the voice of the LORD my God; I have done according to all that You have commanded me.*

After the tithe was given, the Israelite was to make a declaration before the LORD. "I have removed the holy portion from the house, and also I have given it to the Levite and to the sojourner, to the fatherless one, and to the widow, according to all Your commandment."

He then names three things he had not done with it. "I have not eaten of it in my mourning, and I have not removed any of it while unclean, and I have not given any of it for the dead." The tithe was holy. It was not to be touched by uncleanness or used in mourning. "For the dead" may mean as an offering to the dead or food for a funeral meal. The Canaanites gave food to the dead as part of their religion. Israel's gifts belonged to the living God alone.

"I have listened to the voice of the LORD my God; I have done according to all that You have commanded me."

Is this proud? No. It is not a claim to be sinless. It is a statement of honest obedience in one matter: I did what You told me with this tithe. Can you say that before God about what He has asked of you? It is a good thing to be able to say, with a clear conscience, I did what You asked.

26:15 *Look down from the habitation of Your holiness, from the heavens, and bless Your people Israel and the ground which You have given to us, just as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing **with** milk and honey.'*

"Look down from the habitation of Your holiness, from the heavens, and bless Your people Israel and the ground which You have given to us, just as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey."

The prayer ends by asking for blessing, not for himself alone, but for "Your people Israel." The Israelite had cared for the needy. Now he asked God to care for the whole nation. God lives in heaven, high and holy, and yet He looks down and blesses His people on the earth.

Generosity and prayer go together. Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38). God is not in our debt, but He loves to bless those who give freely.

26:16-19 *This day the LORD your God is commanding you to do these statutes and the judgments; and you shall be careful and do them with all your heart and with all your soul. The LORD you have declared today to be your God, and to walk in His ways, and to keep His statutes and His commandments and His judgments, and to listen to His voice. And the LORD has declared you today to be for Him a people of treasured possession, just as He spoke to you, and to keep all His commandments, and to set you high above all the nations which He has made, for praise and for a name and for beauty, and for you to be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He spoke."*

"This day the LORD your God is commanding you to do these statutes and the judgments; and you shall be careful and do them with all your heart and with all your soul." This is the end of the laws that began in chapter 12. And the call is the same as in 6:5: obey with all your heart and soul.

Then both sides of the covenant are spoken. First Israel's side: "The LORD you have declared today to be your God, and to walk in His ways, and to keep His statutes and His commandments and His judgments, and to listen to His voice."

Then God's side: "the LORD has declared you today to be for Him a people of treasured possession, just as He spoke to you." A treasured possession is a king's personal treasure, kept close and valued above everything else. God had said this at Sinai: "you shall be to Me a treasured possession out of all the peoples" (Exodus 19:5).

God promised "to set you high above all the nations which He has made, for praise and for a name and for beauty, and for you to be a holy people to the LORD your God." Israel was meant to show the world what God is like.

Peter uses the same words for believers in Jesus: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). The church does not replace Israel. God still has His promises for Israel, as we will see in chapter 30. But through Christ, believers from every nation are also made God's own people (Titus 2:14). And our purpose is the same: to show the world the goodness of God.

Chapter 26 Summary

When Israel was living in the land, each farmer was to bring a basket of firstfruits to the place the LORD would choose and declare to the priest that he had come into the land God promised. Then he was to confess Israel's story: a wandering Aramean went down to Egypt, became a great nation, was oppressed, cried out to the LORD, and was brought out with a strong hand and given a land flowing with milk and honey. He was to bow down and rejoice with the Levite and the foreigner. In the third year, after giving the tithe to the Levite, foreigner, orphan and widow, he was to declare that he had obeyed and kept it holy, and to ask God to bless Israel. The laws end with both sides of the covenant: Israel declares that the LORD is their God, and the LORD declares Israel His treasured possession and holy people. Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection, and believers in Him are also God's own people.

Chapter 26 Study Questions

1. Why did God want the first of the harvest instead of what was left over? (26:2; Proverbs 3:9)

2. What did a farmer's basket of firstfruits prove about God's promise to the fathers? (26:3)

3. Who is the "wandering Aramean," and why do you think Israel was to remember such a humble beginning? (26:5; Genesis 31:20)

4. Retell the confession of 26:5-9 in your own words. Why is it built on events instead of ideas?

5. Who was to share in the joy of the firstfruits, and what does that teach about thanksgiving? (26:11)

6. What was done with the tithe of the third year, and who did it help? (26:12; 14:28-29)

7. What does it mean for Israel to be God's "treasured possession," and how does Peter use the same idea for believers? (26:18; Exodus 19:5; 1 Peter 2:9)

8. How is Christ "the firstfruits" of the resurrection, and what does that promise those who belong to Him? (1 Corinthians 15:20)

9. Do you give God your first, or what is left over? What would it look like to give Him the first of your time, money or energy this week?

10. If you wrote a short confession of what God has done in your own life, what events would you name? (26:5-10)

Chapter 27: The Altar on Mount Ebal and the Curses

Scripture

27:1-10 And Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, "Keep all the commandment which I am commanding you today. And it shall be, on the day when you pass over the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, that you shall set up for yourself large stones and plaster them with lime. And you shall write on them all the words of this law when you pass over, so that you may go into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, a land flowing ***with*** milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, spoke to you. And it shall be, when you have passed over the Jordan, ***that*** you shall set up these stones, which I am commanding you today, on the mountain of Ebal, and you shall plaster them with lime. And you shall build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield iron on them. ***With*** whole stones you shall build the altar of the LORD your God, and you shall offer up burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. And you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law, very plainly." And Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, "Be silent and hear, Israel: this day you have become a people for the LORD your God. And you shall listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do His commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today."

27:11-26 And Moses commanded the people on that day, saying, "These shall stand to bless the people on the mountain of Gerizim when you have passed over the Jordan: Simeon and Levi and Judah and Issachar and Joseph and Benjamin. And these shall stand for the curse on the mountain of Ebal: Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. And the Levites shall answer and say to every man of Israel ***with*** a raised voice: 'Cursed ***is*** the man who makes a carved image and a cast image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of a craftsman, and sets ***it*** up in secret.' And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who dishonors his father and his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who moves back the boundary of his neighbor.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who makes a blind ***man*** wander on the way.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who turns aside the judgment of a sojourner, a fatherless one, and a widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who lies with the wife of his father, for he has uncovered the skirt of his father.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who lies with any animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who lies with his mother-in-law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who strikes his neighbor in secret.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who takes a bribe to strike down a person of innocent blood.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed ***is*** he who does not establish the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"

Chapter 27 Preview

Moses' long second sermon has ended with the covenant spoken on both sides (26:16-19). Now Moses, with the elders and the priests, gives Israel instructions for a ceremony they were to hold

as soon as they crossed the Jordan. In the middle of the land, at two mountains near the town of Shechem, they were to set up large stones covered with plaster and write the words of the Law on them. They were to build an altar of uncut stones on Mount Ebal and offer sacrifices there. Then the tribes were to divide, six on Mount Gerizim for the blessing and six on Mount Ebal for the curse, while the Levites called out twelve curses and all the people answered, "Amen."

Joshua carried out this command after the fall of Jericho and Ai (Joshua 8:30-35). The twelve curses in this chapter name sins that are mostly done in secret, where no human court could see. The last one covers everything: cursed is anyone who does not keep the words of this Law. Paul quotes that verse to show that no one can be made right with God by the Law, and that Christ took the curse for us (Galatians 3:10-13).

Chapter 27 Study

27:1-4 *And Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, "Keep all the commandment which I am commanding you today. And it shall be, on the day when you pass over the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, that you shall set up for yourself large stones and plaster them with lime. And you shall write on them all the words of this law when you pass over, so that you may go into the land which the LORD your God is giving to you, a land flowing **with** milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, spoke to you. And it shall be, when you have passed over the Jordan, **that** you shall set up these stones, which I am commanding you today, on the mountain of Ebal, and you shall plaster them with lime.*

"And Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people." Their charge was, "Keep all the commandment which I am commanding you today." For the first time in the book, the elders stand with Moses. Moses would soon be gone, and the leaders who stayed would have to carry on what he taught.

"On the day when you pass over the Jordan," Israel was to "set up for yourself large stones and plaster them with lime." Then they were to "write on them all the words of this law." In the ancient world, writing was sometimes done this way: a wall or stone was coated with white plaster and the words were painted or cut into it while it was soft. The words would be large, white and easy to read.

"All the words of this law" probably means the laws of Deuteronomy, or at least its main commands, not all five books of Moses. Even so, it was a lot of writing, and the stones were large.

They were to set them up "on the mountain of Ebal." Ebal and Gerizim are two mountains that face each other with a narrow valley between them, in the middle of the land. The town of Shechem lay in that valley. It was there that God first appeared to Abraham in Canaan and promised, "To your seed I will give this land," and Abraham built an altar (Genesis 12:6-7). Now Abraham's children would claim that promise in the same place.

Why write the Law on stones? A nation is shaped by the words it puts at its center. The first thing Israel was to do in the land was to set up God's Word where everyone could see it. What words are at the center of your home?

27:5-8 *And you shall build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield iron on them.* ***With*** *whole stones you shall build the altar of the LORD your God, and you shall offer up burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. And you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law, very plainly."*

"And you shall build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield iron on them." The stones were to be whole, uncut by any tool. God had said the same at Sinai: "if you make for Me an altar of stones, you shall not build them of hewn stone" (Exodus 20:25). Why? Perhaps so that no one would be tempted to carve images or decorate the altar to show off human skill. The altar was to be God's work, not man's. In the same way, our salvation is God's work, not ours. We add nothing to it.

On that altar they were to offer "burnt offerings," which were burned whole to God as an act of full dedication, and "peace offerings," which were shared in a meal. A peace offering showed fellowship with God. "And you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God."

Notice the order. The Law was written on the stones, and right beside it was the altar. The Law shows us God's holy standard. The altar shows that God made a way for sinners to come to Him. Israel needed both, and so do we. The Law shows us our sin, and the sacrifice, which points to Christ, deals with it.

"And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law, very plainly." God's Word was not meant to be hidden or hard to read. It was meant to be clear.

Joshua did exactly this. He "built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on the mountain of Ebal," "an altar of whole stones on which no one had wielded iron," and "he wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses" (Joshua 8:30-32). Some archaeologists believe they have found the remains of this altar on Mount Ebal, though others disagree.

27:9-10 *And Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, "Be silent and hear, Israel: this day you have become a people for the LORD your God. And you shall listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do His commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today."*

"Be silent and hear, Israel: this day you have become a people for the LORD your God." Israel had been God's people since the exodus. But here, at the renewal of the covenant on the plains of Moab, the new generation was taking that covenant as their own.

"And you shall listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do His commandments and His statutes." Notice the order again. First, "you have become a people for the LORD." Then, "you shall listen." God's people do not obey to become His people. They obey because they are His people. That is true for Christians too. We are saved by grace, and then we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

27:11-14 *And Moses commanded the people on that day, saying, "These shall stand to bless the people on the mountain of Gerizim when you have passed over the Jordan: Simeon and Levi and Judah and Issachar and Joseph and Benjamin. And these shall stand for the curse on the mountain of Ebal: Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. And the Levites shall answer and say to every man of Israel* ***with*** *a raised voice:*

Now Moses gives the plan for the ceremony. Six tribes were to "stand to bless the people on the mountain of Gerizim": "Simeon and Levi and Judah and Issachar and Joseph and Benjamin." Six were to "stand for the curse on the mountain of Ebal": "Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali."

Is there a reason for the split? The tribes on Gerizim were all sons of Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel. Four of the tribes on Ebal came from the two servant women, Bilhah and Zilpah. Reuben was there too; he was Jacob's firstborn, but he lost his place by his sin (Genesis 49:3-4). Zebulun was Leah's youngest son. Scripture does not tell us the reason, so we should not press it. Levi stood on Gerizim, and yet "the Levites" also called out the curses, so it seems the priests and some Levites stood in the valley between the mountains, by the ark (Joshua 8:33).

"And the Levites shall answer and say to every man of Israel with a raised voice." The words would echo between the mountains. Every person would hear.

Notice that the blessings are not listed in this chapter, only the curses. The blessings come in chapter 28.

27:15 *'Cursed* ***is*** *the man who makes a carved image and a cast image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of a craftsman, and sets* ***it*** *up in secret.' And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen.'*

The first curse: "Cursed is the man who makes a carved image and a cast image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret." And all the people were to answer, "Amen." Amen means so be it, or it is true. By saying it, each person agreed with God's judgment and placed himself under it.

Notice the words "in secret." This is the key to all twelve curses. Most of the sins named here are ones that could be hidden from the elders and the courts. A man could keep an idol in a back room, and no judge would know. But God would know. These curses were God's answer to the secret sinner: you may hide it from men, but you are under My curse.

This first curse breaks the first two commandments (5:7-9). It comes first because idolatry was the root of every other sin in Israel.

27:16-19 *'Cursed **is** he who dishonors his father and his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed **is** he who moves back the boundary of his neighbor.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed **is** he who makes a blind **man** wander on the way.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed **is** he who turns aside the judgment of a sojourner, a fatherless one, and a widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'*

"Cursed is he who dishonors his father and his mother." This is the fifth commandment (5:16), turned around. To dishonor parents can mean to treat them with contempt, to mock them, or to neglect them when they are old.

"Cursed is he who moves back the boundary of his neighbor." Land boundaries were marked with stones. Moving one at night was a quiet way to steal a neighbor's land (19:14).

"Cursed is he who makes a blind man wander on the way." To lead a blind man astray, as a cruel joke or to rob him, was to take advantage of someone who could not defend himself (Leviticus 19:14).

"Cursed is he who turns aside the judgment of a sojourner, a fatherless one, and a widow." These were the people with no one to speak for them in court. A man who twisted justice against them might never be caught, because they had no power to fight back.

Do you see the pattern? These sins are against the weak and the trusting: aging parents, a sleeping neighbor, the blind, the foreigner, the orphan, the widow. God takes it personally when the helpless are harmed. Jesus said that whatever we do to the least of His brothers, we do to Him (Matthew 25:40).

27:20-23 *'Cursed **is** he who lies with the wife of his father, for he has uncovered the skirt of his father.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed **is** he who lies with any animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed **is** he who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed **is** he who lies with his mother-in-law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'*

The next four curses deal with sexual sin, mostly within the family. "Cursed is he who lies with the wife of his father," meaning his stepmother, as in 22:30. "Cursed is he who lies with any animal." "Cursed is he who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother," which includes a half sister. "Cursed is he who lies with his mother-in-law."

These are the sins of Leviticus 18 and 20. The Canaanites practiced them openly, and they were among the reasons God judged the land (Leviticus 18:24-28). Within a family, they could also be kept secret, hidden by shame and fear. That is why they are named here.

God made marriage and family good, and He guards them. These sins destroy trust in the very place a person should be safest. If you have been harmed this way by someone in your family, it was not your fault, and God sees it. Please tell someone you trust and get help. And if you have done these things, there is forgiveness in Christ for those who repent, and you must also stop and make it right, including facing the law where a crime has been done (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

27:24-25 *'Cursed **is** he who strikes his neighbor in secret.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed **is** he who takes a bribe to strike down a person of innocent blood.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'*

"Cursed is he who strikes his neighbor in secret." This is murder done in secret, an ambush where no one sees (19:11). "Cursed is he who takes a bribe to strike down a person of innocent blood." This could mean a hired killer, or a judge or witness who takes money to see an innocent person condemned to death. Either way, an innocent life was traded for money.

Again the words "in secret." A murderer might escape every court on earth. He would never escape God. Hebrews says, "there is no creature hidden before Him, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom our account is to be given" (Hebrews 4:13).

27:26 *'Cursed **is** he who does not establish the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"*

"Cursed is he who does not establish the words of this law by doing them." And all the people said, "Amen."

This last curse covers everything. It is not only about the eleven sins named before. Anyone who did not keep the whole Law was under the curse. And all Israel said, so be it.

Can anyone stand under that? Paul quotes this verse in Galatians: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all the things written in the book of the law, to do them" (Galatians 3:10). His point is simple. If you try to be made right with God by keeping the Law, you must keep all of it, all the time. And no one has. "For whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). The Law can show us our sin, but it cannot save us (Romans 3:20).

Then Paul gives the good news: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). He goes on to quote Deuteronomy 21:23, that one who hangs on a tree is cursed. Jesus took the curse that we deserved when He hung on the cross. The "Amen" Israel spoke on Mount Ebal was the sentence on all of us. Jesus bore it, so that all who believe in Him receive the blessing instead (Galatians 3:14).

That is why the altar stood next to the written Law on Mount Ebal. The Law said, cursed. The altar said, there is a sacrifice. And the cross says, it is finished.

Chapter 27 Summary

Moses and the elders commanded Israel, as soon as they crossed the Jordan, to set up large plastered stones on Mount Ebal and write all the words of the Law on them very plainly, and to build an altar of uncut stones there for burnt offerings and peace offerings, with rejoicing. Israel had become the LORD's people and was to obey Him. Six tribes were to stand on Mount Gerizim for the blessing and six on Mount Ebal for the curse, while the Levites called out twelve curses and all the people answered, "Amen." The curses fell on secret idolatry, dishonoring parents, moving a boundary stone, misleading the blind, twisting justice for the weak, sexual sins in the

family and with animals, secret murder, taking a bribe to kill the innocent, and finally on anyone who does not keep all the words of the Law. Joshua carried this out (Joshua 8:30-35). Paul shows that no one can be justified by the Law, and that Christ redeemed us from its curse by becoming a curse for us on the cross.

Chapter 27 Study Questions

1. What were the large stones on Mount Ebal for, and how were they to be written? (27:2-8)

2. Why was the altar to be made of uncut stones, and what might that teach us about salvation? (27:5-6; Exodus 20:25)

3. Why do you think the Law and the altar were set up side by side?

4. What does verse 9 say Israel had become, and why does that come before the call to obey? (27:9-10)

5. What does "Amen" mean, and what were the people doing when they said it after each curse? (27:15)

6. Many of these curses are about sins done "in secret." Why would God name those sins in particular? (27:15, 24; Hebrews 4:13)

7. Which of the curses protect the weak and helpless, and how does Jesus speak of such people? (27:16-19; Matthew 25:40)

8. How does Paul use 27:26 to show that no one can be justified by the Law, and what did Christ do about the curse? (Galatians 3:10-13)

9. Is there a sin you have kept "in secret," thinking no one would know? What would it look like to bring it to God today?

10. What words are at the center of your home and your life, the way the Law stood at the center of Israel's land? (27:2-3)

Chapter 28: Blessings and Curses

Scripture

28:1-14 And it shall be, if you surely listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to be careful to do all His commandments which I am commanding you today, then the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings will come on you and overtake you, if you listen to the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed ***shall*** you be in the city, and blessed ***shall*** you be in the field. Blessed ***shall*** be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your livestock, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your flock. Blessed ***shall*** be your basket and your kneading trough. Blessed ***shall*** you be in your coming in, and blessed ***shall*** you be in your going out. The LORD will give your enemies who rise up against you ***to be*** struck down before you; in one way they will come out against you, and in seven ways they will flee before you. The LORD will command the blessing with you in your barns and in every undertaking of your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving to you. The LORD will establish you for Himself as a holy people, just as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. And all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of the LORD is called on you, and they will be afraid of you. And the LORD will make you abound in good, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, on the ground which the LORD swore to your fathers to give to you. The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its time and to bless all the work of your hand; and you will lend to many nations, and you, you will not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you will be only above, and you will not be beneath, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God which I am commanding you today, to be careful and to do ***them***, and you do not turn aside from all the words which I am commanding you today, ***to the*** right or ***to the*** left, to walk after other gods to serve them.

28:15-26 And it shall be, if you do not listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to be careful to do all His commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today, then all these curses will come on you and overtake you. Cursed ***shall*** you be in the city, and cursed ***shall*** you be in the field. Cursed ***shall*** be your basket and your kneading trough. Cursed ***shall*** be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your flock. Cursed ***shall*** you be in your coming in, and cursed ***shall*** you be in your going out. The LORD will send on you the curse, the confusion, and the rebuke in every undertaking of your hand which you do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the evil of your deeds, by which you have forsaken Me. The LORD will make the pestilence cling to you until He has consumed you from off the ground to which you are going in to take possession of it. The LORD will strike you with consumption and with fever and with inflammation and with burning heat and with the sword and with blight and with mildew, and they will pursue you until you perish. And your heavens which ***are*** over your head will be bronze, and the earth which ***is*** under you iron. The LORD will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from the heavens it will come down on you until you are destroyed. The LORD will give you ***to be*** struck down before your enemies; in one way you will go out against him, and in seven ways you will flee before him; and

you will become a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. And your corpse will become food for every bird of the heavens and for the animals of the earth, and ***there will be*** no one frightening ***them*** away.

28:27-44 The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, ***from*** which you will not be able to be healed. The LORD will strike you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart. And you will be groping at noon, just as the blind ***man*** gropes in the darkness, and you will not make your ways prosper; and you will be only oppressed and robbed all the days, and ***there will be*** no savior. You will betroth a wife, and another man will lie with her; you will build a house, and you will not dwell in it; you will plant a vineyard, and you will not put it to use. Your ox ***will*** be slaughtered before your eyes, and you will not eat of it; your donkey ***will*** be seized from before you, and it will not return to you; your flock ***will*** be given to your enemies, and ***there will be*** no savior for you. Your sons and your daughters ***will*** be given to another people, and your eyes ***will be*** looking and failing for them all the day; and ***there will be*** no power in your hand. The fruit of your ground and all your labor a people whom you have not known will eat, and you will be only oppressed and crushed all the days. And you will be driven mad from the sight of your eyes which you will see. The LORD will strike you with an evil boil on the knees and on the legs, ***from*** which you will not be able to be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head. The LORD will bring you and your king whom you raise up over you to a nation which you have not known, you and your fathers; and you will serve there other gods, wood and stone. And you will become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the peoples to which the LORD will drive you. You will take much seed out to the field, and you will gather little, for the locust will consume it. You will plant vineyards and work ***them***, and wine you will not drink, and you will not gather ***it***, for the worm will eat it. You will have olive trees in all your territory, and ***with*** oil you will not anoint yourself, for your olives will drop off. You will father sons and daughters, and they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity. All your trees and the fruit of your ground the whirring locust will take possession of. The sojourner who ***is*** in your midst will go up above you higher ***and*** higher, and you, you will go down lower ***and*** lower. He, he will lend to you, and you, you will not lend to him; he, he will become the head, and you, you will become the tail.

28:45-57 And all these curses will come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. And they will be on you for a sign and for a wonder, and on your seed, forever. Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and with goodness of heart, from the abundance of everything, and you will serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and in thirst and in nakedness and in lack of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you. The LORD will raise up against you a nation from far away, from the end of the earth, just as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation fierce of face, which will not show regard for an old ***man***, and will not show favor to a youth. And it will eat the fruit of your livestock and the fruit of your ground until you are destroyed, ***a nation*** which will not leave for you grain, new wine, and fresh oil, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your flock, until it has made you perish. And it will besiege you in all your gates until your high and fortified walls come down, in which you are trusting, in all your land; and it will besiege you in all your

gates in all your land which the LORD your God has given to you. And you will eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the LORD your God has given to you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy will distress you. The man ***who is*** tender among you and very delicate, his eye will be evil toward his brother and toward the wife of his bosom and toward the rest of his sons whom he leaves, so as not to give to one of them any of the flesh of his sons whom he eats, because nothing has been left to him, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy will distress you in all your gates. The tender ***woman*** among you and the delicate, who has not attempted to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of delicateness and because of tenderness, her eye will be evil toward the husband of her bosom and toward her son and toward her daughter, and toward her afterbirth which comes out from between her feet, and toward her sons whom she bears; for she will eat them in lack of everything in secret, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy will distress you in your gates.

28:58-68 If you are not careful to do all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God, then the LORD will make your plagues extraordinary, and the plagues of your seed, great and lasting plagues, and evil and lasting sicknesses. And He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they will cling to you. Also every sickness and every plague which ***is*** not written in the book of this law, the LORD will bring them up on you until you are destroyed. And you will be left few in number, whereas you were like the stars of the heavens for multitude, because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD your God. And it shall be, just as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good and to multiply you, so the LORD will rejoice over you to make you perish and to destroy you; and you will be torn away from off the ground to which you are going in to take possession of it. And the LORD will scatter you among all the peoples, from the end of the earth to the end of the earth; and you will serve there other gods which you have not known, you and your fathers, wood and stone. And among those nations you will not find rest, and ***there*** will be no resting place for the sole of your foot; and the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing of eyes and despair of soul. And your life will be hanging before you, and you will be in dread night and day, and you will not trust in your life. In the morning you will say, "Oh that ***it were*** evening!" and in the evening you will say, "Oh that ***it were*** morning!" because of the dread of your heart which you will dread, and because of the sight of your eyes which you will see. And the LORD will bring you back ***to*** Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you, "You will not see it again"; and there you will sell yourselves to your enemies as slaves and as female slaves, and ***there will be*** no buyer.

Chapter 28 Preview

This is one of the longest chapters in Deuteronomy, and one of the most sobering in the whole Bible. Moses sets before Israel the blessings God would give if they listened to His voice and kept His covenant, and the curses that would come if they turned away. The blessings take fourteen verses. The curses take fifty-four. The blessings are rain, harvests, children, flocks, victory and honor among the nations. The curses are the same things turned upside down: drought, disease, defeat, siege, hunger, and finally being torn out of the land and scattered among all the peoples of the earth.

As we read, keep three things in mind. First, these are the terms of the covenant God made with the nation of Israel at Sinai and renewed in Moab. They were not given as a promise to every person of health and wealth in exchange for obedience. Second, history shows that God kept His word, both ways. Israel was blessed in the days of David and Solomon. Then, after centuries of warning, the northern kingdom fell to Assyria, Judah fell to Babylon, and later the Jewish people were scattered over the whole earth after Rome destroyed Jerusalem. Third, the curses are not God's last word. Chapter 30 will show that God promised to bring Israel back. If you lead a group, read verses 53 to 57 ahead of time. They describe the horrors of a city under siege, and they are hard to hear.

Chapter 28 Study

28:1-2 *And it shall be, if you surely listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to be careful to do all His commandments which I am commanding you today, then the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings will come on you and overtake you, if you listen to the voice of the LORD your God.*

"And it shall be, if you surely listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to be careful to do all His commandments which I am commanding you today, then the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth."

Notice the word "if." The blessings depended on Israel's obedience. This is how the Mosaic covenant worked. The covenant God made with Abraham was a promise God swore to keep Himself (Genesis 15:17-18). Israel's place in the land and their enjoyment of its blessings depended on whether they kept the covenant God made with them at Sinai.

Does that mean Israel earned God's love? No. God had already chosen them and redeemed them from Egypt by grace (7:7-8). The blessings of the land were how a loving Father would reward a faithful son, and the curses were how He would discipline a rebellious one (8:5).

"And all these blessings will come on you and overtake you." I like that picture. The blessings would chase them down and catch them.

28:3-6 *Blessed **shall** you be in the city, and blessed **shall** you be in the field. Blessed **shall** be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your livestock, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your flock. Blessed **shall** be your basket and your kneading trough. Blessed **shall** you be in your coming in, and blessed **shall** you be in your going out.*

Here are the blessings in short, simple lines. "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field." "Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your livestock." "Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading trough." The basket held the harvest, and the kneading trough was where bread was made. "Blessed shall you be in your coming in, and blessed shall you be in your going out."

Do you see how it covers all of life? Town and country, family and farm, the harvest and the daily bread, leaving home in the morning and coming back at night. God's blessing was meant to fill every part of an obedient Israelite's life.

28:7-10 *The LORD will give your enemies who rise up against you **to be** struck down before you; in one way they will come out against you, and in seven ways they will flee before you. The LORD will command the blessing with you in your barns and in every undertaking of your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving to you. The LORD will establish you for Himself as a holy people, just as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. And all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of the LORD is called on you, and they will be afraid of you.*

"The LORD will give your enemies who rise up against you to be struck down before you; in one way they will come out against you, and in seven ways they will flee before you." The enemy would march in as one army and run away scattered in every direction.

"The LORD will command the blessing with you in your barns and in every undertaking of your hand." Then the greatest blessing of all: "The LORD will establish you for Himself as a holy people, just as He swore to you." The point of the blessings was not the barns. It was that Israel would be God's holy people.

"And all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of the LORD is called on you, and they will be afraid of you." Israel's blessing was meant to be a witness. When the nations saw Israel blessed, they would know the LORD is God. That happened in Solomon's day, when the queen of Sheba came and praised the LORD for what she saw (1 Kings 10:1-9).

28:11-14 *And the LORD will make you abound in good, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, on the ground which the LORD swore to your fathers to give to you. The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its time and to bless all the work of your hand; and you will lend to many nations, and you, you will not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you will be only above, and you will not be beneath, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God which I am commanding you today, to be careful and to do **them**, and you do not turn aside from all the words which I am commanding you today, **to the** right or **to the** left, to walk after other gods to serve them.*

"The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its time." Israel's land depended on rain, not on a great river like the Nile (11:10-12). Rain at the right time meant life. God kept the key to that storehouse.

"You will lend to many nations, and you, you will not borrow." "And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you will be only above, and you will not be beneath."

All this came with a condition: "if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God," and "you do not turn aside from all the words which I am commanding you today, to the right or to the left, to walk after other gods to serve them." The great danger was idolatry.

Here we should stop and ask a question. Can a Christian today claim these promises and expect God to make him rich and healthy if he obeys? Some teachers say yes. I do not believe the Bible teaches that. These blessings were the terms of God's covenant with the nation of Israel in their land. They were national blessings: rain, harvests, peace and honor among the nations. God has not promised the church a land, a harvest or a place at the head of the nations. What He has given us in Christ is far greater: "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). He has also told us plainly that we will have trouble. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Paul wrote that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Paul himself knew both plenty and hunger (Philippians 4:12). God does bless obedience, and He cares for our needs (Matthew 6:33). But the measure of His blessing on a believer is not a bank account or a clean bill of health. It is Christ Himself.

28:15-19 *And it shall be, if you do not listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to be careful to do all His commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today, then all these curses will come on you and overtake you. Cursed **shall** you be in the city, and cursed **shall** you be in the field. Cursed **shall** be your basket and your kneading trough. Cursed **shall** be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your flock. Cursed **shall** you be in your coming in, and cursed **shall** you be in your going out.*

"And it shall be, if you do not listen to the voice of the LORD your God," then "all these curses will come on you and overtake you." The same word "overtake" is used for both. If Israel turned away, the curses would chase them down just as surely as the blessings would have.

Then the blessings of verses 3 to 6 are turned around, line by line. "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field." "Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading trough." The fruit of the womb, the ground and the flock would be cursed. "Cursed shall you be in your coming in, and cursed shall you be in your going out."

The same God who gives the blessing can take it away. That is a hard truth, but it is a fair one. Israel was not left to guess. Moses told them ahead of time, in plain words, exactly what would happen.

28:20-24 *The LORD will send on you the curse, the confusion, and the rebuke in every undertaking of your hand which you do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the evil of your deeds, by which you have forsaken Me. The LORD will make the pestilence cling to you until He has consumed you from off the ground to which you are going in to take possession of it. The LORD will strike you with consumption and with fever and with inflammation and with burning heat and with the sword and with blight and with mildew, and they will pursue you until you perish. And your heavens which **are** over your head will be bronze, and the earth which **is** under you iron. The LORD will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from the heavens it will come down on you until you are destroyed.*

"The LORD will send on you the curse, the confusion, and the rebuke in every undertaking of your hand." Why? "Because of the evil of your deeds, by which you have forsaken Me." Notice that God

speaks in the first person here. The curses were not bad luck. They were the response of a God whose people had left Him.

Disease would cling to them: "consumption and with fever and with inflammation and with burning heat." The land would suffer "blight" and "mildew." And the rain would stop. "Your heavens which are over your head will be bronze, and the earth which is under you iron." The sky would be like a metal lid, hard and dry, and the ground too hard to plow. "The LORD will make the rain of your land powder and dust."

This happened. In the days of King Ahab, who led Israel to worship Baal, God sent Elijah to announce that there would be no rain, and for three years and more there was none (1 Kings 17:1; James 5:17). Baal was the Canaanite storm god, believed to bring the rain. God showed who really held the key to the storehouse.

28:25-26 *The LORD will give you **to be** struck down before your enemies; in one way you will go out against him, and in seven ways you will flee before him; and you will become a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. And your corpse will become food for every bird of the heavens and for the animals of the earth, and **there will be** no one frightening **them** away.*

"The LORD will give you to be struck down before your enemies; in one way you will go out against him, and in seven ways you will flee before him." This is verse 7 turned around. "And you will become a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth." The word terror here means something that makes others shudder. Jeremiah used the same words for Judah in his day (Jeremiah 24:9).

"And your corpse will become food for every bird of the heavens and for the animals of the earth, and there will be no one frightening them away." To lie unburied was the worst shame in the ancient world. Jeremiah warned that this would happen in Judah (Jeremiah 7:33).

28:27-29 *The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, **from** which you will not be able to be healed. The LORD will strike you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart. And you will be groping at noon, just as the blind **man** gropes in the darkness, and you will not make your ways prosper; and you will be only oppressed and robbed all the days, and **there will be** no savior.*

"The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch." God had struck Egypt with boils (Exodus 9:9-11). Now Israel, if they turned to idols, would suffer like Egypt.

"The LORD will strike you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart. And you will be groping at noon, just as the blind man gropes in the darkness." To grope at noon is to stumble around in broad daylight. They would lose their way, not because there was no light, but because they could not see it. That is what sin does. It blinds. "And there will be no savior." The one Savior they had rejected would not come running to rescue them.

28:30-35 *You will betroth a wife, and another man will lie with her; you will build a house, and you will not dwell in it; you will plant a vineyard, and you will not put it to use. Your ox **will** be slaughtered before your eyes, and you will not eat of it; your donkey **will** be seized from before you, and it will not return to you; your flock **will** be given to your enemies, and **there will be** no savior for you. Your sons and your daughters **will** be given to another people, and your eyes **will be** looking and failing for them all the day; and **there will be** no power in your hand. The fruit of your ground and all your labor a people whom you have not known will eat, and you will be only oppressed and crushed all the days. And you will be driven mad from the sight of your eyes which you will see. The LORD will strike you with an evil boil on the knees and on the legs, **from** which you will not be able to be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.*

These verses describe what it is like to be conquered and ruled by an enemy. "You will betroth a wife, and another man will lie with her; you will build a house, and you will not dwell in it; you will plant a vineyard, and you will not put it to use." All the good things of life would be taken by others. Earlier, a man who had just built a house or planted a vineyard or become engaged was sent home from war to enjoy it (20:5-7). Now those same blessings would be stolen.

"Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, and you will not eat of it." "Your sons and your daughters will be given to another people, and your eyes will be looking and failing for them all the day." Parents would watch for children who had been carried off and would never see them again. "And you will be driven mad from the sight of your eyes which you will see."

We should not read these lines quickly. They describe real suffering. And it came to pass, more than once, in the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions and in later centuries.

28:36-37 *The LORD will bring you and your king whom you raise up over you to a nation which you have not known, you and your fathers; and you will serve there other gods, wood and stone. And you will become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the peoples to which the LORD will drive you.*

"The LORD will bring you and your king whom you raise up over you to a nation which you have not known, you and your fathers; and you will serve there other gods, wood and stone."

This is remarkable. Israel had no king yet. Moses foresaw that they would one day set a king over themselves (17:14), and that the king himself would be carried away. That is just what happened. In 722 B.C. the Assyrians took the northern kingdom of Israel captive (2 Kings 17:6). In 597 B.C. King Jehoiachin of Judah was taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:15), and in 586 B.C. King Zedekiah was blinded, bound "with bronze fetters" and brought "to Babylon" (2 Kings 25:7).

"And you will serve there other gods, wood and stone." Israel had loved idols in their own land. In exile they would live among idols, far from the temple of the living God. God gave them what they had chosen.

"And you will become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the peoples." A proverb here means a saying people use about someone as an example of disaster.

28:38-44 *You will take much seed out to the field, and you will gather little, for the locust will consume it. You will plant vineyards and work **them**, and wine you will not drink, and you will not gather **it**, for the worm will eat it. You will have olive trees in all your territory, and **with** oil you will not anoint yourself, for your olives will drop off. You will father sons and daughters, and they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity. All your trees and the fruit of your ground the whirring locust will take possession of. The sojourner who **is** in your midst will go up above you higher **and** higher, and you, you will go down lower **and** lower. He, he will lend to you, and you, you will not lend to him; he, he will become the head, and you, you will become the tail.*

Here are more curses on the land and its work. "You will take much seed out to the field, and you will gather little, for the locust will consume it." Vineyards would be eaten by worms. Olives would drop off before they were ripe. "You will father sons and daughters, and they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity."

Then verses 12 and 13 are turned around. "The sojourner who is in your midst will go up above you higher and higher, and you, you will go down lower and lower. He, he will lend to you, and you, you will not lend to him; he, he will become the head, and you, you will become the tail."

God's people were meant to be the head. If they turned from Him, the foreigners among them would rise over them.

28:45-48 *And all these curses will come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. And they will be on you for a sign and for a wonder, and on your seed, forever. Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and with goodness of heart, from the abundance of everything, and you will serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and in thirst and in nakedness and in lack of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you.*

"And all these curses will come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD your God." "And they will be on you for a sign and for a wonder, and on your seed, forever." The curses would be a sign to the world that the LORD keeps His word.

Then comes the reason underneath all the others: "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and with goodness of heart, from the abundance of everything." That is worth slowing down for. The root problem was not only that Israel broke rules. It was that they did not serve God with joy when He had given them everything. Ungratefulness in times of plenty leads to idolatry. Moses had warned them of this in chapter 8.

So "you will serve your enemies," "in hunger and in thirst and in nakedness and in lack of everything," and God "will put a yoke of iron on your neck." They would not serve God gladly in plenty, so they would serve their enemies in want.

What about us? Do we serve the Lord with joy for all He has given? A grumbling heart in a time of blessing is a dangerous place to be.

28:49-52 *The LORD will raise up against you a nation from far away, from the end of the earth, just as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation fierce of face, which will not show regard for an old* ***man****, and will not show favor to a youth. And it will eat the fruit of your livestock and the fruit of your ground until you are destroyed,* ***a nation*** *which will not leave for you grain, new wine, and fresh oil, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your flock, until it has made you perish. And it will besiege you in all your gates until your high and fortified walls come down, in which you are trusting, in all your land; and it will besiege you in all your gates in all your land which the LORD your God has given to you.*

"The LORD will raise up against you a nation from far away, from the end of the earth, just as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation fierce of face, which will not show regard for an old man, and will not show favor to a youth."

This fits Babylon well. Habakkuk describes the Babylonians in the same words: "they fly like an eagle hurrying to devour" (Habakkuk 1:8). It also fits Rome, which came from much farther away, spoke a language the Jews did not know, and destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The Roman legions even carried the eagle as their standard. God's warning came true more than once.

"And it will besiege you in all your gates until your high and fortified walls come down, in which you are trusting." Israel's walls would not save them. Only the LORD could, and they had turned from Him.

28:53-57 *And you will eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the LORD your God has given to you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy will distress you. The man* ***who is*** *tender among you and very delicate, his eye will be evil toward his brother and toward the wife of his bosom and toward the rest of his sons whom he leaves, so as not to give to one of them any of the flesh of his sons whom he eats, because nothing has been left to him, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy will distress you in all your gates. The tender* ***woman*** *among you and the delicate, who has not attempted to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of delicateness and because of tenderness, her eye will be evil toward the husband of her bosom and toward her son and toward her daughter, and toward her afterbirth which comes out from between her feet, and toward her sons whom she bears; for she will eat them in lack of everything in secret, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy will distress you in your gates.*

These are the hardest verses in the chapter, and I will be brief and careful with them. Moses warns that in the siege, when the city was starving, the people would be driven to the unthinkable. "And you will eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the LORD your God has given to you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy will distress you."

He goes on to say that even the most gentle and refined man and woman, the kind who had never known hardship, would turn cold toward their own family in that hunger.

Why is something so terrible written in the Bible? Because God wanted Israel to know, ahead of time, how far sin would take them if they kept on rejecting Him. This is not a picture of what God wants. It is a warning so dark that no one could say they were not told.

Sadly, it did happen. Scripture records it in the siege of Samaria (2 Kings 6:24-29) and in the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon. Jeremiah wept over it in Lamentations: "The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children" (Lamentations 4:10). Ancient historians report that it happened again when Rome besieged Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

What do we take from this? Sin is never small. It always takes us further than we meant to go. When people turn from God, the most basic love, a parent's love for a child, can be crushed. And we should read these words with grief, not curiosity, as Jeremiah did. If you lead a group, there is no need to linger here. Read it, name it, and move on to God's mercy.

28:58-63 *If you are not careful to do all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God, then the LORD will make your plagues extraordinary, and the plagues of your seed, great and lasting plagues, and evil and lasting sicknesses. And He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they will cling to you. Also every sickness and every plague which* ***is*** *not written in the book of this law, the LORD will bring them up on you until you are destroyed. And you will be left few in number, whereas you were like the stars of the heavens for multitude, because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD your God. And it shall be, just as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good and to multiply you, so the LORD will rejoice over you to make you perish and to destroy you; and you will be torn away from off the ground to which you are going in to take possession of it.*

"If you are not careful to do all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God." Notice the words "written in this book." Moses was writing these words down (31:9). Israel would have them in black and white.

God would bring "great and lasting plagues," "all the diseases of Egypt," and even "every sickness and every plague which is not written in the book of this law."

"And you will be left few in number, whereas you were like the stars of the heavens for multitude." God had promised Abraham his children would be like the stars (Genesis 15:5). That promise had come true (1:10). Now sin would undo it.

Then one of the most sobering lines in the Bible: "just as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good and to multiply you, so the LORD will rejoice over you to make you perish and to destroy you." How can God rejoice to destroy? It does not mean God enjoys suffering. Ezekiel says plainly that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23, 32). It means God is fully committed to His word. He delights in justice as surely as He delights in mercy. His holiness is not a reluctant part of Him. "And you will be torn away from off the ground."

28:64-67 *And the LORD will scatter you among all the peoples, from the end of the earth to the end of the earth; and you will serve there other gods which you have not known, you and your fathers, wood and stone. And among those nations you will not find rest, and* ***there*** *will be no resting place for the sole of your foot; and the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing of eyes and despair of soul. And your life will be hanging before you, and you will be in dread night and day, and you will not trust in your life. In the morning you will say, "Oh that* ***it were*** *evening!" and in the evening you will say, "Oh that* ***it were*** *morning!" because of the dread of your heart which you will dread, and because of the sight of your eyes which you will see.*

"And the LORD will scatter you among all the peoples, from the end of the earth to the end of the earth; and you will serve there other gods which you have not known, you and your fathers, wood and stone."

This goes further than the exile to Assyria or Babylon. Those were in one region. This is a scattering "from the end of the earth to the end of the earth." After Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70, and crushed another Jewish revolt about sixty years later, the Jewish people were spread over the whole world. Jesus Himself foretold it: they "will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled by the nations until the times of the nations are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). For almost nineteen hundred years, the Jewish people had no nation of their own. Few peoples in history, if any, have been scattered that widely for that long and still kept their identity as a people.

"And among those nations you will not find rest, and there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot." The history of the Jewish people in exile is full of expulsions, persecution and murder, from the Middle Ages to the Holocaust in the twentieth century. "You will be in dread night and day." In the morning they would wish it were evening, and in the evening they would wish it were morning. Every hour would bring fear.

We must be very careful here. These verses explain why God allowed the scattering. They never excuse those who persecuted the Jewish people. God used Assyria and Babylon to discipline Israel, and then He judged them for their cruelty (Isaiah 10:5-12; Jeremiah 50:17-18). Hatred of the Jewish people is sin, and sadly it has often been carried out by people who called themselves Christians. Paul, who wept for Israel, warned Gentile believers not to be proud against them (Romans 11:18-20).

28:68 *And the LORD will bring you back* ***to*** *Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you, "You will not see it again"; and there you will sell yourselves to your enemies as slaves and as female slaves, and* ***there will be*** *no buyer.*

"And the LORD will bring you back to Egypt in ships." Moses had told them they would never see that road again, and now they would. "And there you will sell yourselves to your enemies as slaves and as female slaves, and there will be no buyer."

This is the last curse, and it is the exodus run backward. God had brought them out of Egypt and slavery. Now, if they kept turning away, they would go back as slaves, and they would be so many, or so worthless in their masters' eyes, that no one would even want to buy them. Ancient

historians report that after Jerusalem fell to Rome in A.D. 70, many thousands of Jewish captives were sold into slavery, and many were sent to Egypt.

But this is not where the story ends. Before the curses are even finished being told, God had already promised what would come after: "when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, and I will not abhor them, to make an end of them, to break My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God" (Leviticus 26:44). Chapter 30 will show that God will one day gather Israel back from all the nations and give them a new heart. The prophets promise the same (Jeremiah 31:35-37; Ezekiel 36:24-28). Paul says that "all Israel will be saved," and that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:26, 29). The church has not taken Israel's place. God is not finished with Israel.

Many dispensational teachers see the return of Jewish people to the land over the last century and the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948 as a step toward that promise, while the full return, with a new heart turned to the LORD and to the Messiah, is still to come (Zechariah 12:10). We will look at that more in chapter 30.

Chapter 28 Summary

Moses set before Israel the blessings of obedience: blessing in city and field, family, harvest and flocks, coming in and going out, victory over enemies, rain from God's storehouse, and a place as the head and not the tail, so that the nations would see that Israel was the LORD's holy people. These were the terms of God's covenant with Israel in their land, not a promise of health and wealth to every believer. Then he set out the curses of disobedience, far longer: the same blessings turned upside down, disease, drought, defeat, unburied dead, blindness of heart, others taking their homes and children, the king carried off to a foreign nation, a fierce nation from far away, a siege so terrible that parents would turn on their children, and finally a scattering among all peoples with no rest, and a return to slavery in Egypt. History shows that God kept His word, in the fall of Samaria, the exile to Babylon, and the worldwide scattering after A.D. 70. But God also promised never to break His covenant with Israel and to bring them back, which chapter 30 will show.

Chapter 28 Study Questions

1. What condition did God attach to the blessings, and what parts of life do the blessings of verses 3 to 6 cover? (28:1-6)

2. What was the purpose of Israel's blessings in the eyes of the nations? (28:9-10)

3. Why do these blessings not teach that God promises every Christian health and wealth? What has He promised us instead? (Ephesians 1:3; John 16:33)

4. How do the curses of verses 15 to 19 mirror the blessings? What does that show about God's fairness?

5. How did the warning about the king in verse 36 come true? (2 Kings 17:6; 25:7)

6. What does verse 47 say was the root of Israel's trouble, and why is that a warning for us?

7. How did the warnings of verses 64 to 67 come true in Jewish history? (Luke 21:24)

8. Why must Christians never use these verses to excuse hatred of the Jewish people? (Romans 11:18-20)

9. What promises show that the curses are not God's last word to Israel? (Leviticus 26:44; Romans 11:26, 29)

10. Are you serving the Lord "with joy and with goodness of heart" for what He has given you, or has plenty made you forget Him? (28:47)

Chapter 29: The Covenant in the Land of Moab

Scripture

29:1-15 These ***are*** the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb. And Moses called to all Israel and said to them, "You, you have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and those great wonders. And the LORD has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day. And I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot. Bread you have not eaten, and wine and strong drink you have not drunk, so that you may know that I ***am*** the LORD your God. And you came to this place, and Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan came out to meet us for battle, and we struck them. And we took their land and gave it for an inheritance to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half of the tribe of the Manassites. And you shall keep the words of this covenant and do them, so that you may make all that you do prosper. You are standing today, all of you, before the LORD your God: your heads, your tribes, your elders and your officers, every man of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and your sojourner who ***is*** in the midst of your camp, from the cutter of your wood to the drawer of your water, for you to pass into the covenant of the LORD your God and into His oath, which the LORD your God is making with you today, in order to establish you today for Himself as a people, and that He may be God to you, just as He spoke to you, and just as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, but with him who is here, standing with us today before the LORD our God, and with him who is not here with us today.

29:16-29 For you, you know how we dwelt in the land of Egypt, and how we passed through the midst of the nations which you passed through. And you saw their detestable things and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which ***were*** with them. Lest there be among you a man or a woman or a clan or a tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God, to go to serve the gods of those nations; lest there be among you a root bearing poison and wormwood; and it shall be, when he hears the words of this oath, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I will have peace, for I walk in the stubbornness of my heart,' so as to sweep away the watered ***land*** with the thirsty. The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, for then the anger of the LORD and His jealousy will smoke against that man, and every curse that is written in this book will lie down on him, and the LORD will wipe out his name from under the heavens. And the LORD will separate him for evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that is written in this book of the law. And the later generation will say, your sons who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a distant land, and they will see the plagues of that land and its sicknesses with which the LORD has made it sick: sulfur and salt, a burning, all its land; it is not sown, and it does not make ***anything*** sprout, and no vegetation at all comes up in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and in His rage; and all the nations will say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What ***is*** the heat of this great anger?' And they will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD,

the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out from the land of Egypt, and they went and served other gods and bowed down to them, gods whom they had not known and ***whom*** He had not allotted to them. And the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book. And the LORD plucked them up from off their ground in anger and in rage and in great wrath, and He threw them into another land, as ***at*** this day.' The hidden ***things belong*** to the LORD our God, and the revealed ***things belong*** to us and to our sons forever, to do all the words of this law.

Chapter 29 Preview

Chapters 29 and 30 are Moses' third sermon. He calls the whole nation, from the leaders to the children to the foreigners who cut wood and carry water, to stand before the LORD and enter His covenant. This covenant in the land of Moab did not replace the covenant made at Horeb. It renewed it with the new generation, about to cross the Jordan. Moses reminds them again of what God had done in Egypt and in the wilderness, and then he says something surprising: until now, God had not given them a heart to understand.

Then Moses warns against the one person, family or tribe who hears the curses and says to himself, I will be fine, I will do as I please. That kind of heart is a poisonous root that can spread through the whole nation. Moses looks ahead to a day when the land is ruined like Sodom and the nations ask why, and the answer will be that Israel forsook the covenant. The chapter ends with one of the best-known verses in Deuteronomy: the hidden things belong to the LORD, but the things revealed belong to us, so that we may do them.

Chapter 29 Study

29:1 *These **are** the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb.*

"These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb."

This verse may close chapter 28 or open chapter 29. In Hebrew Bibles it is the last verse of chapter 28. Either way, it tells us what all these words are. They are a covenant, a binding agreement between God and His people, made in Moab forty years after the covenant at Horeb, the mountain also called Sinai.

Was this a new covenant? Not in the sense of a different one. The words "besides the covenant" show it was a second ceremony, renewing the same covenant with the children of those who stood at Horeb. Most of their parents had died in the wilderness. Each generation had to take God's covenant as its own.

29:2-4 *And Moses called to all Israel and said to them, "You, you have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and those great wonders. And the LORD has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day.*

"You, you have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land." Many in the crowd had been children in Egypt. Others had only heard about it from their parents. But Moses speaks to them as one people who saw it all: "the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and those great wonders."

Then this: "And the LORD has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day."

What does that mean? They had seen the plagues, the sea split open and the manna fall. And still they did not truly understand. Seeing miracles does not change a heart. Their parents saw more wonders than any generation in history, and they still grumbled and rebelled. Only God can give a heart that understands.

Does that mean it was God's fault? No. Moses is not making an excuse for them. He is showing them how deep the problem is. People are responsible for their hard hearts, and yet they cannot fix them on their own. That is why God promises in 30:6 to circumcise their hearts.

Paul quotes this verse, together with Isaiah 29:10, to explain why most of Israel in his day did not believe in Jesus: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes not to see and ears not to hear, until this day" (Romans 11:8). But in the same chapter he shows that this hardening is not forever (Romans 11:25-26). What about you? Have you asked God to open your eyes to what you read in His Word (Psalm 119:18)?

29:5-8 *And I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot. Bread you have not eaten, and wine and strong drink you have not drunk, so that you may know that I **am** the LORD your God. And you came to this place, and Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan came out to meet us for battle, and we struck them. And we took their land and gave it for an inheritance to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half of the tribe of the Manassites.*

Now the LORD speaks through Moses in the first person: "And I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot." For forty years, God kept their clothes and sandals from wearing out (8:4).

"Bread you have not eaten, and wine and strong drink you have not drunk, so that you may know that I am the LORD your God." They had no farms, no bakeries and no vineyards. They lived on manna and water from the rock. God was teaching them to depend on Him every day.

Then the most recent victories: "Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan came out to meet us for battle, and we struck them." The land east of the Jordan had already been given to Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh (chapters 2 and 3). The God who had kept them in the wilderness was already giving them the land.

When you look back over your own life, can you see how God has provided, even when you did not notice?

29:9-13 *And you shall keep the words of this covenant and do them, so that you may make all that you do prosper. You are standing today, all of you, before the LORD your God: your heads, your tribes, your elders and your officers, every man of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and your sojourner who* ***is*** *in the midst of your camp, from the cutter of your wood to the drawer of your water, for you to pass into the covenant of the LORD your God and into His oath, which the LORD your God is making with you today, in order to establish you today for Himself as a people, and that He may be God to you, just as He spoke to you, and just as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.*

"And you shall keep the words of this covenant and do them, so that you may make all that you do prosper."

"You are standing today, all of you, before the LORD your God." Then Moses lists who was there: "your heads, your tribes, your elders and your officers, every man of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and your sojourner who is in the midst of your camp, from the cutter of your wood to the drawer of your water."

Everyone. Leaders and children. Men and women. Even the foreigners who did the lowest jobs in the camp. God's covenant was not only for the important people. All of them stood before Him together.

Why? "For you to pass into the covenant of the LORD your God and into His oath." In the ancient world, people sometimes made a covenant by walking between the pieces of an animal cut in two (Genesis 15:9-17; Jeremiah 34:18). Pass into a covenant may echo that.

"In order to establish you today for Himself as a people, and that He may be God to you." That is the heart of every covenant God made with Israel: I will be your God, and you will be My people. And it rests on His promise: "just as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." This covenant in Moab was built on the promise to Abraham, which God had sworn by Himself.

29:14-15 *And not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, but with him who is here, standing with us today before the LORD our God, and with him who is not here with us today.*

"And not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, but with him who is here, standing with us today before the LORD our God, and with him who is not here with us today."

Who is "not here"? The generations not yet born. Moses was binding every future Israelite to this covenant. That is why the later prophets could hold Israel to it centuries afterward. It is also why the blessings and curses of chapter 28 fell on generations who never stood in Moab.

We see the same thing in our own families. The choices we make, for God or against Him, reach our children and grandchildren.

29:16-18 *For you, you know how we dwelt in the land of Egypt, and how we passed through the midst of the nations which you passed through. And you saw their detestable things and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which **were** with them. Lest there be among you a man or a woman or a clan or a tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God, to go to serve the gods of those nations; lest there be among you a root bearing poison and wormwood;*

"For you, you know how we dwelt in the land of Egypt, and how we passed through the midst of the nations." Along the way, "you saw their detestable things and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold." Israel had seen idols up close in Egypt, in Edom, in Moab and at Peor (Numbers 25). They knew how attractive idols could be.

So Moses warns: "Lest there be among you a man or a woman or a clan or a tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God." Notice it starts with one person. One man or one woman. Then a clan. Then a whole tribe.

"Lest there be among you a root bearing poison and wormwood." Wormwood is a bitter plant. A root grows underground, out of sight, and then it sprouts and spreads. One person's secret idolatry could poison a whole people.

Hebrews draws on this verse when it warns "lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and through this many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:15). Sin is never only private. A bitter, unbelieving heart in a church or a family can poison many.

29:19-21 *and it shall be, when he hears the words of this oath, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I will have peace, for I walk in the stubbornness of my heart,' so as to sweep away the watered **land** with the thirsty. The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, for then the anger of the LORD and His jealousy will smoke against that man, and every curse that is written in this book will lie down on him, and the LORD will wipe out his name from under the heavens. And the LORD will separate him for evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that is written in this book of the law.*

Now Moses describes the man he is warning against. When he hears the curses, "he blesses himself in his heart." He says to himself, "I will have peace, for I walk in the stubbornness of my heart." He hears God's warnings and tells himself he will be fine anyway. He thinks he can belong to God's people and still live as he likes.

"So as to sweep away the watered land with the thirsty." This is a hard phrase. It most likely means that his sin would bring ruin on everyone around him, the green and the dry alike. Or it may mean he thinks he can have it all.

God's answer is very strong. "The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, for then the anger of the LORD and His jealousy will smoke against that man." God's jealousy is not petty envy. It is the right anger of a husband whose wife has given herself to another. "Every curse that is written in this book will lie down on him, and the LORD will wipe out his name from under the heavens."

Why does God say He will not forgive him? Because this man has no intention of turning. He has heard the warning and decided to keep going. God always forgives those who truly repent

(30:1-3). But a person who hardens his heart and says, I will have peace anyway, has shut the door himself. Is there any place in your life where you have heard God's warning and told yourself it will be fine?

29:22-28 *And the later generation will say, your sons who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a distant land, and they will see the plagues of that land and its sicknesses with which the LORD has made it sick: sulfur and salt, a burning, all its land; it is not sown, and it does not make **anything** sprout, and no vegetation at all comes up in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and in His rage; and all the nations will say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What **is** the heat of this great anger?' And they will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out from the land of Egypt, and they went and served other gods and bowed down to them, gods whom they had not known and **whom** He had not allotted to them. And the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book. And the LORD plucked them up from off their ground in anger and in rage and in great wrath, and He threw them into another land, as **at** this day.'*

Moses looks into the future. "The later generation," and "the foreigner who comes from a distant land," will see the land ruined: "sulfur and salt, a burning, all its land; it is not sown." It will be "like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim." These were the cities of the plain that God destroyed with fire from heaven (Genesis 19:24-25).

"All the nations will say" it, and their question will be, "Why has the LORD done thus to this land?" Israel's ruin would be a lesson to the world. And the answer would be: "Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers." They "served other gods and bowed down to them, gods whom they had not known and whom He had not allotted to them."

"And the LORD plucked them up from off their ground in anger and in rage and in great wrath, and He threw them into another land, as at this day."

Notice the words "as at this day." Moses speaks as though the exile has already happened. He is so sure of it that he describes it in the past. And it did happen. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, the people asked these very questions, and the prophets gave this very answer (1 Kings 9:8-9; Jeremiah 22:8-9).

29:29 *The hidden **things belong** to the LORD our God, and the revealed **things belong** to us and to our sons forever, to do all the words of this law.*

"The hidden things belong to the LORD our God, and the revealed things belong to us and to our sons forever, to do all the words of this law."

This is a wise and humble verse. After all this talk of the future, Moses says there are things God has not told us. When will judgment fall? Why does God allow this or that? How do all the pieces fit? Some things are hidden. They belong to God, and we can trust Him with them.

But other things God has revealed. He has told us plainly who He is and what He wants. Those things "belong to us and to our sons forever." And notice why God revealed them: "to do all the

words of this law." God did not give us His Word to satisfy our curiosity. He gave it so we would obey.

I find this a great comfort. I do not have to understand everything. There are questions I cannot answer, and the Bible does not answer them either. But I am responsible for what God has made plain. Most of us already know far more of God's will than we are doing. Start there. Do what He has made plain, and trust Him with the rest.

Chapter 29 Summary

In the land of Moab, Moses renewed the covenant God had made at Horeb. He reminded Israel of the wonders in Egypt and of God's care for forty years in the wilderness, when their clothes did not wear out, and of the victories over Sihon and Og. Yet the LORD had not until then given them a heart to understand. All Israel, from the leaders to the children and the foreigners who cut wood and drew water, stood before the LORD to enter His covenant and oath, which also bound generations not yet born. Moses warned against any person, clan or tribe who turned to idols and thought, I will have peace, a poisonous root that would bring the curses on that person and on the land. He foresaw a day when the land would be like Sodom and the nations would ask why, and the answer would be that Israel forsook the covenant and was thrown into another land. The hidden things belong to the LORD, but what He has revealed belongs to us, so that we may do it.

Chapter 29 Study Questions

1. How was the covenant in Moab related to the covenant at Horeb? (29:1)

2. What did Israel see, and what had the LORD not yet given them? What does that teach about miracles and the heart? (29:2-4; Romans 11:8)

3. How did God care for Israel for forty years, and why? (29:5-6)

4. Who stood before the LORD to enter the covenant, and why do you think Moses names even the woodcutters and water carriers? (29:10-11)

5. Who is "him who is not here with us today," and what does that teach about our choices and future generations? (29:14-15)

6. What is the "root bearing poison and wormwood," and how does Hebrews apply it? (29:18; Hebrews 12:15)

7. What does the man of verse 19 tell himself, and why is that so dangerous?

8. What will the nations ask when they see the land ruined, and what will the answer be? (29:24-28)

9. What does 29:29 say about the hidden things and the revealed things? What question about God do you need to trust Him with?

10. What is one thing God has made plain in His Word that you know you should be doing but are not? (29:29)

Chapter 30: Choose Life

Scripture

30:1-10 And it shall be, when all these things come on you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you bring ***them*** back to your heart among all the nations to which the LORD your God has banished you, and you return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you today, you and your sons, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will turn back your captivity and have compassion on you, and He will return and gather you from all the peoples to which the LORD your God has scattered you. If your banished ***one*** is at the end of the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers took possession of, and you shall take possession of it; and He will do you good and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life. And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who have pursued you. And you, you will return and listen to the voice of the LORD, and do all His commandments which I am commanding you today. And the LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, for good; for the LORD will return to rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you return to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

30:11-20 For this commandment which I am commanding you today, it is not too difficult for you, and it is not far away. It ***is*** not in the heavens, to say, 'Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us, and make us hear it, so that we may do it?' And it ***is*** not beyond the sea, to say, 'Who will pass over for us to the other side of the sea and take it for us, and make us hear it, so that we may do it?' For the word ***is*** very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil, in that I am commanding you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, and you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land to which you are going in to take possession of it. And if your heart turns away, and you do not listen, and you are drawn away and bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong ***your*** days on the ground to which you are passing over the Jordan to go in to take possession of it. I call the heavens and the earth to witness against you today: life and death I have set before you, the blessing and the curse; and you shall choose life, so that you may live, you and your seed, to love the LORD your God, to listen to His voice, and to cling to Him; for He ***is*** your life and the length of your days, to dwell on the ground which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them."

Chapter 30 Preview

After the long list of curses in chapter 28 and the picture of a ruined land in chapter 29, you might expect Moses to end in gloom. He does not. Chapter 30 opens with one of the greatest promises in the Old Testament. Moses looks past the exile to a day when Israel, scattered among all the nations, will turn back to the LORD with all their heart. Then God will gather them from the ends of the heavens, bring them back to the land, and do something they could never do for themselves: He will circumcise their hearts, so that they love Him with all their heart and soul. I believe this promise is still waiting for its full fulfillment, and that God will keep it to the nation of Israel in the last days.

Then Moses tells Israel that God's command is not too hard or too far away. They do not need someone to climb into heaven or cross the sea to bring it to them. It is near, in their mouth and in their heart. Paul takes these words and applies them to the gospel of Christ (Romans 10:6-8). The chapter ends with Moses calling heaven and earth as witnesses and pleading with Israel: life and death are before you, so choose life.

Chapter 30 Study

30:1-2 *And it shall be, when all these things come on you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you bring **them** back to your heart among all the nations to which the LORD your God has banished you, and you return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you today, you and your sons, with all your heart and with all your soul,*

"And it shall be, when all these things come on you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you." Notice the word "when," not "if." Moses already knew Israel would know both the blessing and the curse. He had said the same in 4:25-31: Israel would turn to idols, be scattered, and then return.

"And you bring them back to your heart among all the nations to which the LORD your God has banished you." To bring something back to your heart means to think it over, to remember it, to come to your senses. It is what the prodigal son did in the far country when he came to himself (Luke 15:17).

"And you return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you today, you and your sons, with all your heart and with all your soul." The Hebrew word for return, shuv, is the main Old Testament word for repentance. It means to turn around, to go back. This chapter uses it again and again. Israel would return to God, God would turn back their captivity, and God would return to rejoice over them.

Repentance comes first. Israel's return to the land would begin with a return to the LORD.

30:3-5 *then the LORD your God will turn back your captivity and have compassion on you, and He will return and gather you from all the peoples to which the LORD your God has scattered you. If your banished* ***one*** *is at the end of the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers took possession of, and you shall take possession of it; and He will do you good and multiply you more than your fathers.*

"Then the LORD your God will turn back your captivity and have compassion on you, and He will return and gather you from all the peoples to which the LORD your God has scattered you."

Look at how far God's reach goes: "If your banished one is at the end of the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will take you." No Jew could ever be scattered so far that God could not bring him home.

"And the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers took possession of, and you shall take possession of it; and He will do you good and multiply you more than your fathers."

Has this happened? In part. In 538 B.C., Cyrus king of Persia let the Jews in Babylon go home, and a remnant returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). But that return was small, and it was from one region, not "from all the peoples." And within a few centuries Israel was scattered again, over the whole earth, after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The prophets speak of a greater return still to come. Isaiah says the Lord "will again set His hand a second time" to gather the remnant of His people, and "the scattered of Judah He will assemble from the four corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:11-12). Ezekiel says, "I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own ground" (Ezekiel 36:24). I believe this promise will be fulfilled fully in the last days, when Israel turns to the Lord and Christ returns to set up His kingdom.

30:6 *And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life.*

"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life."

This is the heart of the chapter. Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham, a cutting away of the flesh (Genesis 17:10-11). A circumcised heart is a heart with the hardness cut away, a heart that is open to God and belongs to Him. In 10:16, Moses told Israel, "circumcise the foreskin of your heart." They were responsible to do it. But they could not. Back in 29:4 Moses said that God had not yet given them a heart to understand. Now God promises to do it Himself.

Notice what the new heart will do: "to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." That is the great command of 6:5. What the Law demanded, God Himself will give.

This is the same promise as the new covenant. Jeremiah says God will put His law "in their inward part, and on their heart I will write it" (Jeremiah 31:33). Ezekiel says, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezekiel 36:26), and "My Spirit I will put within you"

(Ezekiel 36:27). Both of those promises are made to "the house of Israel," and both look to the day of Israel's return.

Do Christians share in this? Yes. Jesus said His blood is the blood of the new covenant (Luke 22:20), and every believer is given a new heart and the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 5:5). Paul says that true circumcision "is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter" (Romans 2:29), and that believers in Christ were "circumcised with a circumcision made without hands" (Colossians 2:11). So the church shares now in the blessing of the new heart through Christ. But that does not cancel God's promise to the nation of Israel. Paul says plainly that a day is coming when "all Israel will be saved," because "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:26, 29). Zechariah says that God will pour out on Jerusalem "a spirit of grace and supplications," and "they will look to Me, to Him whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10). That is when Deuteronomy 30:6 will be fulfilled for the nation.

30:7-10 *And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who have pursued you. And you, you will return and listen to the voice of the LORD, and do all His commandments which I am commanding you today. And the LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, for good; for the LORD will return to rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you listen to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you return to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

"And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who have pursued you." The curses that fell on Israel would turn on the nations that persecuted them. God had promised Abraham, "the one who disdains you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3).

"And you, you will return and listen to the voice of the LORD, and do all His commandments." With a new heart, obedience would come from love, not fear.

"And the LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand," in children, livestock and harvest, "for the LORD will return to rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers." In 28:63 the LORD would "rejoice" to destroy them. Now He would "return to rejoice over you for good." The same God who disciplined them would delight in them again. Zephaniah describes that day: the LORD "will rejoice over you with joy" (Zephaniah 3:17).

"If you listen to the voice of the LORD your God," "if you return to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." The promise still comes with a call to return. But God Himself will give the heart that returns. That is grace.

30:11 *For this commandment which I am commanding you today, it is not too difficult for you, and it is not far away.*

"For this commandment which I am commanding you today, it is not too difficult for you, and it is not far away."

Wait, you may ask. Hasn't the Bible just shown that Israel could not keep the Law? How can Moses say it is not too difficult?

The point is not that anyone could keep the Law perfectly. The point is that God's will was not hidden or out of reach. Israel did not have to guess what God wanted. He had told them plainly (29:29). And the command at the center was to love the LORD (30:16), to turn to Him, and to trust Him. It was given to a people God had already redeemed, and it came with the altar and the sacrifices for when they failed. John says the same of believers now: "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

30:12-14 *It **is** not in the heavens, to say, 'Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us, and make us hear it, so that we may do it?' And it **is** not beyond the sea, to say, 'Who will pass over for us to the other side of the sea and take it for us, and make us hear it, so that we may do it?' For the word **is** very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.*

"It is not in the heavens." No one had to ask who would go up to heaven, take it, and make them hear it. "And it is not beyond the sea." No one had to cross the sea to fetch it. Israel did not need a hero to climb into heaven or sail across the sea to bring back God's Word. God had already brought it to them.

"For the word is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it." It was in their mouth because they spoke it and taught it to their children (6:7). It was to be in their heart because God wanted it loved and lived, not just recited.

Paul takes these words and applies them to the gospel. In Romans 10 he says that "the righteousness of faith" tells us not to say in our heart, Who will ascend into heaven, as if we had to go "to bring Christ down" (Romans 10:6). No one needs to climb to heaven to bring Christ down, because He has already come. No one needs to go down into the abyss to bring Him up from the dead, because God has already raised Him (Romans 10:7). "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart," Paul says, and that word is "the word of faith which we proclaim" (Romans 10:8). Then he explains it: "if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Is Paul twisting Moses' words? No. Moses was saying that God had come near and done the hard part, so His people did not have to reach up to heaven. Paul shows that this is most fully true in Christ. God came down to us in His Son. Christ did the work, all of it, in His death and resurrection. Salvation is not far away. It is as near as your mouth and your heart. All you must do is believe and confess Him.

30:15-18 *See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil, in that I am commanding you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, and you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land to which you are going in to take possession of it. And if your heart turns away, and you do not listen, and you are drawn away and bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong* ***your*** *days on the ground to which you are passing over the Jordan to go in to take possession of it.*

"See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil." Moses brings it all down to one choice.

What is the way of life? "To love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments." Love comes first. Then "you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land."

What is the way of death? "If your heart turns away, and you do not listen, and you are drawn away and bow down to other gods and serve them." Notice it starts in the heart. Then the ears close. Then the feet follow. "I declare to you today that you shall surely perish."

There is no third road. Jesus said the same: there is a wide road that leads to destruction and a narrow road that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14).

30:19-20 *I call the heavens and the earth to witness against you today: life and death I have set before you, the blessing and the curse; and you shall choose life, so that you may live, you and your seed, to love the LORD your God, to listen to His voice, and to cling to Him; for He* ***is*** *your life and the length of your days, to dwell on the ground which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them."*

"I call the heavens and the earth to witness against you today." In covenants of the ancient world, witnesses were called to make the agreement binding. Moses calls on the heavens and the earth, which would still be there long after every person in the crowd had died.

"Life and death I have set before you, the blessing and the curse; and you shall choose life, so that you may live, you and your seed."

God does not only set the choice before them. He tells them which one to make. He pleads with them. "Choose life." This is the heart of a loving God, who does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9).

And what is that life? "To love the LORD your God, to listen to His voice, and to cling to Him; for He is your life and the length of your days." Notice that. Life is not just something God gives. He is our life. To cling to Him is to hold on to Him the way a husband and wife hold to each other (Genesis 2:24 uses the same word).

Joshua made the same appeal at the end of his life: "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve," and he added, "I and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

For us, life is found in one Person. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), and "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). John wrote, "The one who has the Son has life" (1 John 5:12). The choice Moses set before Israel is the choice every person must make about Jesus Christ. Have you chosen life?

Chapter 30 Summary

Moses foretold that after Israel had known both the blessing and the curse and was scattered among the nations, they would take it to heart and return to the LORD with all their heart and soul. Then the LORD would turn back their captivity, gather them from the ends of the heavens, bring them into the land, and circumcise their hearts and the hearts of their children to love Him with all their heart and soul. He would turn the curses on their enemies and rejoice over Israel again. The return from Babylon was a partial fulfillment, and the full regathering and new heart for Israel are still to come in the last days. God's command was not too hard or far away, but near, in their mouth and heart, words Paul applies to the gospel of Christ who came down and was raised. Moses set before Israel life and death, called heaven and earth to witness, and pleaded with them to choose life by loving the LORD and clinging to Him, for He is their life.

I have made the choice Moses set before Israel. I chose life in Jesus Christ. I am sure there are people around me, family, friends and co-workers, who have not. All I can do is show Jesus in my life and actions, and pray that one day we can have an honest talk.

Chapter 30 Study Questions

1. What would Israel do among the nations after the blessing and the curse had come on them? (30:1-2)

2. What does the Hebrew word shuv, return, teach about repentance? (30:2, 8, 10)

3. How far would God's reach go to gather Israel, and where would He bring them? (30:3-5; Isaiah 11:11-12)

4. What does it mean that God will "circumcise your heart," and why could Israel not do this on their own? (30:6; 10:16; 29:4)

5. How does 30:6 connect to the new covenant promises in Jeremiah 31:33 and Ezekiel 36:26-27?

6. How do Christians share in the new heart today, and why does that not cancel God's promises to Israel? (Romans 2:29; 11:26, 29)

7. In what sense was God's command "not too difficult" and "not far away"? (30:11-14)

8. How does Paul use 30:12-14 to explain the gospel? (Romans 10:6-9)

9. Moses says the LORD "is your life." What would it look like this week to cling to Him? (30:20)

10. Have you made the choice Moses set before Israel, the choice of life in Jesus Christ? If you have, who in your life still needs to hear that choice? (30:19; John 14:6)

Chapter 31: Joshua Appointed and the Law Written

Scripture

31:1-13 And Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them, "I ***am*** a son of a hundred and twenty years today; I am no longer able to go out and to come in, and the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not pass over this Jordan.' The LORD your God, He is passing over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua, he is passing over before you, just as the LORD has spoken. And the LORD will do to them just as He did to Sihon and to Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, whom He destroyed. And the LORD will give them up before you, and you shall do to them according to all the commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and be courageous; do not be afraid and do not be terrified of them, for the LORD your God, He ***is*** the ***One*** who goes with you; He will not let you go, and He will not forsake you." And Moses called to Joshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, "Be strong and be courageous, for you, you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD swore to their fathers to give to them, and you, you shall cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, He ***is*** the ***One*** who goes before you; He, He will be with you; He will not let you go, and He will not forsake you; do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed." And Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of seven years, at the appointed time of the year of release, at the Festival of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the face of the LORD your God in the place which He will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their ears. Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and your sojourner who ***is*** in your gates, so that they may hear and so that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law; and their sons, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God all the days which you ***are*** alive on the ground to which you are passing over the Jordan to take possession of it."

31:14-30 And the LORD said to Moses, "Look, your days have drawn near to die. Call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, so that I may commission him." And Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting. And the LORD appeared at the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood over the entrance of the tent. And the LORD said to Moses, "Look, you are about to lie down with your fathers, and this people will rise up and prostitute itself after the foreign gods of the land into the midst of which it is going in, and it will forsake Me and break My covenant which I made with it. And My anger will burn against it on that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and it will be for devouring, and many calamities and troubles will find it; and it will say on that day, 'Is it not because my God ***is*** not in my midst that these calamities have found me?' And I, I will surely hide My face on that day because of all the evil which it has done, for it has turned to other gods. And now write for yourselves this song, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it in their mouth, so that this song may be for Me a witness against the sons of Israel. For I will bring it into the land which I swore to its fathers, flowing ***with*** milk and honey, and it will eat and be satisfied and grow fat, and it will turn to other gods, and they will serve them and spurn Me and break My covenant. And it shall be, when many calamities and troubles have found it, that this song will testify before it as a witness,

for it will not be forgotten from the mouth of its seed; for I know its inclination which it is making today, before I have brought it into the land which I swore." And Moses wrote this song on that day and taught it to the sons of Israel. And He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, "Be strong and be courageous, for you, you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I, I will be with you." And it was, when Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book until their completion, that Moses commanded the Levites, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, "Take this book of the law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and it shall be there for a witness against you. For I, I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. Look, while I ***am*** still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death! Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, and let me speak these words in their ears, and let me call the heavens and the earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you, and the evil will meet you at the end of the days, because you will do the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger by the work of your hands." And Moses spoke in the ears of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song until their completion:

Chapter 31 Preview

Moses' sermons are finished. Now he begins to hand everything over. He is a hundred and twenty years old, and he knows he will not cross the Jordan. So he does three things. He encourages the people and Joshua, his successor, with the same words: be strong and courageous, for the LORD goes with you and will not forsake you. He writes the Law down and gives it to the priests and elders, with a command to read it to the whole nation every seven years. And at God's command, he writes a song for Israel to learn by heart.

This chapter also has some of the saddest words in Deuteronomy. The LORD tells Moses plainly that after his death Israel will turn to other gods and break the covenant. The song and the book of the Law will stand as witnesses against them. Moses knew his people well. He says, if you have rebelled while I am still alive, how much more after I die? And yet, in the middle of that, God's promise to Joshua does not change: "I will be with you."

Chapter 31 Study

31:1-6 *And Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them, "I **am** a son of a hundred and twenty years today; I am no longer able to go out and to come in, and the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not pass over this Jordan.' The LORD your God, He is passing over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua, he is passing over before you, just as the LORD has spoken. And the LORD will do to them just as He did to Sihon and to Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, whom He destroyed. And the LORD will give them up before you, and you shall do to them according to all the commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and be courageous; do not be afraid and do not be terrified of them, for the LORD your God, He **is** the **One** who goes with you; He will not let you go, and He will not forsake you."*

"And Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel." He told them, "I am a son of a hundred and twenty years today; I am no longer able to go out and to come in." To go out and come in means to lead, especially in war. Moses was not saying he was frail. Chapter 34 says his eye had not dimmed and his strength had not left him (34:7). He was saying that his time to lead was over. The LORD had told him he would not cross the Jordan (3:27).

So who would lead them? "The LORD your God, He is passing over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you." Their real leader was the LORD. Moses would stay behind, but God would go ahead of them. And "Joshua, he is passing over before you." God had already chosen Moses' successor (1:38; Numbers 27:18-23).

"And the LORD will do to them just as He did to Sihon and to Og." What God had done east of the Jordan, He would do west of it.

Then the great word of encouragement: "Be strong and be courageous; do not be afraid and do not be terrified of them, for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you; He will not let you go, and He will not forsake you."

The writer of Hebrews takes this promise and gives it to every believer: "I will certainly not leave you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). He uses it to tell us to be content and not to love money. If God is with us, we have what we need. Jesus promised the same: "look, I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

31:7-8 *And Moses called to Joshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, "Be strong and be courageous, for you, you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD swore to their fathers to give to them, and you, you shall cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, He **is** the **One** who goes before you; He, He will be with you; He will not let you go, and He will not forsake you; do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed."*

"And Moses called to Joshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel," "Be strong and be courageous." Notice that it was done in public. The people needed to see that Moses himself had handed the leadership to Joshua. A smooth change of leaders is a gift to God's people.

"For you, you shall go with this people into the land," and "you shall cause them to inherit it." Joshua's job was to lead them in and divide the land among the tribes. His name means the LORD is salvation. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the same name.

"And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you; He, He will be with you; He will not let you go, and He will not forsake you; do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed." Moses gives Joshua the same promise he gave the people. Leaders need encouragement too. Joshua had seen Moses lead for forty years. Now it was his turn, and he must have felt the weight of it. God repeated this word to him again after Moses died: "Be strong and be bold" (Joshua 1:5-6).

Is there someone who leads you, a pastor, a parent, a boss, who needs that kind of encouragement today?

31:9-13 *And Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of seven years, at the appointed time of the year of release, at the Festival of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the face of the LORD your God in the place which He will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their ears. Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and your sojourner who* ***is*** *in your gates, so that they may hear and so that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law; and their sons, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God all the days which you* ***are*** *alive on the ground to which you are passing over the Jordan to take possession of it."*

"And Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel." The ark of the covenant was the gold-covered chest that held the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. It stood in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle and stood for God's throne among His people. The priests carried it, and now they also kept the written Law.

This verse is one of the clearest statements in the book that Moses wrote it (see also 31:24). God's Word was not left to memory. It was written down, so it could be kept, copied and read.

Then Moses gave a command: "At the end of seven years, at the appointed time of the year of release, at the Festival of Booths," "you shall read this law before all Israel in their ears." The year of release was the seventh year, when debts were canceled (15:1-2). The Festival of Booths, also called Tabernacles, was the fall harvest feast when Israel lived in shelters for a week to remember the wilderness (16:13-15). Every seven years, the whole Law was to be read aloud to the whole nation.

Who was to hear it? "The men and the women and the little ones, and your sojourner who is in your gates." Everyone. Why? "So that they may hear and so that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law." Hearing leads to learning, learning to the fear of God, and the fear of God to obedience.

And especially the children: "their sons, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God." Every generation must hear God's Word for itself.

Did Israel do this? Sometimes. After the return from exile, Ezra read the book of the Law to the people day by day at the Festival of Booths (Nehemiah 8:1-3, 18). But in the days of the kings, the book of the Law was so neglected that when a copy was found in the temple under King Josiah, it was treated as a great discovery (2 Kings 22:8-13). When God's Word is not read, it is soon forgotten. How often is God's Word read aloud in your church and in your home?

31:14-15 *And the LORD said to Moses, "Look, your days have drawn near to die. Call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, so that I may commission him." And Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting. And the LORD appeared at the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood over the entrance of the tent.*

The LORD told Moses, "Look, your days have drawn near to die. Call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, so that I may commission him."

The tent of meeting was another name for the tabernacle, the place where God met with His people. Moses and Joshua went there, "and the LORD appeared at the tent in a pillar of cloud." The cloud was the sign of God's presence that had led Israel all through the wilderness. Moses had commissioned Joshua before the people. Now God would commission him Himself.

31:16-18 *And the LORD said to Moses, "Look, you are about to lie down with your fathers, and this people will rise up and prostitute itself after the foreign gods of the land into the midst of which it is going in, and it will forsake Me and break My covenant which I made with it. And My anger will burn against it on that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and it will be for devouring, and many calamities and troubles will find it; and it will say on that day, 'Is it not because my God **is** not in my midst that these calamities have found me?' And I, I will surely hide My face on that day because of all the evil which it has done, for it has turned to other gods.*

Then God told Moses something hard. "Look, you are about to lie down with your fathers." To lie down with your fathers is a gentle way of saying to die. "And this people will rise up and prostitute itself after the foreign gods of the land." God often describes idolatry as spiritual adultery. Israel was bound to the LORD like a wife to her husband, and to chase other gods was to be unfaithful to Him. "And it will forsake Me and break My covenant which I made with it."

Imagine hearing that at the end of your life's work. Moses had given forty years to these people. Now God told him they would turn away anyway.

"And My anger will burn against it on that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them." To hide His face means to withdraw His favor and protection. Then "many calamities and troubles will find it," and the people will ask whether these troubles came "because my God is not in my midst."

"And I, I will surely hide My face on that day because of all the evil which it has done, for it has turned to other gods." Notice the cause: they turned from God first. God hid His face because they had turned their backs.

Why would God tell Moses this? Not because Israel had no choice. God knows the future, but His knowing does not force anyone's hand. He told Moses so that when it happened, Israel would know that God had warned them, and that He was not surprised or defeated by their sin.

31:19-22 *And now write for yourselves this song, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it in their mouth, so that this song may be for Me a witness against the sons of Israel. For I will bring it into the land which I swore to its fathers, flowing* ***with*** *milk and honey, and it will eat and be satisfied and grow fat, and it will turn to other gods, and they will serve them and spurn Me and break My covenant. And it shall be, when many calamities and troubles have found it, that this song will testify before it as a witness, for it will not be forgotten from the mouth of its seed; for I know its inclination which it is making today, before I have brought it into the land which I swore." And Moses wrote this song on that day and taught it to the sons of Israel.*

"And now write for yourselves this song, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it in their mouth, so that this song may be for Me a witness against the sons of Israel."

Why a song? Because songs stay with us. People forget sermons, but they remember songs for the rest of their lives. God wanted these words in their mouths, sung by parents and children, so that they would never be forgotten.

"For I will bring it into the land which I swore to its fathers, flowing with milk and honey, and it will eat and be satisfied and grow fat, and it will turn to other gods." Here again is the danger of plenty that Moses warned about in chapters 6 and 8. Comfort leads to forgetting God.

"And it shall be, when many calamities and troubles have found it, that this song will testify before it as a witness, for it will not be forgotten from the mouth of its seed." When trouble came, Israel would be singing the very song that explained why.

"For I know its inclination which it is making today, before I have brought it into the land." God knew their hearts before they ever crossed the Jordan. He knows ours too. And still He loved them and gave them the land.

"And Moses wrote this song on that day and taught it to the sons of Israel." We will study the song in chapter 32. What songs are you putting into the mouths of your children? The songs we sing shape what we believe.

31:23 *And He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, "Be strong and be courageous, for you, you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I, I will be with you."*

"And He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun." He said, "Be strong and be courageous, for you, you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I, I will be with you."

Now the LORD Himself speaks to Joshua. The words are the same as Moses' words, but now they come straight from God. And the last line is the most important: "I, I will be with you." Joshua's strength would not come from his own skill. It would come from God's presence. Every task God gives His people comes with that same promise.

31:24-27 *And it was, when Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book until their completion, that Moses commanded the Levites, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, "Take this book of the law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and it shall be there for a witness against you. For I, I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. Look, while I* ***am*** *still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death!*

"And it was, when Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book until their completion." Moses finished the book. Then he told the Levites who carried the ark, "Take this book of the law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and it shall be there for a witness against you."

The tablets of the Ten Commandments were inside the ark (10:5). The book of the Law was placed beside it. It would stand as a witness, a record of what Israel had promised and what God had warned.

Then Moses spoke with brutal honesty: "For I, I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. Look, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death!"

A stiff neck is the picture of an ox that will not bow to the yoke. Moses had seen it at the golden calf, at Kadesh-barnea, at Meribah and at Peor. He had no illusions about his people.

Is that a word for us? Yes. We are no better than Israel. Paul says these things "happened to them as examples," and were written for our warning (1 Corinthians 10:11). The heart that rebels against God is in every one of us. That is why we need not only God's Law, but a Savior and a new heart.

31:28-30 *Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, and let me speak these words in their ears, and let me call the heavens and the earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you, and the evil will meet you at the end of the days, because you will do the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger by the work of your hands." And Moses spoke in the ears of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song until their completion:*

"Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, and let me speak these words in their ears, and let me call the heavens and the earth to witness against them."

"For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you, and the evil will meet you at the end of the days." The phrase "the end of the days" points to the latter part of Israel's history, and in the prophets it often reaches to the last days before the Messiah's kingdom (4:30). Moses saw that the trouble would not be quick. It would follow Israel down through their history.

And the reason: "because you will do the evil in the eyes of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger by the work of your hands." The work of their hands means the idols they would make.

The book of Judges shows how quickly this came true. After Joshua and the elders who outlived him died, "another generation" arose who did not know the LORD, and they served the Baals (Judges 2:7-11).

"And Moses spoke in the ears of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song until their completion." And that is where we turn next.

Chapter 31 Summary

At a hundred and twenty years old, Moses told Israel he would not cross the Jordan, but the LORD and Joshua would go before them, and the LORD would not forsake them. Before all Israel he charged Joshua to be strong and courageous. Moses wrote the Law and gave it to the priests and elders, commanding that it be read to the whole nation, men, women, children and foreigners, every seven years at the Festival of Booths, so that each generation would learn to fear the LORD. At the tent of meeting, in the pillar of cloud, the LORD told Moses that after his death Israel would turn to other gods and He would hide His face from them, and He told Moses to write a song to stand as a witness against them. The LORD commissioned Joshua with the promise, "I will be with you." Moses finished writing the book of the Law, had it placed beside the ark as a witness, and warned that Israel, rebellious already, would turn aside after his death. Then he spoke the song to the whole assembly.

Chapter 31 Study Questions

1. Why did Moses say he could no longer go out and come in, and who would go before Israel instead? (31:2-3; 34:7)

2. What promise did Moses give the people and Joshua, and how does Hebrews apply it to us? (31:6, 8; Hebrews 13:5)

3. Why do you think Moses commissioned Joshua "before the eyes of all Israel"? (31:7)

4. What did Moses do with the Law he wrote, and what does this tell us about who wrote Deuteronomy? (31:9, 24)

5. When and to whom was the Law to be read, and why? (31:10-13; Nehemiah 8:18)

6. What did the LORD tell Moses Israel would do after his death? Why do you think He told him? (31:16-18)

7. Why did God give Israel a song? What makes songs such a powerful teacher? (31:19-22)

8. What did Moses mean by Israel's "stiff neck," and why is that a warning for us? (31:27; 1 Corinthians 10:11)

9. Is there someone in your life who leads or serves others and needs to hear "Be strong and be courageous" from you this week?

10. How often is God's Word read in your home? What could you do to make sure the next generation hears it? (31:12-13)

Chapter 32: The Song of Moses

Scripture

32:1-14 Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop like the rain, let my speech distill like the dew, like showers on new grass, and like abundant rains on vegetation. For the name of the LORD I will proclaim; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, His work ***is*** perfect, for all His ways ***are*** justice; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright ***is*** He. It has acted corruptly toward Him; ***they are*** not His sons, ***it is*** their blemish; a perverse and crooked generation. Is it the LORD you repay thus, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who acquired you? He made you and established you. Remember the days of old; consider the years of generation and generation. Ask your father, and he will tell you; your elders, and they will say ***it*** to you. When the Most High gave the nations ***their*** inheritance, when He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. For the LORD's portion ***is*** His people; Jacob ***is*** the measured portion of His inheritance. He found him in a land of wilderness, and in the formlessness of a howling wasteland; He surrounded him, He cared for him, He guarded him like the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle ***that*** stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreads out its wings, takes him, carries him on its pinion, the LORD alone guided him, and ***there was*** no foreign god with Him. He made him ride on the high places of the land, and he ate the produce of the field; and He made him suck honey from the crag and oil from the flint of the rock, curds of the herd and milk of the flock, with the fat of lambs, and rams, sons of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of wheat; and the blood of the grape you drank, fermenting wine.

32:15-25 And Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; you grew fat, you grew thick, you were gorged; and he abandoned God who made him, and treated with contempt the Rock of his salvation. They made Him jealous with strange ***gods***; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not God, gods whom they had not known, new ***gods*** who came lately, whom your fathers had not dreaded. The Rock who fathered you, you neglected, and you forgot God who gave birth to you. And the LORD saw and spurned ***them***, because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters. And He said, "Let Me hide My face from them; I will see what their end ***will be***; for they ***are*** a generation of perversities, sons in whom ***is*** no faithfulness. They, they have made Me jealous with ***what is*** not a god; they have provoked Me to anger with their vanities; and I, I will make them jealous with ***those who are*** not a people; with a foolish nation I will provoke them to anger. For a fire has been kindled in My anger, and it burns to the lowest Sheol, and it consumes the earth and its produce, and sets ablaze the foundations of the mountains. I will heap calamities on them; My arrows I will use up on them. ***They will be*** exhausted ***by*** famine, and devoured ***by*** plague and bitter destruction; and the tooth of beasts I will send on them, with the venom of crawling things of the dust. Outside the sword will bereave, and from the inner rooms terror, both young man and virgin, the nursing child with the man of gray hair.

32:26-43 I said, 'I will cut them to pieces; let Me make the memory of them cease from among men,' were it not ***that*** I feared the provocation of the enemy, lest their adversaries misconstrue, lest they say, 'Our hand is high, and the LORD has not done all this.' For they ***are*** a nation devoid of counsels, and ***there is*** no understanding in them. If only they were wise, they would

comprehend this; they would understand their end! How could one pursue a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had delivered them up? For not like our Rock ***is*** their rock, and our enemies ***are*** judges. For from the vine of Sodom ***is*** their vine, and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes ***are*** grapes of poison; bitter clusters ***are*** theirs. The venom of serpents ***is*** their wine, and the cruel poison of cobras. Is it not stored up with Me, sealed up in My storehouses? To Me ***belong*** vengeance and recompense, for the time ***when*** their foot slips; for the day of their calamity ***is*** near, and the things prepared for them hasten." For the LORD will judge His people, and He will have compassion on His servants, when He sees that ***their*** hand is gone, and ***there is*** none, shut up or left free. And He will say, "Where ***are*** their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices ***and*** drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you; let it be a shelter over you! See now that I, I ***am*** He, and ***there is*** no god with Me; I, I put to death and I make alive; I have wounded and I, I heal; and ***there is*** no one who delivers from My hand. For I lift up My hand to the heavens and say, '***As*** I live forever, if I sharpen the lightning of My sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment, I will return vengeance to My adversaries, and I will repay those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword will devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and the captive, from the head of the leaders of the enemy.'" Shout for joy, O nations, His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and He will return vengeance to His adversaries, and He will make atonement for His land, His people.

32:44-52 And Moses came and spoke all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he and Hoshea the son of Nun. And Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel. And he said to them, "Set your heart on all the words which I am testifying against you today, which you shall command your sons to be careful to do, all the words of this law. For it ***is*** not an empty word for you, for it ***is*** your life, and by this word you shall prolong ***your*** days on the ground to which you are passing over the Jordan to take possession of it." And the LORD spoke to Moses on this same day, saying, "Go up to this mountain of the Abarim, the mountain of Nebo, which ***is*** in the land of Moab, which ***is*** facing Jericho, and see the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the sons of Israel for a possession. And die on the mountain onto which you are going up, and be gathered to your peoples, just as Aaron your brother died on Hor the mountain and was gathered to his peoples, because you acted unfaithfully against Me in the midst of the sons of Israel at the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, ***in*** the wilderness of Zin, because you did not sanctify Me in the midst of the sons of Israel. For at a distance you shall see the land, and there you shall not go in, into the land which I am giving to the sons of Israel."

Chapter 32 Preview

This is the song the LORD told Moses to write and teach Israel in chapter 31. It is Israel's history in poetry, told before most of it happened. It begins with praise to God, the Rock, whose work is perfect. It tells how the LORD chose Israel, found them in the wilderness, carried them like an eagle carries its young, and fed them with the best of the land. Then it tells how Israel grew fat and kicked, turned to idols and demons, and forgot the Rock who fathered them. God answers with judgment: He will hide His face, send famine, sword and plague, and stir Israel to jealousy with a people who are not a people. But He will not wipe them out. In the end He will have

compassion on His servants, judge their enemies, and make atonement for His land and His people.

The New Testament quotes this song several times. Paul uses it to explain how God would use the Gentiles to make Israel jealous (Romans 10:19), to warn against vengeance (Romans 12:19), and to call the nations to rejoice with God's people (Romans 15:10). Hebrews uses its words about the Lord judging His people (Hebrews 10:30) and, from the Greek form of verse 43, about the angels worshiping the Son (Hebrews 1:6). In Revelation, the saints in heaven sing "the song of Moses the slave of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Revelation 15:3). The chapter ends with God telling Moses to climb Mount Nebo to see the land and die there.

Chapter 32 Study

32:1-3 *Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop like the rain, let my speech distill like the dew, like showers on new grass, and like abundant rains on vegetation. For the name of the LORD I will proclaim; ascribe greatness to our God!*

"Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth." In 31:28 Moses said he would call heaven and earth to witness. Here he does it. The song is like a court case, with all creation as the witnesses.

This is Hebrew poetry, so a word about how it works. Hebrew poetry does not rhyme the way English songs often do. Instead it uses what is called parallelism. A line says something, and the next line says it again in different words, or adds to it, or gives the opposite. "Give ear, O heavens" is matched by "let the earth hear." "Let me speak" is matched by "the words of my mouth." When you read the Psalms, the Proverbs and the prophets, look for these pairs. They help you understand the meaning.

"Let my teaching drop like the rain, let my speech distill like the dew, like showers on new grass." In a dry land, rain and dew were life. Moses prayed that his words would soak into Israel's hearts and make them grow. God's Word does that still (Isaiah 55:10-11).

"For the name of the LORD I will proclaim; ascribe greatness to our God!" The song is first of all about God.

32:4 *The Rock, His work **is** perfect, for all His ways **are** justice; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright **is** He.*

"The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He."

The Rock is one of the great names of God in this song. It appears again in verses 15, 18, 30 and 31. A rock is solid, unchanging, a place of safety and shelter. In a land of shifting sand, a great rock was something you could build on and hide behind. God is like that. He does not change.

Notice what is said about Him. His work is perfect. All His ways are justice. He is faithful and without injustice. Before the song tells of Israel's sin and God's judgment, it settles this: whatever God does is right. When we come to the hard parts of the song, we need to remember this verse.

Paul tells us that the rock that gave Israel water in the wilderness "was the Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus Himself said that the wise man builds his house on the rock by hearing His words and doing them (Matthew 7:24).

32:5-6 *It has acted corruptly toward Him; **they are** not His sons, **it is** their blemish; a perverse and crooked generation. Is it the LORD you repay thus, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who acquired you? He made you and established you.*

Now the contrast. God is perfect, but "It has acted corruptly toward Him; they are not His sons, it is their blemish; a perverse and crooked generation." The Hebrew of this line is hard, but the point is plain. Israel had acted so badly that they did not look like God's children at all. Paul borrows the words "a crooked and perverted generation" to describe the world in which believers are to shine as lights (Philippians 2:15).

"Is it the LORD you repay thus, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who acquired you? He made you and established you." God had made Israel a nation, bought them out of Egypt, and set them in place. How could they treat Him like this? This is one of the first places in the Old Testament where God is plainly called Israel's Father. The sin of a child against a loving father is the saddest sin of all.

32:7-9 *Remember the days of old; consider the years of generation and generation. Ask your father, and he will tell you; your elders, and they will say **it** to you. When the Most High gave the nations **their** inheritance, when He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. For the LORD's portion **is** His people; Jacob **is** the measured portion of His inheritance.*

"Remember the days of old; consider the years of generation and generation. Ask your father, and he will tell you; your elders, and they will say it to you." Faith is passed down. Ask the older ones what God has done.

"When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel." The Most High is a name for God as ruler over all nations. This looks back to Genesis 10 and 11, when God divided the nations after the tower of Babel. Paul says the same in Athens: God "made from one blood every nation of men," and determined "the boundaries of their dwelling" (Acts 17:26).

What does "according to the number of the sons of Israel" mean? Our Hebrew text, which the SLB follows, reads this way. It may mean that God set the nations in their places with Israel in mind, planning even then where His people would live. Genesis 10 lists seventy nations, and seventy is also the number of Jacob's family who went down to Egypt (Genesis 46:27), so some see a link there.

But you should know that some old copies of this verse read differently. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls, copies of Scripture found in caves near the Dead Sea and made before the time of Christ, reads "sons of God" here, and the old Greek translation has a similar reading. On that reading, God divided the nations among the angels, or heavenly beings, while He kept Israel for Himself (compare Daniel 10:13, 20, which speaks of spiritual princes over nations). Bible teachers who love God's Word differ on which reading is original. Either way, the next verse is the point.

"For the LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the measured portion of His inheritance." Every nation had its land. But Israel was God's own. Of all the peoples of the earth, He chose Israel as His special treasure.

32:10-12 *He found him in a land of wilderness, and in the formlessness of a howling wasteland; He surrounded him, He cared for him, He guarded him like the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle **that** stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreads out its wings, takes him, carries him on its pinion, the LORD alone guided him, and **there was** no foreign god with Him.*

"He found him in a land of wilderness, and in the formlessness of a howling wasteland." Israel was helpless in a desert where the wind howled. God found them there. The word for formlessness is the same word used in Genesis 1:2, where the earth was "formlessness" before God made it good. God took a people out of chaos and made them His.

"He surrounded him, He cared for him, He guarded him like the pupil of His eye." The pupil is the most tender part of the eye, and we guard it by instinct. That is how God guarded Israel.

Then one of the most beautiful pictures in Scripture: "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreads out its wings, takes him, carries him on its pinion." A mother eagle stirs up the nest so the young will learn to fly. She hovers over them. When one falls, she spreads her wings and catches it. God had said at Sinai, "I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Myself" (Exodus 19:4). Sometimes God stirs up our nest. It feels like falling. But He is always under us, ready to catch us.

"The LORD alone guided him, and there was no foreign god with Him." No idol had any part in Israel's rescue.

32:13-14 *He made him ride on the high places of the land, and he ate the produce of the field; and He made him suck honey from the crag and oil from the flint of the rock, curds of the herd and milk of the flock, with the fat of lambs, and rams, sons of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of wheat; and the blood of the grape you drank, fermenting wine.*

"He made him ride on the high places of the land." To ride on the heights is to be in control, secure and victorious. "He made him suck honey from the crag and oil from the flint of the rock." Bees made honey in the rocks, and olive trees grew in rocky soil. Even the hard places would give them sweetness and richness.

Then a list of the best food there was: curds and milk, "the fat of lambs," "rams, sons of Bashan," which was famous for its herds, "the fat of the kidneys of wheat," meaning the finest wheat, "and

the blood of the grape you drank, fermenting wine." God gave Israel more than they needed. He gave them the best.

Has God given you more than you need? Most of us, if we are honest, would say yes. The question is what we do with it.

32:15-18 *And Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; you grew fat, you grew thick, you were gorged; and he abandoned God who made him, and treated with contempt the Rock of his salvation. They made Him jealous with strange **gods**; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not God, gods whom they had not known, new **gods** who came lately, whom your fathers had not dreaded. The Rock who fathered you, you neglected, and you forgot God who gave birth to you.*

"And Jeshurun grew fat and kicked." Jeshurun is a pet name for Israel. It means upright one. God gave His people a name of honor, and then they acted like a well-fed ox that kicks its owner. "You grew fat, you grew thick, you were gorged; and he abandoned God who made him, and treated with contempt the Rock of his salvation."

This is what Moses warned about in 6:10-12 and 8:11-14. Plenty made them proud, and pride made them forget.

"They made Him jealous with strange gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger." "They sacrificed to demons, not God, gods whom they had not known, new gods who came lately." Here we learn what idols really are. The idol was only wood or stone, but behind idol worship stood demons. Paul says the same: "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God" (1 Corinthians 10:20). False religion is never harmless.

"The Rock who fathered you, you neglected, and you forgot God who gave birth to you." God is pictured both as a father and as a mother who gave birth. He brought Israel into being. And they forgot Him.

32:19-22 *And the LORD saw and spurned **them**, because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters. And He said, "Let Me hide My face from them; I will see what their end **will be**; for they **are** a generation of perversities, sons in whom **is** no faithfulness. They, they have made Me jealous with **what is** not a god; they have provoked Me to anger with their vanities; and I, I will make them jealous with **those who are** not a people; with a foolish nation I will provoke them to anger. For a fire has been kindled in My anger, and it burns to the lowest Sheol, and it consumes the earth and its produce, and sets ablaze the foundations of the mountains.*

"And the LORD saw and spurned them, because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters." Now God speaks. "Let Me hide My face from them; I will see what their end will be; for they are a generation of perversities, sons in whom is no faithfulness."

Then a measure-for-measure judgment: "They, they have made Me jealous with what is not a god; they have provoked Me to anger with their vanities; and I, I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; with a foolish nation I will provoke them to anger." Israel gave their love to a no-god. So God would show His favor to a no-people.

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10:19 and explains it in Romans 11. When most of Israel rejected Jesus, God brought salvation to the Gentiles, "to provoke them to jealousy" (Romans 11:11). The Gentiles, who had not been God's people, are now being saved in great numbers. And God's purpose in that is not to throw Israel away, but to stir them up to want what the Gentiles have found, so that in the end Israel too will turn to the Messiah (Romans 11:11-15, 25-26).

"For a fire has been kindled in My anger, and it burns to the lowest Sheol." Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, the grave or the world below. God's anger reaches from the heights to the depths.

32:23-25 *I will heap calamities on them; My arrows I will use up on them. **They will be** exhausted **by** famine, and devoured **by** plague and bitter destruction; and the tooth of beasts I will send on them, with the venom of crawling things of the dust. Outside the sword will bereave, and from the inner rooms terror, both young man and virgin, the nursing child with the man of gray hair.*

"I will heap calamities on them; My arrows I will use up on them." God's judgments are pictured as arrows. Famine, plague, wild beasts and serpents would come. "Outside the sword will bereave, and from the inner rooms terror, both young man and virgin, the nursing child with the man of gray hair." No one would escape, not the young or the old, not those outside or those hiding indoors.

These are the curses of chapter 28 put into song. Israel would sing them for generations, and when the judgments came, they would know they had been warned.

32:26-27 *I said, 'I will cut them to pieces; let Me make the memory of them cease from among men,' were it not **that** I feared the provocation of the enemy, lest their adversaries misconstrue, lest they say, 'Our hand is high, and the LORD has not done all this.'*

Then God holds back. God says He had said, "I will cut them to pieces; let Me make the memory of them cease from among men." God could have wiped Israel out. Why didn't He? "Were it not that I feared the provocation of the enemy, lest their adversaries misconstrue." He would not let the enemy think they had done it by their own strength and boast that "the LORD has not done all this."

God's own name and glory were at stake. Moses had pleaded this very reason at the golden calf: what will the Egyptians say (Exodus 32:12; Deuteronomy 9:28)? God would not let His name be mocked. That is good news for Israel. Their survival does not finally rest on their faithfulness, but on God's faithfulness to His own name. And it is good news for us.

32:28-31 *For they **are** a nation devoid of counsels, and **there is** no understanding in them. If only they were wise, they would comprehend this; they would understand their end! How could one pursue a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had delivered them up? For not like our Rock **is** their rock, and our enemies **are** judges.*

"For they are a nation devoid of counsels, and there is no understanding in them. If only they were wise, they would comprehend this; they would understand their end!" Who is meant here? It may be Israel, who did not understand why they suffered. Or it may be the enemy nations, who

did not understand that they had only won because God allowed it. The next lines suggest the enemy.

"How could one pursue a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had delivered them up?" When Israel was faithful, one of them could chase a thousand (Joshua 23:10). If an enemy ever did that to Israel, it was only because God had handed His people over.

"For not like our Rock is their rock, and our enemies are judges." Even Israel's enemies had to admit it. Their gods were nothing like the LORD.

32:32-35 *For from the vine of Sodom **is** their vine, and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes **are** grapes of poison; bitter clusters **are** theirs. The venom of serpents **is** their wine, and the cruel poison of cobras. Is it not stored up with Me, sealed up in My storehouses? To Me **belong** vengeance and recompense, for the time **when** their foot slips; for the day of their calamity **is** near, and the things prepared for them hasten."*

"For from the vine of Sodom is their vine, and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poison." The enemy nations were as wicked as Sodom. Their wine was "the venom of serpents."

"Is it not stored up with Me, sealed up in My storehouses?" God had not forgotten their sins. He had them stored up and sealed, waiting for the right time.

"To Me belong vengeance and recompense, for the time when their foot slips; for the day of their calamity is near." Paul quotes this verse when he tells believers not to take revenge: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19). Hebrews quotes it too (Hebrews 10:30). This is a great relief. We do not have to settle every score. God sees every wrong, and He will judge justly. That frees us to love our enemies and leave the judging to Him.

32:36-38 *For the LORD will judge His people, and He will have compassion on His servants, when He sees that **their** hand is gone, and **there is** none, shut up or left free. And He will say, "Where **are** their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices **and** drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you; let it be a shelter over you!*

"For the LORD will judge His people, and He will have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their hand is gone, and there is none, shut up or left free." Here the song turns. To judge His people here means to bring justice for them, to vindicate them. When Israel has nothing left, no strength, no one to help, God will step in with compassion. Hebrews quotes the first words of this verse as a warning that "the Lord will judge His people" (Hebrews 10:30).

Then God mocks the idols Israel had trusted: "Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you." When the crisis came, the idols were silent. They always are.

32:39 *See now that I, I **am** He, and **there is** no god with Me; I, I put to death and I make alive; I have wounded and I, I heal; and **there is** no one who delivers from My hand.*

"See now that I, I am He, and there is no god with Me; I, I put to death and I make alive; I have wounded and I, I heal; and there is no one who delivers from My hand."

This is one of the strongest statements in the Old Testament that there is only one God. "I, I am He." No other god stands beside Him. He holds life and death. He wounds, and He heals. Hannah sang the same truth (1 Samuel 2:6), and Hosea said, "He has torn, and He will heal us" (Hosea 6:1).

When God disciplines His people, it is so that He can heal them. The wound is never the end. And in Jesus we see this God in human flesh. He is the One who said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). He holds "the keys of Hades and of Death" (Revelation 1:18).

32:40-42 *For I lift up My hand to the heavens and say, '**As** I live forever, if I sharpen the lightning of My sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment, I will return vengeance to My adversaries, and I will repay those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword will devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and the captive, from the head of the leaders of the enemy.'"*

"For I lift up My hand to the heavens," God says, and He swears, "As I live forever." Lifting the hand was the way a person swore an oath. God swears by His own life, since there is no one greater (Hebrews 6:13).

"If I sharpen the lightning of My sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment, I will return vengeance to My adversaries, and I will repay those who hate Me." The language that follows is fierce. God's arrows and sword are pictured as drunk with the blood of His enemies.

These are hard words, and we should not soften them too much. God is a warrior against evil, and the day is coming when He will judge those who hate Him and harm His people. But notice that vengeance here belongs to God, not to man. And He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23). The same Bible that speaks of God's sword also tells us that God sent His Son to bear the judgment for all who will turn to Him. Revelation pictures the returning Christ with a sharp sword coming from His mouth to judge the nations (Revelation 19:11-15). The time to turn to Him is now.

32:43 *Shout for joy, O nations, His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and He will return vengeance to His adversaries, and He will make atonement for His land, His people.*

"Shout for joy, O nations, His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and He will return vengeance to His adversaries, and He will make atonement for His land, His people."

The song ends with the nations called to rejoice. The Hebrew line can be read as calling the nations to praise His people, or as calling the nations to rejoice together with His people. Paul quotes it in that second sense: "Rejoice, Gentiles, with His people" (Romans 15:10). Paul's point is that God always meant for the Gentiles to share in Israel's joy and praise Him together with Israel, through Christ.

Atonement means covering over sin and making peace with God. At the end, God will "make atonement for His land, His people." The land defiled by sin and bloodshed will be cleansed, and the people will be made right with God. That points to the day when Israel turns to the Messiah and God forgives them (Romans 11:26-27; Zechariah 13:1), and Christ reigns over the earth.

Hebrews 1:6 quotes the words, "And let all the angels of God worship Him," and applies them to Christ, God's Firstborn, as He is brought into the world. Those words are not in our Hebrew text of 32:43, which the SLB follows. They are found in the old Greek translation of this verse, and a similar longer form appears in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Psalm 97:7 has a similar line.) The writer of Hebrews, guided by the Holy Spirit, used that form of the verse to show that the Son is far above the angels. And it fits the song: when God comes to judge and to save, it is His Son, Jesus Christ, who comes, and all heaven worships Him.

32:44-47 *And Moses came and spoke all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he and Hoshea the son of Nun. And Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel. And he said to them, "Set your heart on all the words which I am testifying against you today, which you shall command your sons to be careful to do, all the words of this law. For it **is** not an empty word for you, for it **is** your life, and by this word you shall prolong **your** days on the ground to which you are passing over the Jordan to take possession of it."*

"And Moses came and spoke all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he and Hoshea the son of Nun." Hoshea was Joshua's first name, before Moses changed it (Numbers 13:16). The old leader and the new stood together to teach the song.

Then Moses gave his last charge: "Set your heart on all the words which I am testifying against you today, which you shall command your sons to be careful to do, all the words of this law."

"For it is not an empty word for you, for it is your life." God's Word is not empty talk. It is not one more set of opinions. It is life. Jesus said, "The words which I speak to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). Do you treat God's Word as your life, or as one more thing to fit in when there is time?

32:48-52 *And the LORD spoke to Moses on this same day, saying, "Go up to this mountain of the Abarim, the mountain of Nebo, which **is** in the land of Moab, which **is** facing Jericho, and see the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the sons of Israel for a possession. And die on the mountain onto which you are going up, and be gathered to your peoples, just as Aaron your brother died on Hor the mountain and was gathered to his peoples, because you acted unfaithfully against Me in the midst of the sons of Israel at the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, **in** the wilderness of Zin, because you did not sanctify Me in the midst of the sons of Israel. For at a distance you shall see the land, and there you shall not go in, into the land which I am giving to the sons of Israel."*

"And the LORD spoke to Moses on this same day." "Go up to this mountain of the Abarim, the mountain of Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, which is facing Jericho, and see the land of Canaan." The Abarim is a range of mountains east of the Dead Sea. Nebo is one of its peaks, and from it you can see across the Jordan valley into the land.

"And die on the mountain onto which you are going up, and be gathered to your peoples, just as Aaron your brother died on Hor" To be gathered to your peoples means to join those who have died before you. It is a hint that death is not the end.

Why could Moses not go in? "Because you acted unfaithfully against Me in the midst of the sons of Israel at the waters of Meribah of Kadesh," "because you did not sanctify Me." At Meribah, God told Moses to speak to the rock, and in his anger Moses struck it twice and spoke as though he and Aaron were bringing out the water (Numbers 20:7-12). He did not treat God as holy before the people.

That seems a heavy price for one sin, after forty years of faithful service. But the greater the leader, the greater the responsibility (James 3:1). And the rock, as we have seen, was a picture of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4), struck once for us. God was gracious even so. He let Moses see the land. And many centuries later, Moses did stand in the land, on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured, talking with Him about His death in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30-31).

Chapter 32 Summary

Moses called heaven and earth to hear his song. He proclaimed the LORD as the Rock, perfect, just and faithful, and contrasted Him with a corrupt and foolish people who repaid their Father with evil. When God divided the nations, He kept Israel as His own portion, found them in the wilderness, guarded them like the pupil of His eye, carried them like an eagle, and gave them the best of the land. But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked, turned to strange gods and demons, and forgot the Rock who fathered them. So God would hide His face, make them jealous with a no-people, and send famine, plague and sword, yet He would not wipe them out, lest the enemy boast. Vengeance belongs to the LORD; He will have compassion on His servants when their strength is gone, show the idols to be nothing, and declare that He alone kills and makes alive, wounds and heals. He will repay His enemies, and the nations will rejoice with His people when He makes atonement for His land and people. Moses charged Israel that God's Word is their life, and God told him to climb Mount Nebo to see the land and die.

Chapter 32 Study Questions

1. What is Hebrew parallelism, and where can you see it in the first verses of the song? (32:1-2)

2. What does verse 4 teach about God the Rock, and why is it important to settle that before reading the rest of the song? (32:4; 1 Corinthians 10:4)

3. What are the two readings of verse 8, and what point does verse 9 make either way? (32:8-9)

4. How does the picture of the eagle describe God's care for Israel? (32:10-12; Exodus 19:4)

5. What happened when Jeshurun "grew fat"? What does the song say was really behind idol worship? (32:15-18; 1 Corinthians 10:20)

6. How does Paul use 32:21 to explain God's plan for the Gentiles and for Israel? (Romans 10:19; 11:11)

7. Why did God not wipe Israel out? (32:26-27)

8. How should "To Me belong vengeance and recompense" change the way we respond to people who wrong us? (32:35; Romans 12:19)

9. How do Romans 15:10 and Hebrews 1:6 use verse 43 to point to the Gentiles and to Christ?

10. Moses said God's Word "is your life." What would change if you treated it that way? Has God ever stirred up your nest? How did He carry you? (32:11, 47)

Chapter 33: Moses Blesses the Tribes

Scripture

33:1-17 And this ***is*** the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the sons of Israel before his death. And he said, "The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir on them; He shone forth from the mountain of Paran, and He came from ten thousands of holiness; from His right hand ***was*** a fire of law for them. Indeed, He ***is*** loving the peoples; all His holy ones ***are*** in Your hand; and they, they were led at Your feet; ***each*** will receive of Your words. Moses commanded us a law, a possession of the assembly of Jacob. And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people gathered themselves together, the tribes of Israel. Let Reuben live, and let him not die, and let his men be a number." And this ***is*** for Judah, and he said, "Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people; his hands contended for him, and You will be a help against his adversaries." And of Levi he said, "Your Thummim and Your Urim ***belong*** to the man, Your godly one, whom You tested at Massah, ***with*** whom You contended at the waters of Meribah; who said of his father and of his mother, 'I have not seen him'; and his brothers he did not recognize, and his sons he did not know; for they kept Your word, and Your covenant they guarded. They shall teach Your judgments to Jacob, and Your law to Israel; they shall put incense in Your nostrils, and a whole offering on Your altar. Bless, O LORD, his substance, and the work of his hands You will accept; shatter the loins of those who rise against him, and of those who hate him, so that they do not rise." Of Benjamin he said, "The beloved of the LORD, he dwells in security beside Him; He shields him all the day, and between His shoulders he dwells." And of Joseph he said, "Blessed of the LORD ***be*** his land, from the choice things of the heavens, from the dew, and from the deep lying beneath, and from the choice things of the produce of the sun, and from the choice things of the yield of the months, and from the top of the ancient mountains, and from the choice things of the everlasting hills, and from the choice things of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush; let it come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of the one consecrated among his brothers. The firstborn of his ox, majesty ***is*** his, and the horns of a wild ox ***are*** his horns; with them he will gore peoples, together, the ends of the earth; and they ***are*** the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they ***are*** the thousands of Manasseh."

33:18-29 And of Zebulun he said, "Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and Issachar, in your tents. They will call peoples ***to*** the mountain; there they will sacrifice sacrifices of righteousness; for they will suck the abundance of the seas, and the concealed things hidden in the sand." And of Gad he said, "Blessed ***is*** He who enlarges Gad; like a lion he dwells, and he tears the arm, also the crown of the head. And he saw the first ***part*** for himself, for there the portion of a commander ***was*** reserved; and he came ***with*** the heads of the people; the righteousness of the LORD he executed, and His judgments with Israel." And of Dan he said, "Dan ***is*** a lion's cub; he leaps forth from Bashan." And of Naphtali he said, "Naphtali, satisfied ***with*** favor, and full of the blessing of the LORD, take possession of the sea and the south." And of Asher he said, "Blessed more than sons ***is*** Asher; let him be the favored one of his brothers, and dipping his foot in oil. Iron and bronze ***shall be*** your bolts, and as your days, ***so shall be*** your strength." "***There is*** none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to your help, and in His majesty the clouds. The God of old ***is*** a dwelling place, and underneath ***are*** the everlasting arms; and He drove out the enemy from

before you, and said, 'Destroy!' And Israel dwells in security; alone ***is*** the spring of Jacob, in a land of grain and new wine; also his heavens drop dew. How blessed ***are*** you, O Israel! Who ***is*** like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help, and who ***is*** the sword of your majesty? And your enemies will cringe before you, and you, you will tread on their high places."

Chapter 33 Preview

Before he died, Jacob gathered his twelve sons and spoke a word over each one (Genesis 49). Now, at the end of his life, Moses does the same for the tribes that came from them. The song of chapter 32 was mostly warning. This chapter is blessing. It opens with the LORD coming from Sinai in glory to give His Law, and it closes with some of the most comforting words in the Old Testament: "The God of old is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

In between, Moses blesses the tribes one by one: Reuben, Judah, Levi, Benjamin, Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh), Zebulun and Issachar, Gad, Dan, Naphtali and Asher. Simeon is not named. Some blessings are long and some are one line. Many of them are poetry and hard to pin down in every detail, so I will give the main point of each and not press the fine points. The big picture is clear: every tribe had a place in God's plan, and every one of them was blessed by the same God.

Chapter 33 Study

33:1 *And this **is** the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the sons of Israel before his death.*

"And this is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the sons of Israel before his death." This is the first time in the Bible a person is called "the man of God." Later the title was used for prophets like Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. Paul uses it for Timothy (1 Timothy 6:11). It means a man who belongs to God and speaks for Him.

Notice that Moses' last words to Israel were a blessing. He had warned them, rebuked them and pleaded with them. But he ended by blessing them. What would you want your last words to the people you love to be?

33:2-5 *And he said, "The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir on them; He shone forth from the mountain of Paran, and He came from ten thousands of holiness; from His right hand **was** a fire of law for them. Indeed, He **is** loving the peoples; all His holy ones **are** in Your hand; and they, they were led at Your feet; **each** will receive of Your words. Moses commanded us a law, a possession of the assembly of Jacob. And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people gathered themselves together, the tribes of Israel.*

"The LORD came from Sinai," He dawned on them from Seir, and "He shone forth from the mountain of Paran." Sinai, Seir and Paran are mountain regions in the south, along the way from Sinai to the land. Moses pictures the LORD rising over them like the sun at dawn.

"And He came from ten thousands of holiness." The holy ones are most likely angels. The New Testament says the Law was given "through angels" (Galatians 3:19; Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2).

"From His right hand was a fire of law for them." The Law came out of the fire on the mountain (5:22).

"Indeed, He is loving the peoples; all His holy ones are in Your hand." The Law was not given in cold anger. It was given by a God who loved His people and held them in His hand. "Each will receive of Your words." They sat at His feet like students before a teacher.

"Moses commanded us a law, a possession of the assembly of Jacob." The Law was Israel's treasure, handed down from parent to child.

"And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people gathered themselves together." Jeshurun is the honor name for Israel we saw in 32:15. Who was king? Most likely the LORD. At Sinai, when the tribes gathered, the LORD became Israel's King. Some think it means Moses, who led Israel with a king's authority, though he never took the title. Most teachers take the first view, since Israel had no human king until Saul.

33:6 *Let Reuben live, and let him not die, and let his men be a number."*

"Let Reuben live, and let him not die, and let his men be a number." Reuben was Jacob's firstborn, but he lost the rights of the firstborn because he slept with his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22; 49:3-4). His tribe settled east of the Jordan and was never large or strong. Moses prays simply that Reuben would survive and not die out. Sometimes the best blessing a person can receive after a great failure is that God would let them go on. God did not wipe Reuben out.

33:7 *And this **is** for Judah, and he said, "Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people; his hands contended for him, and You will be a help against his adversaries."*

"And this is for Judah." Moses prays, "Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people; his hands contended for him, and You will be a help against his adversaries." Judah was to lead the tribes into battle (Judges 1:1-2). Moses prays that God would hear Judah's cry in war, give him strength and bring him home safely.

Jacob had said that the scepter would not depart from Judah (Genesis 49:10). From Judah came King David, and from David's line came Jesus Christ, "the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5).

What about Simeon? Simeon is not named in this chapter. Jacob had said that Simeon and Levi would be scattered in Israel because of their violence at Shechem (Genesis 49:5-7). Levi was scattered as a tribe of priests. Simeon was scattered in another way: when the land was divided, Simeon received its towns inside the land of Judah (Joshua 19:1, 9), and over time it seems to have blended into Judah. That may be why Moses blesses Judah and leaves Simeon unnamed. Scripture does not say why.

33:8-11 *And of Levi he said, "Your Thummim and Your Urim **belong** to the man, Your godly one, whom You tested at Massah, **with** whom You contended at the waters of Meribah; who said of his father and of his mother, 'I have not seen him'; and his brothers he did not recognize, and his sons he did not know; for they kept Your word, and Your covenant they guarded. They shall teach Your judgments to Jacob, and Your law to Israel; they shall put incense in Your nostrils, and a whole offering on Your altar. Bless, O LORD, his substance, and the work of his hands You will accept; shatter the loins of those who rise against him, and of those who hate him, so that they do not rise."*

The blessing on Levi is long, because Levi was the tribe of priests. "Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to the man, Your godly one." The Urim and Thummim were objects the high priest kept in the breastplate he wore over his heart, and God used them to give answers when Israel needed to know His will (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21). Scripture does not tell us exactly what they looked like or how they worked.

"Whom You tested at Massah, with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah." At Massah and Meribah the people tested God by grumbling for water (Exodus 17:1-7). Levi stood with Moses through those trials.

Levi is the one "who said of his father and of his mother," "I have not seen him," and "his brothers he did not recognize." This points back to the golden calf. When Moses cried, "Who is for the LORD? To me!" all the sons of Levi came to him, and they carried out God's judgment even on their own relatives (Exodus 32:26-29). They put loyalty to God above loyalty to family. Jesus said that whoever loves father or mother more than Him is not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37). That does not mean we stop loving our families. It means God comes first.

"For they kept Your word, and Your covenant they guarded." So Levi received two great tasks. "They shall teach Your judgments to Jacob, and Your law to Israel." The priests were to be Israel's teachers. Malachi says, "the lips of a priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek law from his mouth" (Malachi 2:7). "They shall put incense in Your nostrils, and a whole offering on Your altar." They led Israel's worship.

"Bless, O LORD, his substance, and the work of his hands You will accept; shatter the loins of those who rise against him." Moses asked God to bless Levi's service and protect them against anyone who opposed them.

All this points to Jesus. He is our great High Priest, who teaches us the Father's words and offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 7:26-27). And through Him every believer is part of "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), called to know God's Word and to worship Him.

33:12 *Of Benjamin he said, "The beloved of the LORD, he dwells in security beside Him; He shields him all the day, and between His shoulders he dwells."*

"Of Benjamin he said," "The beloved of the LORD, he dwells in security beside Him; He shields him all the day, and between His shoulders he dwells."

Benjamin was Jacob's youngest son, the son his father loved so dearly (Genesis 44:20). Now the tribe is called "the beloved of the LORD." The phrase "between His shoulders" may picture a

father carrying his child on his back, or it may point to the hills of Benjamin's land. Jerusalem lay right on the border of Benjamin and Judah (Joshua 18:16), and the temple would stand there. So God would dwell, in a sense, among Benjamin's hills.

What a picture of a believer's life. Secure. Shielded all day. Carried close to God. Can you say that about yourself? In Christ, you can.

33:13-17 *And of Joseph he said, "Blessed of the LORD **be** his land, from the choice things of the heavens, from the dew, and from the deep lying beneath, and from the choice things of the produce of the sun, and from the choice things of the yield of the months, and from the top of the ancient mountains, and from the choice things of the everlasting hills, and from the choice things of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush; let it come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of the one consecrated among his brothers. The firstborn of his ox, majesty **is** his, and the horns of a wild ox **are** his horns; with them he will gore peoples, together, the ends of the earth; and they **are** the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they **are** the thousands of Manasseh."*

Joseph receives the longest blessing of all, like the one Jacob gave him (Genesis 49:22-26). Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, became two tribes, and their land in the middle of Canaan was some of the richest in the country.

"Blessed of the LORD be his land." Moses lists every good thing that could make a land fruitful: "the choice things of the heavens," "the dew," "the deep lying beneath," the produce of the sun and the yield of the months, the riches of the ancient mountains and the everlasting hills, "the choice things of the earth and its fullness."

And the best blessing: "the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush." This is the only place in the Old Testament outside Exodus 3 that speaks of the burning bush. The God who met Moses in the fire at Horeb and called Himself I AM would show His favor to Joseph. Moses had never forgotten that day.

"Let it come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of the one consecrated among his brothers." Joseph had been set apart from his brothers, first by their hatred and then by God's plan to save them through him (Genesis 50:20).

"The firstborn of his ox, majesty is his, and the horns of a wild ox are his horns." The wild ox was a symbol of strength. "With them he will gore peoples." "And they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh." Ephraim, the younger, is named first and with the larger number, just as Jacob had blessed Ephraim above Manasseh (Genesis 48:19-20). Ephraim became the leading tribe of the northern kingdom.

33:18-19 *And of Zebulun he said, "Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and Issachar, in your tents. They will call peoples **to** the mountain; there they will sacrifice sacrifices of righteousness; for they will suck the abundance of the seas, and the concealed things hidden in the sand."*

"And of Zebulun he said," "Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and Issachar, in your tents." Zebulun and Issachar were Leah's last two sons, and they are blessed together. Their land lay in

the north, in what was later called Galilee. "Going out" may mean trade and travel, while "tents" may mean life at home and in the fields.

"They will call peoples to the mountain; there they will sacrifice sacrifices of righteousness." They would invite others to worship the LORD. "For they will suck the abundance of the seas, and the concealed things hidden in the sand." They would grow rich from the sea, perhaps by trade, fishing, or the making of glass and purple dye from the sand and shells of the coast.

Many centuries later, Jesus made His home in Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, and Matthew says this fulfilled Isaiah's word about the "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali" where "the people sitting in darkness saw a great light" (Matthew 4:13-16; Isaiah 9:1-2). Much of Jesus' ministry took place in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali. The greatest blessing those northern tribes ever received was that the Light of the world walked among them.

33:20-21 *And of Gad he said, "Blessed **is** He who enlarges Gad; like a lion he dwells, and he tears the arm, also the crown of the head. And he saw the first **part** for himself, for there the portion of a commander **was** reserved; and he came **with** the heads of the people; the righteousness of the LORD he executed, and His judgments with Israel."*

"And of Gad he said," "Blessed is He who enlarges Gad; like a lion he dwells." Gad settled east of the Jordan, where they had to fight off raiders. They were known as fierce warriors (1 Chronicles 12:8). God would enlarge their land.

"And he saw the first part for himself, for there the portion of a commander was reserved." Gad was one of the first tribes to ask for its land, east of the Jordan, after the defeat of Sihon and Og (Numbers 32:1-5). But they kept their promise to cross over and fight beside the other tribes until the whole land was won (Numbers 32:20-22; Joshua 22:1-4). "The righteousness of the LORD he executed, and His judgments with Israel."

Gad's story is a good lesson. They got their blessing first, but they did not settle down and leave their brothers to fight alone. Do we do the same when God has blessed us?

33:22-23 *And of Dan he said, "Dan **is** a lion's cub; he leaps forth from Bashan." And of Naphtali he said, "Naphtali, satisfied **with** favor, and full of the blessing of the LORD, take possession of the sea and the south."*

"And of Dan he said," "Dan is a lion's cub; he leaps forth from Bashan." A young lion is bold and quick. Dan first received land in the south near the Philistines, but they could not take it, and part of the tribe moved far north and seized the city of Laish, near Bashan (Judges 18:27-29). Sadly, they also set up an idol there (Judges 18:30-31).

"And of Naphtali he said," "Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full of the blessing of the LORD, take possession of the sea and the south." Naphtali lived in the north, around the Sea of Galilee. The word for sea here may mean the west, and the word for south may mean the region to the south of their land, near the lake. Naphtali is pictured as full and satisfied, resting in God's favor.

33:24-25 *And of Asher he said, "Blessed more than sons **is** Asher; let him be the favored one of his brothers, and dipping his foot in oil. Iron and bronze **shall be** your bolts, and as your days, **so shall be** your strength."*

"And of Asher he said," "Blessed more than sons is Asher; let him be the favored one of his brothers, and dipping his foot in oil." The name Asher means happy or blessed. Asher's land along the northern coast had so many olive trees that it was as if they were walking in oil. Olive oil was used for food, light and medicine, and it was a sign of wealth.

"Iron and bronze shall be your bolts, and as your days, so shall be your strength." The bolts were the bars on a city gate. Asher would be safe and secure.

And then a promise that many believers have held on to in hard times: "as your days, so shall be your strength." God gives strength for each day as it comes. He does not give you tomorrow's strength today, but when tomorrow comes, His strength will be there. Paul learned the same: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

33:26-29 *"**There is** none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to your help, and in His majesty the clouds. The God of old **is** a dwelling place, and underneath **are** the everlasting arms; and He drove out the enemy from before you, and said, 'Destroy!' And Israel dwells in security; alone **is** the spring of Jacob, in a land of grain and new wine; also his heavens drop dew. How blessed **are** you, O Israel! Who **is** like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help, and who **is** the sword of your majesty? And your enemies will cringe before you, and you, you will tread on their high places."*

Moses ends where he began, with God. "There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to your help, and in His majesty the clouds." The Canaanites called Baal the rider on the clouds. But Moses says it is Israel's God who rides the heavens, and He rides them to help His people.

"The God of old is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms." This is one of the most comforting verses in the Bible. God Himself is our home. Moses says the same in the psalm he wrote: "Lord, You have been a dwelling place for us in generation and generation" (Psalm 90:1). And underneath us, when we fall, when we are weak, when we are dying, are the arms of the eternal God. They never tire and they never let go. Moses was about to die. He knew where he was going. He was falling into the everlasting arms.

"And He drove out the enemy from before you." God would fight for them.

"And Israel dwells in security; alone is the spring of Jacob, in a land of grain and new wine; also his heavens drop dew." Israel would live safely, set apart, in a fruitful land.

"Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help, and who is the sword of your majesty?" Here is Israel's true glory. Not their armies or their land, but this: they were a people saved by the LORD. He was their shield and their sword.

These words will be fully true for Israel in the kingdom to come, when the nation is saved and dwells in safety under its Messiah (Jeremiah 23:5-6; Romans 11:26). And every believer in Christ

can say the same of himself now: I am saved by the LORD. He is my shield. Underneath are the everlasting arms.

Chapter 33 Summary

Before his death, Moses the man of God blessed the tribes of Israel. He began with the LORD coming from Sinai with His holy ones and giving the Law in love, and being King in Jeshurun. He prayed that Reuben would live, that God would help Judah in battle, and that Levi, who stood for God at Massah and the golden calf and was trusted with the Urim and Thummim, would teach the Law and lead worship. Benjamin, the beloved of the LORD, would dwell securely beside Him. Joseph's land would be rich with every good thing and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush, with the strength of Ephraim and Manasseh. Zebulun and Issachar would rejoice and call peoples to worship; Gad, like a lion, would carry out the LORD's justice; Dan would be a lion's cub; Naphtali would be full of the LORD's blessing; and Asher would be blessed with oil and strength for each day. Simeon is not named. Moses ended by praising the God who rides the heavens to help His people, the eternal dwelling place with the everlasting arms beneath, and Israel as a people saved by the LORD.

Chapter 33 Study Questions

1. Why do you think Moses' last words to Israel were a blessing? (33:1)

2. How is the giving of the Law described in verses 2 to 4, and what does it show about God's heart? (33:2-4)

3. What did Moses pray for Reuben, and what hope does that give someone after a great failure? (33:6; Genesis 49:3-4)

4. Why might Simeon not be named in this chapter? (Genesis 49:5-7; Joshua 19:1, 9)

5. What had Levi done to show loyalty to the LORD, and what two tasks were they given? (33:8-10; Exodus 32:26-29)

6. How is Benjamin described, and how can a believer in Christ share in that security? (33:12)

7. What is "the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush," and why would Moses think of that day? (33:16; Exodus 3:1-6)

8. How did Jesus bring a great blessing to the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali? (Matthew 4:13-16)

9. "As your days, so shall be your strength." What are you facing right now for which you need God's strength one day at a time? (33:25)

10. What does it mean to you that "underneath are the everlasting arms"? (33:27; Psalm 90:1)

Chapter 34: The Death of Moses

Scripture

34:1-12 And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to the mountain of Nebo, the top of the Pisgah, which ***is*** facing Jericho; and the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, and the Negeb, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of the palm trees, as far as Zoar. And the LORD said to him, "This ***is*** the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'To your seed I will give it.' I have let you see ***it*** with your eyes, and there you shall not pass over." And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the mouth of the LORD. And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor, and no man knows his burial place until this day. And Moses ***was*** a son of a hundred and twenty years when he died; his eye had not grown dim, and his vigor had not fled. And the sons of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; and the days of the weeping of the mourning for Moses were completed. And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And there has not arisen again a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, for all the signs and the wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty hand and for all the great terror which Moses did before the eyes of all Israel.

Chapter 34 Preview

This short chapter closes Deuteronomy and the five books of Moses. Moses climbs Mount Nebo, and the LORD shows him the whole land He promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, from the far north to the Negev in the south. Then Moses dies there, at a hundred and twenty years old, still strong, his eyes still clear. The LORD Himself buries him, and no one knows where his grave is. Israel mourns him thirty days, and Joshua, full of the spirit of wisdom, takes his place.

The chapter ends with a tribute to Moses: no prophet like him had arisen in Israel, one whom the LORD knew face to face. We will also look at a fair question: who wrote this chapter, since it tells of Moses' own death? And we will see how the promise of a Prophet like Moses (18:15) found its answer in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 34 Study

34:1-4 *And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to the mountain of Nebo, the top of the Pisgah, which **is** facing Jericho; and the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, and the Negeb, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of the palm trees, as far as Zoar. And the LORD said to him, "This **is** the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'To your seed I will give it.' I have let you see **it** with your eyes, and there you shall not pass over."*

"And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to the mountain of Nebo, the top of the Pisgah, which is facing Jericho." Pisgah seems to be the name of the ridge or the peak of Nebo. Moses had asked God to let him cross over and see the good land, and God had said, go up to Pisgah and look, but you will not cross (3:25-27). Now Moses obeyed. He climbed alone.

"And the LORD showed him all the land." Then the places are listed, from the north to the south: "Gilead as far as Dan," "all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea," which is the Mediterranean, "and the Negeb, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of the palm trees, as far as Zoar." The Negeb is the dry land in the far south. Zoar was near the south end of the Dead Sea.

Could Moses really see all of that from one mountain? On a clear day you can see a long way from Nebo, across the Jordan valley to the hills of Judah and Jericho below. But Dan in the far north and the sea in the west are a very long way off. It may be that God gave Moses a special sight that day, beyond what normal eyes could see. Either way, the point is that God showed it to him. Moses saw the whole inheritance.

"And the LORD said to him, This is the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." God had promised it more than four hundred years before (Genesis 12:7; 15:18). "I have let you see it with your eyes, and there you shall not pass over."

This is a tender moment. God did not just tell Moses no. He took him up and showed him every part of what he had spent forty years leading Israel toward. Moses died knowing God's promise was about to be kept.

34:5-6 *And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the mouth of the LORD. And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor, and no man knows his burial place until this day.*

"And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the mouth of the LORD." The title "servant of the LORD" is the highest honor Scripture gives Moses. He was not called a king or a general. He was a servant. Joshua would later be called the same (Joshua 24:29). God Himself said to Joshua, "Moses My servant has died" (Joshua 1:2).

"According to the mouth of the LORD" means at the word of the LORD. Moses died when God said it was time, not one day earlier or later. Jewish teachers have also read the phrase as a picture of

God taking Moses' life gently, as with a kiss. That is not what the words must mean, but it is a beautiful thought.

"And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor, and no man knows his burial place until this day." Who buried Moses? God did. No other person in the Bible is said to have been buried by God Himself.

Why was his grave hidden? Scripture does not say. Many have suggested that God did not want Israel to turn Moses' grave into a shrine and worship there. Israel was prone to that kind of thing. Centuries later they burned incense to the bronze serpent Moses had made (2 Kings 18:4). Jude 9 tells us that "Michael the archangel" was "disputing with the devil, arguing about the body of Moses." We are not told more than that. But it shows that Moses' body was in God's care, and the devil had no claim on it.

34:7-8 *And Moses **was** a son of a hundred and twenty years when he died; his eye had not grown dim, and his vigor had not fled. And the sons of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; and the days of the weeping of the mourning for Moses were completed.*

"And Moses was a son of a hundred and twenty years when he died; his eye had not grown dim, and his vigor had not fled." His life fell into three parts of forty years: forty in Pharaoh's palace, forty in the desert of Midian, and forty leading Israel (Acts 7:23, 30, 36). He did not die of old age or weakness. He died because God's time had come, and because of his sin at Meribah (32:51).

"And the sons of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days." This was the same length of mourning they had kept for Aaron (Numbers 20:29). For all their grumbling against him, Israel loved Moses and knew what they had lost.

"And the days of the weeping of the mourning for Moses were completed." There is a time to grieve, and then a time to get up and go on. Grief is right. But God's work did not die with Moses. Paul tells us we grieve, but not "just as also the rest who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

34:9 *And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did just as the LORD had commanded Moses.*

"And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him." God had told Moses to lay his hand on Joshua before the whole congregation (Numbers 27:18-23). The laying on of hands showed that God's authority was being passed on. God gave Joshua the wisdom he needed for the task.

"And the sons of Israel listened to him and did just as the LORD had commanded Moses." The people followed the new leader. This was a gift. Many great leaders leave behind confusion and division when they die. Moses left behind a trained successor, a written Law and a people ready to go. That is what faithful leadership looks like. Are you preparing anyone to carry on what God has given you to do?

34:10-12 *And there has not arisen again a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, for all the signs and the wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty hand and for all the great terror which Moses did before the eyes of all Israel.*

"And there has not arisen again a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face." God spoke to other prophets in visions and dreams, but with Moses He spoke "mouth to mouth" (Numbers 12:6-8). And Moses did "all the signs and the wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt," and showed "the mighty hand" and "the great terror" before the eyes of all Israel.

The words "there has not arisen again" were written some time after Moses' death, by someone looking back. They remind us of the promise in 18:15: God would raise up a Prophet like Moses. Every generation that read this verse was reminded that the promise was still waiting. No prophet after Moses, not Samuel, not Elijah, not Isaiah, was the one.

Then Jesus came. He did signs and wonders greater than Moses. He spoke the Father's words (John 12:49). He knew the Father, not only face to face, but as "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18). Philip said, "We have found Him of whom Moses wrote in the law" (John 1:45), and Peter preached that Jesus is the Prophet Moses promised (Acts 3:22-26). Hebrews says that "Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant," but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house (Hebrews 3:5-6). Moses was the greatest of the servants. Jesus is the Son.

And one more thing. Moses was not allowed to enter the land. But on the mountain of the transfiguration, Moses stood in the land at last, talking with Jesus about His coming death in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30-31). The Law could bring Israel to the edge of the promised land, but not in. That took Joshua, whose name is the Hebrew form of Jesus. In the same way, the Law brings us to see our need, but only Jesus can bring us into God's rest (Hebrews 4:8-10; Galatians 3:24).

So who wrote this chapter? Moses wrote the Law and finished the book (31:9, 24), but he could hardly have written about his own burial and the thirty days of mourning after it, or that "no man knows his burial place until this day." Words like "until this day" and "there has not arisen again" look back from some time later. Jewish tradition has long said that Joshua wrote the account of Moses' death, and I believe that is the most likely answer, though it could have been another faithful writer soon after, such as the priests who kept the book beside the ark. This does not weaken the truth that Moses wrote Deuteronomy. A book can be one man's work and still have its last page, the account of his death, added by the man who followed him. Many books are finished that way today. And the Holy Spirit, who breathed out all of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16), guided the one who wrote these last words as surely as He guided Moses.

Chapter 34 Summary

Moses climbed from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah on Mount Nebo, across from Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land, from Gilead and Dan in the north to the western sea, the Negeb and Zoar in the south, and told him this was the land He had sworn to Abraham, Isaac

and Jacob, which Moses could see but not enter. Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there at the LORD's word, a hundred and twenty years old, his eye not dim and his strength not gone, and the LORD buried him in a valley in Moab where no one knows his grave. Israel mourned thirty days. Joshua, full of the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid hands on him, led the people, and they obeyed. No prophet had arisen like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face and who did such signs and wonders, until Jesus Christ, the Prophet like Moses and greater than Moses. This last chapter was most likely added by Joshua or another faithful writer after Moses' death.

Chapter 34 Study Questions

1. What did the LORD show Moses from Mount Nebo, and what did He say to him? (34:1-4)

2. Why do you think God took Moses up to see the land even though he could not enter? (34:4; 3:25-27)

3. What title does Scripture give Moses at his death, and why is it such an honor? (34:5; Joshua 1:2)

4. Who buried Moses, and why might his grave have been hidden? (34:6; Jude 9)

5. How old was Moses, and what was his condition when he died? What were the three parts of his life? (34:7; Acts 7:23, 30, 36)

6. How did Israel respond to Moses' death, and what does that teach about grief? (34:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13)

7. How was Joshua prepared to lead, and why did the people follow him? (34:9; Numbers 27:18-23)

8. Who wrote this chapter, and how do we know it was written after Moses died? (34:6, 10)

9. How is Jesus like Moses, and how is He greater? (34:10-12; John 1:18; Hebrews 3:5-6)

10. Who are you preparing to carry on the work God has given you? What would you want said of you at the end of your life? (34:5, 9)

Conclusion

Deuteronomy is the last word of Moses to a people about to cross the Jordan. In the first sermon he looked back over forty years and called Israel to remember what God had done. In the second he gave them the heart of the Law: "Hear, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (6:4-5). Then came the laws for life in the land, the blessings and the curses, the covenant renewed in Moab, the song, the blessing of the tribes, and Moses' death on Mount Nebo. From beginning to end, the book is about one thing: a God who chose a people in love, redeemed them, and asked for all their heart in return.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, Deuteronomy gives us an honest picture of the human heart. Moses knew his people. He told them they would forget God in times of plenty, turn to idols, and be scattered among the nations, and history shows he was right. The Law was holy and good, but it could not give Israel a new heart. Moses himself said so (29:4). Yet Deuteronomy does not end in despair. God promised that one day He would gather Israel from the ends of the heavens and circumcise their hearts to love Him (30:1-6). God is not finished with Israel, and He will keep every promise He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and encourage you to love Him with your whole heart. Every part of this book points ahead to Jesus Christ. He answered Satan in the wilderness with the words of Deuteronomy, and where Israel failed for forty years, He stood firm. He is the Prophet like Moses whom God promised to raise up, the One to whom we must listen (18:15; Acts 3:22). He became a curse for us by hanging on a tree, so that the curse of the broken Law would fall on Him instead of us (21:23; Galatians 3:13). He is the word that is near, in our mouth and in our heart (30:14; Romans 10:8-9). And He is the only One who has ever loved the Father with all His heart, soul and might.

Moses ended his sermons with a choice: "life and death I have set before you, the blessing and the curse; and you shall choose life, so that you may live, you and your seed" (30:19). That choice is still before every one of us. Life is not found in keeping the Law well enough. It is found in a Person. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of

my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve, and where God's Word is read and taught, so that you and those after you may "love the LORD your God, to listen to His voice, and to cling to Him; for He is your life" (Deuteronomy 30:20).

Bibliography

The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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