Deuteronomy

\* Deuteronomy represents the crux of the Old Testament. As a renewal of the covenant, the rest of the history of the nation of Israel to the time of Christ is a verification that she has failed in her covenant obligations, and that God has enacted the appropriate promised curses.

\* Further, Deuteronomy plays an important role in the progression of the historical redemptive narrative of the Bible, as Moses calls the nation of Israel to faith in her God. The people’s affirmation of the covenant, and Moses’s statements regarding their failures, as well as the promises of Christ and the Gospel of faith all serve to link Deuteronomy inextricably with the New Testament.

\* Finally, the freedom of God to impose laws on His people is the basis for morality in Western society. Because God is holy, He has the right to require holiness of His creatures. Deuteronomy, more than any other book, links the character of God Himself with the morality which He demands.

\* “Deuteronomy clearly indicates the Judeo-Christian idea of law and the basis for it. Here is no man-made agreement based on interpersonal, intertribal, or even international experience; rather, the decrees of God produce the notion of law. These decrees stem from the nature of God himself and from his disposition toward mankind.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Introduction, Title

* The name Deuteronomy comes from the Greek term, *Deuteronomion,* meaning, literally, ‘second law’. The use of the title likely comes from a mistranslation of Deut 17:18 in the Septuagint (LXX), where the king is called to write a copy of the law. The translators misunderstood the Hebrew and translated it as ‘second law’, or a new code of law based on the text.
* Such a title can be confusing - the book is not a second law, but a revisitation of Moses to the first law, and a renewal of the covenant with the nation of Israel
  + - “In a sense, the title (interpreted literally) is misleading, for the fifth book of Moses does not contain a second and distinct law. It does, however, repeat much of the legislation contained in the preceding books, though the context and form of that repetition is peculiar to Deuteronomy.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
    - “There is not the slightest trace, throughout the whole book, of any intention whatever to give a new or second law. Whilst the laws as well as the divine promises and threatenings in the three middle books of the Pentateuch are all introduced as words of Jehovah to Moses, …the book of Deuteronomy, with the exception of Deut. 31–34, contains nothing but words addressed by Moses to the people, with the intention, as he expressly affirms in Deut. 1:5, of explaining the law to the people.”[[3]](#footnote-3)
* The title in the Hebrew bible is literally, *“These are the words…”* (אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים, *ʾēlleh haddəvārîm*), the customary form of titling the work based on the first words of the text.
* This title is better, since the text represents Moses’ “Upper Desert Discourse,” and consists of a series of farewell messages by Israel’s 120-year-old leader. It is, in a sense, the first exposition of a Scriptural text, since Moses is explaining and revisiting the covenant texts of Sinai. It is, in that sense, a sermon.
* The book represents the final words of Moses, as the nation of Israel prepares to take the promised land of Canaan. Moses recounts their history from Egypt until this moment, being careful to remind the current generation that their parents perished in the wilderness because of covenant unfaithfulness.

## Author & Date

* Moses has been traditionally recognized as the author of Deuteronomy, since the book itself testifies that Moses wrote it (1:1, 5; 31:9, 22, 24).
* However, since the Enlightenment, historical-critical theory has created a number of possible arguments against the Mosaic authorship in favor of any number of other authors including Samuel, Isaiah, Ezra and others. The arguments range from a secondary redaction in the 7th century, to a complete rewrite as late as the 5th century.
* Nevertheless, it should be considered to be written by Moses, and within a single stated historical timeframe. A number of arguments serve to defend this view:
  + Both the O.T. (1 Kgs. 2:3; 8:53; 2 Kgs. 14:6; 18:12) and the N.T. (Acts 3:22-23; Rom. 10:19) support the claim of Mosaic authorship. Therefore, and most importantly, Scripture testifies to itself regarding the dating and authorship of the book.
  + The document is structured within the customary covenant-treaty format of the nations surrounding Israel. This is helpful because it indicates that Moses was writing a covenantal document that would serve, in effect, as a legally binding reality for the people of Israel.
    - “…the treaty-covenant structure of Deuteronomy indicates that it must be dated in the Mosaic age. The thrust of this argument rests on several bases, but two may be singled out as being of particular importance. (1) Deuteronomy reflects the pattern of the suzerainty treaties in its total structure; (2) in particular, the whole work reflects “the classic legal form of the suzerainty treaties of the Mosaic age.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
  + The document also serves as a chronological marker for the nation because of the escape from bondage. It is not just a treaty as a marker for national awareness, but a treaty with Israel as a vassal to the one who has set her free - God Himself. As such, it makes sense that if functions both nationally, and historically within the confines of the time shortly after the Egyptian captivity.
    - “The covenant does not simply function to bind the people of Israel to their God, but it also marks the liberation of the people from subservience to a worldly power, namely, Egypt. In this context the significance of the treaty pattern emerges, for the form that symbolizes worldly vassal-dom is transposed to another context, that of Israel’s relationship to God. Like the other small nations that surrounded her, Israel was to be a vassal state, but not to Egypt or the Hittites; she owed her allegiance to God alone.”[[5]](#footnote-5)
* All told, then, the book (including the section detailing Moses’s death) came from Moses’ hand just before his death in 1405 b.c.

## Historical Setting

* Like Leviticus, Deuteronomy does not progress historically. It takes place entirely on the plains of Moab due east of Jericho and the Jordan River (cf. 1:1; 29:1; Josh. 1:2) and covers about one month: combine Deuteronomy 1:3 and 34:8 with Joshua 5:6–12.
  + - “The introduction locates the addresses of Moses geographically as “east of the Jordan” in general and “in the territory of Moab” in particular. Based on 32:49 and 34:1, these events happen at the northern edge of Moab.”[[6]](#footnote-6)
* The book was written at the end of the forty-year period in the wilderness (c. 1405 b.c.) when the new generation was on the verge of entering Canaan. The appeal of the book reflects a renewal of the Sinai covenant between this new generation and God.
* The book of Deuteronomy concentrates on events that took place in the final weeks of Moses’ life. The major event was the verbal communication of divine revelation from Moses to the people of Israel (1:1 – 30:20; 31:30 – 32:47; 33:1-29).
* The only other events recorded (ch 31ff) are:
  + Moses’ recording the law in a book and his commissioning of Joshua as the new leader (31:1–29)
  + Moses’ viewing of the land of Canaan from Mt. Nebo (32:48-52; 34:1-4)
  + Moses’ death (34:5-12).

## Theme & Purpose

* The theme of Deuteronomy is “***remember the Lord your God.***” As a book detailing a renewal of the covenant, Moses calls for the people to remember the events of the past 40 years, and to walk with God in that light going forward.
* The book of Deuteronomy is comprised of three farewell addresses given by an aged Moses (120 years, 34:6) and was given to a new generation ready to possess the promised land as a reminder of God's holiness and faithfulness to the nation of Israel.
* Like Leviticus, Deuteronomy contains much legal detail, but with an emphasis on the people rather than the priests.
* As Moses calls the second generation of Israel to trust the Lord and be obedient to His covenant made at Horeb (Sinai), he illustrates his points with references to Israel’s past history.
  + He reminds Israel of her rebellion against the Lord at Horeb (9:7 – 10:11) and at Kadesh (1:26-46), which brought devastating consequences.
  + He also reminds her of the Lord’s faithfulness in giving victory over her enemies (2:24 – 3:11; 29:2, 7, 8).
  + Most importantly, Moses calls the people to take the land that God had promised by oath to their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 29:13; 30:20; 34:4; cf. Gen. 15:18-21; 26:3-5; 35:12). The call to possess the land reflects the fulfillment of God’s promises to the patriarchs.
* Moses not only looked back, he also looked ahead and saw that Israel’s future failure to obey God would lead to her being scattered among the nations before the fulfillment of His oath to the patriarchs would be completed (4:25-31; 29:22-30:10; 31:26-29).

## Similarities with Exodus

* This book does have many passages that are parallel to teaching already given in Exodus. For instance:
  + Ex. 21:1–11 matches Deut. 15:12–18
  + Ex. 21:12–14 matches Deut. 19:1–13
  + Ex. 22:21–24 matches Deut. 24:17–22
  + Ex. 22:29 matches Deut. 15:19–23
  + Ex. 23:2–8 matches Deut. 16:18–20
  + Ex. 23:10–13 matches Deut. 15:1–11
  + Ex. 23:14–17 matches Deut. 16:1–17
  + Ex. 23:19a matches Deut. 26:2–10
* Still, some 50% of the content of Deuteronomy is new. And what is repeated is often expanded by exhortations or by explanation of the deeper meaning of the duplicated laws.

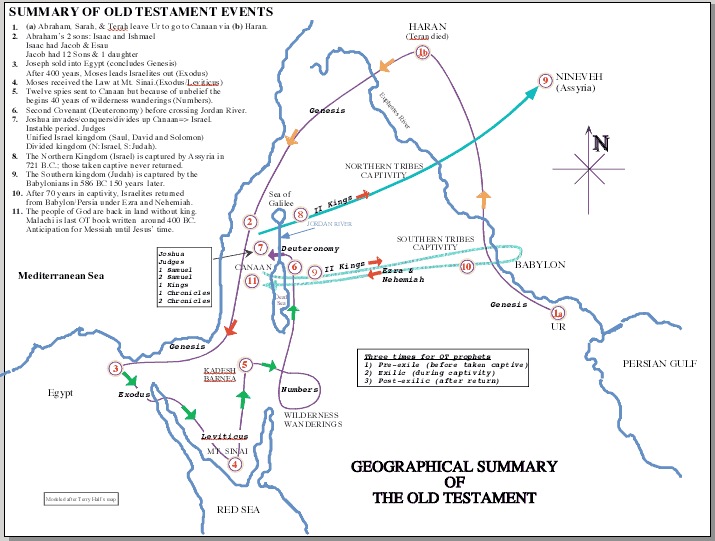
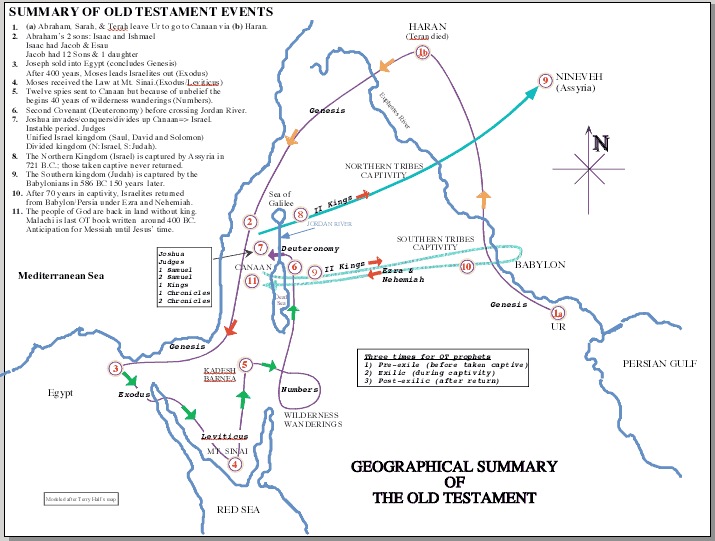
1:1 – 4:43 ~ Moses’ 1st Address

## 1:1-4 ~ Introduction: The Setting, Preamble

**1:1-4** ~ 1These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab. 2It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. 3In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the Lord had commanded him to give to them, 4after he had defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and Edrei.

* These 4 verses contain the historical setting for Moses’ 1st address. Moses gives the specific date for when this narrative took place (vv. 2-4). Most commentators have called it a preamble, which would have been customary for any sovereign-vassal covenant document.
  + - “The terms used in these initial verses indicate the nature of the book. “These are the words” (v.1) suggest a suzerain-vassal treaty preamble. “All that the Lord had commanded him” (v.3) indicates the source of the material in the book, the nature of Moses’ ministry as communicator of the Lord’s commands rather than that of an author, and the authoritative character of the addresses as commands of the Lord.”[[7]](#footnote-7)
    - “These verses form a preamble to the entire book and serve a function similar to that of the preamble in the Near Eastern treaties. The great covenant, which was made at Sinai between the Lord and his people, is to be renewed prior to the transference of the leadership from Moses to Joshua and the Israelites’ entry into the promised land. In this renewal of the covenant, the persons involved, the place, and the time are all specified explicitly.”[[8]](#footnote-8)
* The phrase **These are the words** (אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים, *ʾēlleh haddəvārîm*) indicates both a looking forward toward the commands and renewal of the covenant, as well as a consideration of what has come before.
* Israel took more than 38 years to move from Sinai into the promised land, a journey that could have been taken in 11 days (v. 2)… a journey of roughly 150 miles.
* The geographical markers of the wilderness (…**in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab…**) have caused some level of confusion. However, the exact location is likely not the issue at hand, since none of the markers would provide an exact geographical location. Rather the point may well be to indicate that Israel is still in the desert - they have not entered Canaan. As such, they are renewing the covenant prior to their possession in order to serve as a reminder and renewal to the nation.
  + - “This contrast between the verse before us and Deut. 4:45, 46, and still more the introduction of the very general and loose expression, *“in the desert,”* which is so little adapted for a geographical definition of the locality, that it has to be defined itself by the additional words *“in the Arabah,”* suggest the conclusion that the particular names introduced are not intended to furnish as exact a geographical account as possible of the spot where Moses explained the law to all Israel, but to call up to view the scene of the addresses which follow, and point out the situation of all Israel at that time. Israel was *“in the desert,”* not yet in Canaan the promised inheritance, and in fact *“in the Arabah.”* This is the name given to the deep low-lying plain on both sides of the Jordan, which runs from the Lake of Gennesaret to the Dead Sea, and stretches southwards from the Dead Sea to *Aila*, at the northern extremity of the Red Sea, as we may see very clearly from Deut. 2:8, where the way which the Israelites took past Edom to *Aila* is called the “way of the *Arabah,”* and also from the fact that the Dead Sea is called “the sea of the *Arabah”* in Deut. 3:17 and 4:49.”[[9]](#footnote-9)
* Additionally, the locations mentioned were significant. Hazeroth and Paran were both specifically linked to the rebellion of the previous generation (see Num. 12 and 14). Suph and Tophel were likely geographical landmarks providing the location of the desert to link back with the previous generation’s opportunity. Moses includes these details to make the link between the generations explicit before renewing the covenant.
* The **fortieth year** refers to the time after the Exodus from Egypt. The years of divine judgment (Num. 14:33-34) were ending, while Numbers 20–36 records the events of the 40th year.
  + - “Now the date of the address of Moses and the renewal of the covenant is added: the beginning of the eleventh month of the fortieth year of wilderness wandering since the Exodus. It is the only exact date given in the book and presumably it was the only date that was necessary, since it specifies the starting point of all the words and events contained in the book.”[[10]](#footnote-10)
* Along the way, Israel defeated two kings – Sihon of the Amorites and Og of Bashan (Num. 21:21-35). These will be recalled in light of God’s faithfulness later in the book (2:36-3:22).
* Below is a detailed chart of the events and travels of the OT:

## 1:5 – 3:29 ~ Review of God’s Sovereign Power & Grace

* v. 5 represents a transitional statement, moving the flow of the book from the preamble into the body of the first dialogue, which will last through 3:29. Some keep v. 5 and the closing of the preamble, but it seems more clear to be the introductory verse for what follows.
* The verb translated ‘expound’ (NASB) or ‘explain’ (ESV) is the verb באר (bēʾēr) and carries the idea of making something extremely clear or plain. Moses will use the same verb again in 27:8 regarding the clarity or legibility of the inscription of the law into stone. Moses has, as his main goal, to make the law crystal clear for this generation. They must understand it completely, and so Moses begins the process of communicating it to them with clarity.
  + - “Here it signifies “to expound this law clearly,” although the exposition was connected with an earnest admonition to preserve and obey it. “This” no doubt refers to the law expounded in what follows; but substantially it is no other than the law already given in the earlier books. “Substantially there is throughout but one law” (*Schultz*). That the book of Deuteronomy was not intended to furnish a new or second law, is as evident as possible from the word בֵּאֵר.”[[11]](#footnote-11)
* These verses are mainly Moses’ first speech. Moses introduced his explanation of the law with a call to enter the land of Canaan (vv. 6–8), which had been promised by the Abrahamic Covenant from God (cf. Gen. 15:18–21). Throughout the book, he refers to that covenant promise (1:35; 4:31; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:8, 12; 8:1, 18; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 13:17; 19:8; 26:3, 15; 27:3; 28:11; 29:13; 30:20; 31:7, 20–23; 34:4).
* He then gives a historical review of God’s gracious acts (1:9 – 3:29) and a call to Israel for obedience to the covenant given to them by the Lord at Sinai (4:1–40).
* This introductory section ends with a brief narrative recounting the appointment of the 3 cities of refuge East of the Jordan river (4:41–43).
* Remarkably, on the precipice of his own death, Moses’ main goal was to communicate and shepherd the flock God had given him.
* As Moses recounts the history of the nation through the wilderness, he provides a number of details. It is striking to note that the vast bulk of the time, Moses spends almost no time at all on, while the shorter times - both the travel and the fighting, receive substantial text time. These can be summarized with the chart below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Text** | **Location** | **Estimated Narrated Time** | **%** | **Narrative Time (number of verses devoted to subject)** | **%** |
| 1:6–18 | At Horeb | 2 months | 0.4% | 13 | 12% |
| 1:19 | From Horeb to Kadesh Barnea | 42 weeks | 2.2% | 1 | 1% |
| 1:20–46 | At Kadesh Barnea | 2 weeks | 0.1% | 27 | 25% |
| 2:1 | In the desert south of Kadesh Barnea | 38 years | 97% | 1 | 1% |
| 2:2–23 | Encounters with the Transjordanian relatives | 1 month | 0.2% | 22 | 21% |
| 2:24–3:11 | Encounters with the Transjordanian Amorites | 1 month | 0.2% | 25 | 23% |
| 3:12–29 | Preparing for the conquest of Canaan | 1 month | 0.2% | 18 | 17% |

(from Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy, p. 60)*

### 1:6-8 ~ God’s Command to Leave Horeb

🕮 **1:6-8** ~ 6“The Lord our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, ‘You have stayed long enough at this mountain. 7‘Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. 8‘See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them.’

* Moses now reminds the people of what had happened at the base of Mt. Sinai. After the law, the rebellion and the redemption through Moses’ intercession, God calls the people to go and take possession of the land that He has promised them. Interestingly, Moses begins the discourse with a statement intended to carry covenant promises - **the Lord OUR God** (*Yhwh Elohenu*) - indicating that Israel was already under the covenant. Hence the following would be a reminder of God’s commands.
* The first imperative, then, according to v. 7 is turn (פנה) - in other words, go and fulfill what you have been called to do in the land of Canaan.
  + - “Moses began by reciting God’s order to leave Horeb (v.6) and to go to Canaan (v.7). What the Lord commanded the people at Horeb was a new bit of information. That he gave such a command is mentioned in Numbers 10:11–13, but its content is given only here.”[[12]](#footnote-12)
* The land which the Lord set before Israel to go in and possess was clearly described in v. 7.
  + The **mountains** of the Amorites referred to the hill country to the W of the Dead Sea.
  + The **plain** (**Arabah**) was the land in the rift valley from the Sea of Galilee in the North to the Dead Sea in the South.
  + The **mountains** were the hills that run through the center of the land North and South. These hills are to the west of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River.
  + The **lowland** referred to the low rolling hills that sloped toward the Mediterranean coast (**Shephelah**).
  + The south (Negev) described the dry wasteland stretching southward from Beersheba to the wilderness.
  + The **seacoast** referred to the land along the Mediterranean Sea.
  + The boundaries of the Land of the Canaanites were given in Num. 34:1–15. Lebanon to the north marked the northwestern boundary on the coast. The northeastern boundary of the land was the Euphrates River (cf. Num. 34:1–12).
* This description of the land gives explanation to the scope of the promises made to the patriarchs. Since God **swore** that He would fulfill His covenant promise with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, there should have been absolutely no reason for Israel to have failed to possess it.
* However, it should be noted that this area of land was never fully possessed, even at the height of the Solomonic empire.
  + - “The call was to go toward the promised land; and the dimensions of it, as described in this verse, are enormous. Virtually all of Palestine and Syria are included by these terms, an area larger than Israel ever possessed in fact, even during the reigns of David and Solomon.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

## 1:9-18 ~ The Appointment of Leaders

🕮 **1:9-18** ~ 9“I spoke to you at that time, saying, ‘I am not able to bear the burden of you alone. 10‘The Lord your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are this day like the stars of heaven in number. 11‘May the Lord, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand-fold more than you are and bless you, just as He has promised you! 12‘How can I alone bear the load and burden of you and your strife? 13‘Choose wise and discerning and experienced men from your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads.’ 14“You answered me and said, ‘The thing which you have said to do is good.’ 15“So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads over you, leaders of thousands and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and officers for your tribes. 16“Then I charged your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him. 17‘You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God’s. The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.’ 18“I commanded you at that time all the things that you should do.

* Moses recounts the events that took place in Exodus 18 where his father-in-law wisely counsels him to share the burdens of leadership with capable and faithful men.
* Moses’ statement about the weightiness of the burden is not to be taken negatively. While it is true that he was overburdened, he did not see this as a curse, but as a fulfillment of the **promises** to the patriarchs, and therefore to the nation.
* In fact, in vv. 10-11, he acknowledges the scope of their growth hyperbolically (**stars of the heaven**) but then prays that the Lord would increase them a thousand times more!
  + - “Moses therefore saw this state of affairs not as a problem but as a sign of the blessing of the Lord. In fact, he reported that his innermost desire was that God make them not just as numerous as the stars but a thousand times more so.”[[14]](#footnote-14)
* The nation had become too large for Moses to govern effectively. The solution was the appointment by Moses of men to help him lead the people (see Ex. 18:13–27). These men were to be:
  + ***wise***, (*ḥōkmâ*) i.e., men who knew how to apply their knowledge.
    - “…*wise in the administration of affairs:* Joseph in Egypt Gn 41:33, 39 (E); heads of tribes Dt 1:13, 15, judges 16:19; of David 2 S 14:20, of Solomon.”[[15]](#footnote-15)
  + ***understanding***, (*nābon*) i.e., those who had discernment and so were able to judge
    - “…observe, mark, give heed to, distinguish, consider (with attention)…”[[16]](#footnote-16)
  + ***knowledgeable***, (*yada*) i.e., experienced and respected based on knowledge
    - **“…**know, learn to know, good and evil. Discriminate, distinguish.”[[17]](#footnote-17)
* In a sense, the three words express similar ideas. Taken together, these men were to be the most wise in Israel, and their task would be a difficult one.
* The people were pleased with the suggestion. Moses reminds Israel of their agreement, likely because the need for their obedience going forward would be paramount.
* Moses therefore appoints the tribal heads. The Hebrew seems awkward here, as Moses says he took their ‘heads’ and made them ‘heads’. However, the wording is initially proleptic - those who are the heads were taken by Moses to become the heads.
* Moses concludes with his statements to those judges, or tribal heads. They must be marked by absolute fairness.
  + **Partiality** would be strictly forbidden (James 2:1ff), since God’s law was at stake. Therefore both rich and poor, small and great were to be given a fair hearing.
  + **Fear of man** was forbidden as well. (Gal 1:10). Since God’s laws were at issue, a fear of man would pervert justice, and therefore violate the law of God, making the judge the criminal.
* Cases too difficult for the judges were to be brought to Moses, who would make final decisions via appealing to God Himself.
  + - “This suggests that fairness in judgment is a theological as well as legal matter. There may be the need for due process at the practical and human level, but the ultimate standard of righteousness and justice is that which inheres in the character of God himself. Therefore, when human capacity for equitable judgment reaches its limits, appeal must be made ultimately to God. Israel’s judges were to recognize this and conduct their legal proceedings in light of their accountability to him.”[[18]](#footnote-18)
* The reminder here at this point is intended to keep Israel under the same legal and judicial care, even as the leadership changes from Moses to Joshua. The change should have little effect, since the tribal heads were in place.

## 1:19-25 ~ The Spies Sent Out Remembered

🕮 **1:19-25** ~ 19“Then we set out from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, just as the Lord our God had commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. 20“I said to you, ‘You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the Lord our God is about to give us. 21‘See, the Lord your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. Do not fear or be dismayed.’ 22“Then all of you approached me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back to us word of the way by which we should go up and the cities which we shall enter.’ 23“The thing pleased me and I took twelve of your men, one man for each tribe. 24“They turned and went up into the hill country, and came to the valley of Eshcol and spied it out. 25“Then they took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought us back a report and said, ‘It is a good land which the Lord our God is about to give us.’

* This section recounts the events that took place when the nation came to Kadesh-barnea, a major oasis on the road from Sinai to the Arabah.
  + - “Most scholars identify it with modern ’Ain Qedeis, a major crossroads for travel between the south Sinai and the central hill country of Canaan and between the Gulf of Elath and the Mediterranean Sea.”[[19]](#footnote-19)
* The arrival at Kadesh-barnea must have been particularly encouraging after the intensity of the desert (**great and terrible wilderness**).
  + - “The journey took the Israelites through a *great and terrible wilderness*, namely, an almost waterless limestone plateau. It was a journey of more than one hundred miles, and over those dusty and dry miles the prospect of the promised land must have become very inviting.”[[20]](#footnote-20)
* Moses reiterates to the people that the land was what the Lord was **about to give to us (**אֱלֹהֵ֖ינוּ נֹתֵ֥ן- *Elohenu noten*) The verb is an absolute participle - ‘is giving’ to us. The certainty of the Lord's promise is in Moses’ words.
* He then commands them to **go up (**עֲלֵ֣ה**)** and **take possession (רֵ֗שׁ) (v. 21)** since the Lord has given them the land. The imperatives form the right response to the knowledge of God’s control over the land. It is not their land, nor is it theirs to take. Nevertheless, the Lord giving it to them implies the command to go and take it.
* The negative commands, **do not fear (אַל־תִּירָ֖א) or be dismayed (וְאַל־תֵּחָֽת׃)**, are the corollary components of the positive commands (both imperfect jussives). Hence, their going up and taking possession implies that they must not fear in their hearts.
* Obeying these commands rests on their confidence in YHWH and His promise to give them the land.
  + - “They were to *take possession* of the land in obedience to the command of *the Lord God of your fathers*, a further reference to the continuity of their God and the God of the patriarchs.”[[21]](#footnote-21)
* Moses then recounts that the idea of the spies came from the people, and he approved of it in vv. 22-23. The spies went into the land and found it to be a **good land** as a gift from the Lord. The area they explored is still known as an excellent region for grape production.
  + - “Eshcol was a valley or wadi in the region of Hebron; the exact location of the ancient site is not known. The general region is known, however; there are vineyards even today in the vicinity of Hebron that are famous for the quality of their grapes. The land that the spies explored was a striking contrast to the great and terrible wilderness through which the Israelites had recently passed.”[[22]](#footnote-22)
    - “Eschol” specifically refers to the stalk or stem of some fruit or flower. From this it comes to represent a whole bunch or cluster. The Valley of Eschol lies about two miles north of Hebron (ZPEB, 2:364). Grapes are still grown there.”[[23]](#footnote-23)
* Not only had God commanded them to take possession, and promised it to them as a fulfillment of His words to the patriarchs, but the land itself was very desirable. Nevertheless, the outcome was not what one would expect with all the inducements.

## 1:26-46 ~ The Rebellion Against the Lord

🕮 **1:26-46** ~ 26“Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God; 27and you grumbled in your tents and said, ‘Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us. 28‘Where can we go up? Our brethren have made our hearts melt, saying, “The people are bigger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified to heaven. And besides, we saw the sons of the Anakim there.” ’ 29“Then I said to you, ‘Do not be shocked, nor fear them. 30‘The Lord your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, 31and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked until you came to this place.’ 32“But for all this, you did not trust the Lord your God, 33who goes before you on your way, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, to show you the way in which you should go.

* The response of the people is somewhat shocking. The sins of the people are spelled out explicitly. The events occur in Num 14:1ff.
* Moses speaks to them as though they had actively rebelled against the Lord, though it was not them but their parents. Nevertheless, Moses links them to the sin, and points out that they should also consider that their hearts are the same.
  + - “At the same time, by addressing the existing members of the nation, as if they themselves had spoken so, whereas the whole congregation that rebelled at Kadesh had fallen in the desert, and a fresh generation was now gathered round him, Moses points to the fact, that the sinful corruption which broke out at that time, and bore such bitter fruit, had not died out with the older generation, but was germinating still in the existing Israel, and even though it might be deeply hidden in their hearts, would be sure to break forth again."[[24]](#footnote-24)
  + The **were not willing to go up** - though every inducement lay before them, they rejected the commands of God.
  + They **rebelled against the command** - The people actively rebel against God’s command and promise
  + They **grumbled in their tents**  - The people weep and complain about the circumstance that Moses has brought them into.
* Their complaint is remarkable - **The Lord hates us** - the people were so terrified of the nations in Canaan that they say that God actually hates them and that is why he brought them up out of the land.
* The complaints center around three issues - the people in the land are taller, the cities are fortified to heaven, and the Anakim are there (sons of Anak). The size of the people terrify the Israelites because they want to feel secure about their victory without God’s help. The city fortifications create fear because it would be incredibly difficult to capture a walled city. And the Anakim terrify the people. The word initially meant a son of Anak, who was likely a chief of a tribe in that region, but the term eventually because widely used simply for giants. Of the origin, there is little that is not shrouded in mystery because of weak record keeping.
  + - “Though the word probably came to be used as a general term for “giants” (LXX renders *giganton*), in more ancient times it probably referred to a particular tribe or ethnic group. In the Egyptian Execration Texts, reference is made to a “ruler of Iy-‘anaq” (*ANET*, p. 328).”[[25]](#footnote-25)
* Moses tries to encourage the people by appealing to what had already happened in Israel’s wanderings and Exodus, and how God had been faithful to them. He links together two imperatives (**do not be shocked/terrified** nor **fear them**) and then gives the basis for the commands.
* The inducement to not be afraid is centered on God Himself - the war was his war, and He would go before them into battle and ensure success. Moses gives four statements about God to help the people not fear.
  + - “Their hearts had already fainted as though it were their war (v. 28), but, in fact, it was Yahweh’s war; they did not need to fear at all (cf. Deut 20:3; 31:6; Josh 8:1). Second, the battle was Yahweh’s, and as such he would fight for them (v. 30; cf. 3:22; 20:4; Exod 14:13–14). He had done so in the past, Moses reminded them, and the foe was none other than mighty Egypt (Exod 7:4–5; 12:29; 13:3, 14–15; 14:4).”[[26]](#footnote-26)
* Moses tells the people that God carried them through the wilderness as though they were His son. The statement expresses God’s covenant love and concern and service to the nation - as a father to a son.
* And yet, though God had promised, and had already proved his covenant love for them, they refused to **trust** the Lord. The verb used for trust (אמןʾ- āman) means ‘make oneself secure’ in something. The people should have been secure, not in the circumstance, or even the beauty of the land, but YHWH Himself.
  + - “…the people of Israel were expected to rely completely on their God and his promises; if they did not manifest this kind of trust, they would be punished, their existence would be threatened.”[[27]](#footnote-27)
* The leadership of the nation was not from Moses but from the Lord Himself. He led them, found them places to camp, and showed them where to God. All of this He did through a pillar of fire by night and cloud by day. God’s presence in the cloud continues throughout the OT, where God is said to ride upon the clouds (Ps. 68:4, 104:3), and fight for Israel (Isa 19:1).

## 1: 34-40 ~ The Lord’s Response in Judgment at Kadesh Barnea

34“Then the Lord heard the sound of your words, and He was angry and took an oath, saying, 35‘Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers, 36except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and to his sons I will give the land on which he has set foot, because he has followed the Lord fully.’ 37“The Lord was angry with me also on your account, saying, ‘Not even you shall enter there. 38‘Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter there; encourage him, for he will cause Israel to inherit it. 39‘Moreover, your little ones who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to them and they shall possess it. 40‘But as for you, turn around and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea.’

* Though the rebellion was spoken in the ‘tents’ of the people, of course the Lord heard their words. He is angry against them, and **took an oath**. The oath here is in response to the people being unwilling to trust the oath of the Abrahamic promise, and applied only to the wilderness generation.
  + - “The verb used (Niph. of *shāḇaʿ*) is the same as that employed for the covenant promise to the patriarchs and to the Israelites. The promise was contingent on obedience in the context of the covenant, and hence the rebellion of the people against the first oath of God (which held out the promise of the land) induced another oath with a less pleasant prospect.”[[28]](#footnote-28)
* These events are recorded in **Hebrews 3:12-4:7**, and applied to believers in the church. The generation in the wilderness wanderings were unable to enter the land because, though they heard the promise of God, they refused to trust God and His promise and provision. The whole issue, ultimately, was faith. Because they lacked faith in God, they feared, and rebelled, and were unable to enter the land.
* The author of Hebrews tells his reader that the wilderness generation is the example for all future generations. This is based on **Psalm 95:6-11** where the psalmist calls the present day people to not **harden their hearts** in unbelief. Every generation in the OT, and, according to the author of Hebrews, the NT as well, should look back to the wilderness generation and learn and soften their hearts to God and His loving commands.
* The oath the Lord took excluded the entire generation from entrance into the land, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who had not feared (Num 14:21-24).
* Moses says that God was angry at him as well, on their account, and told him that he would also not be allowed to enter the land, but that Joshua the son of Nun would enter. Moses is told to encourage him since he would fulfill the promise.
* This judgment statement does not seem accurate based on the events, since Moses’ own sin caused him to be excluded from the land. However, there appear to be two reasons why Moses speaks in this way:
  + - “Even in this book his sin at the water of strife is not passed over in silence (cf. Deut. 32:51). But on the present occasion, if he had given prominence to his own fault, he would have weakened the object for which he referred to this event, viz., to stimulate the consciences of the people, and instill into them a wholesome dread of sin, by holding up before them the magnitude of their guilt. But in order that he might give no encouragement to false security respecting their own sin, on the ground that even highly gifted men of God fall into sin as well, Moses simply pointed out the fact, that the quarreling of the people with him occasioned the wrath of God to fall upon him also.”[[29]](#footnote-29)
    - “Although Moses was personally without blame for the failures of the Israelites at Kadesh-barnea, his identification with the people as their leader meant that he also accepted with them the result of their failure.”[[30]](#footnote-30)
* However, rather than that generation, the very ones who they feared for would enter the land. Their little ones, who they had said would become prey (Num 14:3), would enter and possess the land, and the children who had not chosen rebellion would fulfill the promise. The statement **no knowledge of good or evil** is frequently repeated in the OT in reference to children who are not aware of the implications of their actions (note esp. Isa 7:16; 8:4; Jonah 4:11). The Lord says that He will give the land to them to possess.
* Rather than entering, the Lord tells the people to leave the land and turn back toward the Red Sea. They did not likely reach there, but instead wandered in the wilderness.
  + - “In fact, the plain sense is that they were to set out on the route from Kadesh Barnea to the Red Sea, traveling thus in a southeasterly direction. But how far they were to take that route cannot be known. What in fact happened was that they went to Mount Hor, just northeast of Kadesh Barnea (Num 20:22) and from there bypassed Edom (Num 21:4; Deut 2:1–3).”[[31]](#footnote-31)

## 1:41-46 ~ The Rebellion Continues - False Repentance

41”Then you said to me, ‘We have sinned against the Lord; we will indeed go up and fight, just as the Lord our God commanded us.’ And every man of you girded on his weapons of war, and regarded it as easy to go up into the hill country. 42“And the Lord said to me, ‘Say to them, “Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you; otherwise you will be defeated before your enemies.” ’ 43“So I spoke to you, but you would not listen. Instead you rebelled against the command of the Lord, and acted presumptuously and went up into the hill country. 44“The Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you and chased you as bees do, and crushed you from Seir to Hormah. 45“Then you returned and wept before the Lord; but the Lord did not listen to your voice nor give ear to you. 46“So you remained in Kadesh many days, the days that you spent there.

* While it seems they would have heard, instead, they continued to rebel against the command of the Lord. They say to Moses that they have sinned, but they’ll obey, after realizing the gravity of the situation.
* Instead, they say that they’ll go and obey, believing it would be easy to take the land. They’ve missed both points - first, that the land was hard to conquer, and second, that the Lord would accomplish the impossible task. Their false repentance was the root of their secondary rebellion.
  + - “The statement, made in shame, had still no real appreciation of what it was that their God was demanding of them: they had *thought it easy to go up to the hill country*. There was a fine balance in the nature of the covenant that they constantly failed to grasp. First, they could not really trust in the Lord, who would fight for them and protect them. Then, when they rose to shallow confidence in the Lord, they forgot the seriousness of their task.”[[32]](#footnote-32)
* God told them to not go up, that He was not with them, and therefore that they would be defeated. Nevertheless, the people went up in rebellion and presumption. Again, the willingness to go up was not in relation to trust in God and His promises, but a desire to avoid the consequences.
* The entire attack was presumption against the Lord. The events in Numbers make this rebellious act clear.
  + - “The three verbs—in Numbers 14:44 (“they went up”), here in v.41 (“we will go up”), and in v.43 (“marched up”)—all suggest audacity, foolhardiness, presumption, rashness, and arrogance.”[[33]](#footnote-33)
* The Israelite army did in fact go into the land, and were able to penetrate into the hill country. But when news came to the local tribes, they came out and attacked them. The text says that they chased the Israelites l**ike bees do from Seir to Hormah,** a distance of as much as fifty miles.
  + - “The Amorites’ pursuit “like a swarm of bees” describes numerical greatness, persistence, and ferocity. Hormah lies about fifty-five miles northeast of Kadesh Barnea.”[[34]](#footnote-34)
* The reference to the Amorites is somewhat problematic since the Numbers account specifically names the Amalekites and the Canaanites (Num. 14:43). Liberal scholars would attribute this is source confusion. However, it is far more likely that Moses simply used a generic word for the tribesmen in that hilly area, as opposed to those on the plain.
  + - “Distribution of the terminology Amalekite, Canaanite, and Amorite in Numbers and Deuteronomy is most suggestive. “Amalekite” occurs (in any of its forms) six times in Numbers and only twice in Deuteronomy (both times referring to the Amalekites of the Sinai desert). “Canaanite” is attested in any of its forms (including the references to Canaan as a land) eighteen times in Numbers and only five times in Deuteronomy. “Amorites” appears thirteen times in Numbers (nine in chap. 21 alone) and fifteen in Deuteronomy (six times in chap. 1). Except for Num 13:29 all references to Amorites in that book are to the inhabitants of the Transjordan. Thus it is clear that the precision with which Moses made ethnic and national distinctions in Numbers is lacking in Deuteronomy. In the latter it is sufficient to regard all inhabitants of the hill country as Amorites (cf. 1:7).”[[35]](#footnote-35)
* Remarkably, the chapter ends with the nation returning, not so much physically, but internally, as they weep before the Lord for the defeat they’ve faced. The statements regarding the suffering and weeping of the people are still not genuine repentance. Instead, they simply wept over the loss of life. Hence, the Lord did not hear them.
  + - “The spiritual consequences of this event were more tragic than the physical. Having swung emotionally from despair to self-confidence, the people returned to the base camp and wept before Yahweh. But Yahweh’s ears were stopped; he refused to listen. God demanded obedience, not tears.”[[36]](#footnote-36)
* In v. 46, the people settle down at Kadesh Barnea for 38 years, waiting for the people to die.
  + - “Resigned to the fact that God had abandoned his role as warrior in the pursuit of holy war—at least temporarily—and that there could therefore be no hope of Canaanite conquest, the Israelites settled in at Kadesh Barnea and vicinity for many years, thirty-eight as it turned out, until at last the rebel generation had died.”[[37]](#footnote-37)

Deuteronomy 2:1-3:29 ~ Wilderness Wanderings and Military Conquests

#### In Deuteronomy 1:46, God leaves the Israelites “in Kadesh many days.” Those “many days” end up being thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness.

#### In chapters 2-3, Moses focuses on five encounters after their departure from Kadesh-barnea, following thirty-eight years of wandering, as they make their way up to the eastern plains of Moab facing the Jordan River and the Promised Land.

#### These chapters conclude the historical recap of God’s gracious dealings with His people and firmly establish His sovereignty over all the nations and His steadfast love in preparing the way for His people to take the Promised Land.

**2:1-7 ~ Journey through Edom**

#### Despite their rebellion at the end of ch. 1, the Lord is still with His people, guiding them to the Promised Land. So, after a thirty-eight-year delay, God resumes Israel’s journey to Canaann by calling Moses to move the people out.

#### Phrases in Deut 2 stressing God’s absolute control over all the nations:

#### “I will not give” (vv. 5, 9, 19)

#### “I have given” (vv. 5, 9)

#### “the Lord gave” (v. 12)

#### “the Lord our God is giving to us” (v. 29)

#### “the Lord our God delivered him over to us” (v. 33)

#### “This chapter shows the sovereignty of YHWH in international boundaries (cf. 32:8; Neh 9:22), because each of these phrases stresses that YHWH is the one who gave the land to certain people groups to inherit. This chapter shows that YHWH did not exclusively give land to Israel, but He gave some to every nation. Some lost their land because of their sins (e.g., Gen. 15:16) and Israel also lost her land for a period (i.e., Assyrian and Babylonian exiles) because of her sin. This is asserting that YHWH is the universal God. In a day of polytheism, this is a wonderful statement of monotheism. There is one and only one God, Deut 6:4-6. He is the One who gives the land even to the Edomites, Moabites, Amorites, etc. (esp. Deut 32:8 in the Septuagint [LXX]).”[[38]](#footnote-38)

#### Verse 1 is a near-verbatim repetition of the same command in 1:40. The Lord calls (“as the Lord spoke to me”) the Israelites *away* from the Promised Land because of their rebellion.

#### So, the Israelites end up circling Mt. Seir “for many days” (v. 1), which turns out to be thirty-eight years. It’s during this time that the first generation (specifically, the men ages 20 and over) dies.

#### Mt. Seir is the mountain range in Edom, the land of Esau, Jacob’s older brother. It’s south of the Dead Sea and extends down the eastern side of the Arabah.

#### “Finally after thirty-eight years the people of the Lord were ready to do what he had commanded them to do long before, “turn around and set out toward the desert” (Deut 1:40). Thus Moses said, “We turned back and set out toward the desert” (2:1), clearly a literary way of establishing a connection between the original instruction and its greatly postponed fulfillment. The Hebrew formula is exactly the same in both passages (except for verb forms), one consisting of the juxtaposition of the verbs “turn” and “set out.” Once this is recognized, the statement that Israel “turned back” (better, “turned about”) makes good sense inasmuch as it imitates a command that long since should have been obeyed.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

#### [Deut 1:46] brings formal closure to the Kadesh Barnea chapter. The statement declares that the Israelites “stayed in Kadesh many days,” though it is unclear how long “many days” was. But in obedience to Yahweh’s command, they turned around and headed southeastward into the desert in the direction of the Red Sea (2:1). Moses’ observation that they milled around in circles for many days in the vicinity of Seir represents a classic understatement, for those days turned out to be 13,880 days. During these thirty-eight years (cf. v. 14) the Israelites made no progress whatsoever toward the fulfillment of the mission on which they had embarked when they came out of Egypt.

#### Yahweh had one primary goal for their desert wanderings—to get rid of that rebellious generation (vv. 14–16). For almost four decades Israel was a death camp, a walking mortuary, in which the dominant sound was the death wail. The irony is inescapable. So long as they were slaves in Egypt, Israel’s population mushroomed; as soon as they were free, it shrank.[[40]](#footnote-40)

#### In vv. 2-5, God speaks to Moses with specific directions on Israel’s next stop.

#### Israel is finally to leave Mt. Seir and “turn north,” first passing through the land of Esau/Edom (v.3).

#### The same word for “turn” in 1:7 is used in 2:3 (both as imperatives).

#### The exact route that Israel takes is uncertain (v. 4).[[41]](#footnote-41) It seems that they traveled south to the tip of the Gulf of Aqabah (an extension of the Dead Sea), around the southern border of Edom, and then up its eastern border.

#### This part of the journey, from Kadesh-barnea to Mt. Hor (cf. Num 20:23-29) all the way around Edom (cf. Deut 2:8) to Beth-peor (Deut 3:29) on the plains of Moab east of the Jordan was between 300-400 miles.

#### God calls Israel “to be very careful” (v. 4) and to “not provoke them” (v. 5).

#### The first of two reasons they are not to fight with Esau is the Lord has given the region of Mt. Seir as Esau’s possession (v. 5; cf. v. 12).

#### Genesis 36:1-8 details Esau’s settling of Edom.

#### “…the Israelite understanding of the nature of their God extended beyond the boundaries of their own covenant society. The Lord had promised to give his own people a land; but other peoples, too, had been granted possessions by God. This verse is one of the several clues in Deuteronomy to the concept of the nature of God and the realm of his power over peoples and nations other than Israel.”[[42]](#footnote-42)

#### In v. 7, the Lord provides the second *reason* why Israel was to buy provisions from Edom and not take their land: He had blessed His people with everything that they needed for the past forty years in the wilderness.

#### In v. 7, Moses states the Lord “has known” Israel in the wilderness. In contexts like this one, “know” can mean “to care for” or “protect.” (cf. Gen 39:6, 8; Job 9:21; 35:15; Pss 1:6; 31:7; Prov 27:3).[[43]](#footnote-43)

#### In Numbers 20:20-2, Edom refuses Israel passage *through* their territory (not mentioned in Deuteronomy).

#### In both Num 20 and Deut 2, there is no mention of buying food or water from Esau.

#### “…Canaan was Jacob’s. Nevertheless, Esau had his possession, too, in Mount Seir (*cf.* Gen. 36) and Israel was forbidden to contend for it (v. 5)…When the policy dictated by the Lord was followed, the Edomites refused passage through their land, thus compelling a circuit about their borders (v. 8; *cf.* Num. 20:14ff.). Esau’s fear of Israel (v. 4; contrast Gen. 32:3ff.) was displayed by his blocking entry into Seir (Num. 20:20).”[[44]](#footnote-44)

**2:8-15 ~ Journey through Moab**

#### After passing “beyond” Edom, the Israelites encounter Moab (v. 8).

#### According to v. 8, Israel seems to have taken a southeasterly route around Edom.

#### “Elath” is likely a later name for “Ezion-geber,” which is a port-city at the northermost tip of the Gulf of Aqabah.**[[45]](#footnote-45)** Or, Ezion-geber is a city one to two miles west of Elath. Either way, the difference is negligible.

#### Israel takes the eastern caravan route, heavily trafficked by the Egyptians, according to various temple inscriptions from Egypt,**[[46]](#footnote-46)** and makes its way north to “the wilderness of Moab” (v. 8).

#### The Moabites, like the Edomites, are relatives of the Israelites.

#### Both the Moabites and Ammonites are descendants of the incestuous encounters between Lot and his two daughters (Gen 19:37-38).

#### **Genesis 19:36-38** ~ Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. 37The firstborn bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. 38As for the younger, she also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the sons of Ammon to this day.

#### The Lord tells the Iraelites not to engage in conflict with the Moabites (v. 9), just as He warned them regarding Esau in v. 5. They must leave Moab alone because God has given Ar (the capital city of Moab; also used synonymously for Moab; cf. 2:18) “to the sons of Lot as a possession.”

#### “Just as Yahweh had given Seir to Edom, so he gave Ar to the Moabites as their possession. Remarkably, Yahweh posed as Moab’s patron deity, claiming a role normally ascribed to Chemosh, the god of Moab.”**[[47]](#footnote-47)**

#### In vv. 10-12, Moses includes a historical interlude.

#### He recounts the original people that lived in Moab: “the Emim” (vv. 10-11). Then he recounts the conquest of the Horites, original occupants of the Seir region, by the sons of Esau (v. 12).

#### Very similar historical details also appear in vv. 20-23 (regarding Ammon).

#### Here is a chart laying out all the parallels in these two texts:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Moab (vv. 5-6, 9-12)** | **Ammon (vv. 19-23)** |
| Israelites forbidden by God to harass or provoke them because He has given them the land as a possession (v. 5) | Israel forbidden by God to harass or provoke them because He has given them the land as a possession (v. 19) |
| Original settlers of Ar/Moab, whom the Jews knew as the Rephaim\*, are called the Emim by the Moabites (v. 11; cf. Deut 3:11; Gen 14:5) | Original settlers of Ammon, also the Rephaim\*, are called the Zamzummin by the Ammonites (v. 20; cf. Deut 3:11; Gen 14:5) |
| Original settlers of Moab, the Emim/Rephaim, are “great, numerous, and tall” (v. 10) | Original settlers of Ammon, the Zamzummim/ Rephaim, are “great, numerous, and tall” (v. 21) |
| Dispossession of Horites, original settlers of Edom, by the sons of Esau (v. 12; Gen 36:20) | Dispossession of Horites, original settlers of Edom, by the sons of Esau, with the victory specifically attributed to the Lord (v. 22; Gen 36:20) |
| Additional detail of Israel dispossessing their lands which God gave them (v. 12) | Additional detail of the Caphtorim (Philistines)\*\* destroying and taking the lands of the Avvim (v. 23) |

#### \**On the Rephaim:* “Deuteronomy itself provides most of the biblical information about the Rephaites [*Rephaim*]. They lived not only in Moab and Bashan but also in Ammon (2:20). It seems, then, that virtually all the Transjordan was their home at one time (3:13) and that their reputation as a strong, numerous, and tall people is well justified. Og, for example, was a Rephaite who required an iron bed thirteen feet long and six feet wide (3:11)! Giants who lived west of the Jordan in Canaan proper may also have sprung from the Rephaites as their linkage with the Anakites might suggest (Deut 1:28; Josh 11:21–22; 14:12, 15; 15:13–14; Judg 1:20). Eventually they were driven out of Israelite territory and took up residence in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (Josh 11:22), the home of Philistine giants such as Goliath (1 Sam 17:4; 1 Chr 20:4–8). The famous battlefield known as the Valley of Rephaim also supports the presence of these giants (Josh 15:8; 18:16; 2 Sam 5:18–22; 23:15).”**[[48]](#footnote-48)**

#### \*\**On the Caphtorim (early Philistines)*: “In the table of nations of Gen 10 the Caphtorites are listed after the Casluhites “from whom the Philistines came” (10:14; cf. 1 Chr 1:12). The prophet Amos appears to have equated the Casluhites and Caphtorites when he pointed out that the Philistines came from Caphtor (Amos 9:7)...Jeremiah added the information that the Philistines were “the remnant from the coasts of Caphtor” (Jer 47:4).

“…Most scholars equate the Philistines exclusively with the Sea Peoples of various ancient texts, a people who did not appear in Canaan until 1200 b.c. or later. References to Philistines in patriarchal or other earlier times are either considered anachronistic or are relegated to the realm of legend or etiological sagas. If, however, Caphtorites and Philistines are one and the same and the former are attested as early as Abraham, at least as Keftiu or Kaptara, no reason remains to doubt the genuineness of pre-Mosaic and Mosaic references to these Philistines. Identification of the Sea Peoples and Philistines (which is not denied) means only that there was a later migration of Philistines hundreds of years after those known to the patriarchs (cf. Gen 21:32, 34; 26:1, 8; Exod 13:17; 23:31).”[[49]](#footnote-49)

#### There is some debate about the author, timing, and meaning of 2:12b (“just as Israel did to the land of their possession which the Lord gave to them”).

#### There are two options:

#### (1) Another authorized author inserted this phrase. It refers to the conquest of Canaan, which had taken place by the time of this later author’s insertion.

#### (2) Moses is the author of this verse. It refers either (a) to the future conquest of Canaan and surrounding lands or (b) to whatever occupation of the Transjordanian region had already occurred up to the time of Moses’ writing.

#### If it is predictive, Moses is employing the so-called “perfective of confidence” used to speak of a future event that is as good as done inasmuch as it is promised by the Lord.**[[50]](#footnote-50)**

#### There is no solid exegetical or historical reason to doubt Mosaic authorship of v. 12, whether it’s predictive or recapitulating Israelite occupation up that point in time.

#### Moses includes the historical details in vv. 10-12 to remind the Israelites of a few key truths:

#### (1) God is the sovereign King over all peoples and lands, not human kings and armies. He is fully in control over every single detail of every single people *everywhere*.

#### (2) If God had dispossessed lands for Esau, Moab, and Ammon, how will He not do the same (and more) for His covenant-people Israel?

#### (3) Israel must trust the Lord and not walk by sight, as they see a people great, numerous, and tall living in Canaan. The Lord has already given the land to them, and He will confirm that promise by fighting the battles for them.

#### “By all these historical notices the covenant servant Israel was advised that Yahweh, their great King, had an [*sic*] hegemony over the territory about their promised land. In his all-controlling providence he had repeatedly dispossessed great nations even the Anakim, whose presence in Canaan had frightened Israel into rebellion against him a generation before (*cf.* 1:28; 2:14, 15). And he had done so in behalf of various peoples who enjoyed no such special status of covenant calling as elect Israel had received. With what confidence, therefore, Israel might obey Yahweh’s summons to rise up and cross the mountain torrents of Zered (v. 13) and Arnon (v. 24), and soon the Jordan (*cf.* Josh. 1:2).”**[[51]](#footnote-51)**

#### In vv. 13-15, as Moses recounts Israel’s crossing of the brook Zered, the southern boundary of Moab (v. 13).

#### “The recollection of Yahweh’s charge to cross the Zered (v. 13) triggered a reflective glance backward. The generation that had been lost in the desert perished not for lack of water or food, but because Yahweh had become their enemy and had taken action against them, just as he had sworn…Yahweh’s hand that had fought so triumphantly against the Egyptians was now turned against the Israelites and would not cease its devastating work until every member of that generation had been rooted out.”**[[52]](#footnote-52)**

#### In v. 14, Moses summarizes how long it took for them to go from Kadesh-barnea to the brook Zered (cf. 1:46): thirty-eight years (ca. 1444-1406 B.C.).

#### This was the time God had designated for the “all the generation of the men of war” to die in the camp of Israel.

#### The Lord enacted His judgment by his hand “to destroy them,” which translates הָמַם (*hamam*), meaning “confuse” or “cause panic” (v. 15).

#### “The fact that the Lord‘s hand was against a people often meant that He sent a destroying pestilence against them (cf. Ex. 9:15; 1 Sam. 5:6–7, 9, 11; 6:3, 5, 9; 2 Sam. 24:17)…The verb for “panic or confuse” (*hāmam*) is used for the divinely inspired panic that God sent on many of Israel’s enemies so that they became too confused or terrified to fight competently.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

**2:16-23 ~ Journey through Ammon**

#### In these 8 verses, Moses recounts Israel’s passing through Ammonite territory.

#### Verse 16 repeats the information about the death of “all the men of war” (vv. 14-15)

#### The threefold repetition of the death of the first generation signals that a huge transition is taking place in the conquest narrative (vv. 14-16). It serves at least three theological purposes:

#### 1) The sojourn in the wilderness is coming to an end.

#### 2) The upcoming military victories can only be attributed to the Lord.

#### 3) A new generation with a renewed sense of obedience is

#### In vv. 17-19, Lord commands Moses regarding their upcoming encounter with Ammon.

#### Just as with Edom and Moab, the Israelites are not to stir up any conflict with their relatives in Ammon (v. 19) because God’s gave the sons of Ammon this land “as a possession.”

#### “Here he [the Lord] claims authority normally attributed the Milkom, the acknowledged patron deity of Bene Ammon.”**[[54]](#footnote-54)**

#### Ammon is located to the northeast of Moab, just east of the Amorite lands of Sihon and Og. The Israelites cross the northern border of Moab into Ammonite territory and then immediately turn west to head toward the Amorites.

#### [On the historical details in vv. 19-23, see notes above vv. 10-12.]

**2:24-37 ~ Conquest of Sihon of Heshbon (Amorites)**

#### In v. 24, Moses picks up his discourse from where he left off in v. 19 (the historical interlude in vv. 20-23 have no second person verbs addressing the Israelites).

#### The Israelites cross the valley of Arnon/theArnon River (specifically, its ravine or gorge; modern-day Wadi el-Mujib**[[55]](#footnote-55)**) and arrive at land of the first of two Amorite kings they’ll face: Sihon, whose capital was Heshbon (v. 24).

#### Basically, Sihon ruled the southern Amorites.

#### “Heshbon occupies a place of prominence in the Old Testament (Num 21:25–34; 32:3, 37; Deut 29:7; Josh 12:2, 5; 13:10–27)…It was one of the forty-eight Levitical cities (1 Chr 6:81), claimed first by Reuben (Num 32:37) and later by Gad (Josh 13:26). Prior to Sihon’s rise to power Heshbon and everything south had belonged to Moab. The energetic Amorite had then destroyed Heshbon, made the site his own capital, and pushed Moab’s border all the way to the Arnon (Num 21:26–30). The Israelites under Moses were therefore asking to traverse territory that had recently fallen to Sihon’s control. This may in part explain his sensitivity about allowing this to happen (v. 30).”**[[56]](#footnote-56)**

#### The Arnon River and its valley marks the northern boundary between Moab and the Amorites.

#### “[Sihon’s] territory extended from the Jordan in the west to the land of Bene Ammon and the desert on the east, and from Wadi Jabbok in the north to Wadi Arnon in the south.**[[57]](#footnote-57)**

***The Amorite Lands East of the Jordan and the Abrahamic Covenant’s Land Promises***

This section is provided to clarify this question: Does the Promised Land include territories east of the Jordan River, like the Amorite lands of Sihon and Og? If it does, why is crossing the Jordan into Canaan so significant?

#### While it is true that Canaan’s eastern border is the Jordan River (Num 34:12), the entire Promised Land is larger than Canaan itself. It includes territory east of the Jordan River, like Amorite lands of Sihon and Og. In fact, the boundaries of the Promised Land extend far beyond the Jordan River. They extend all the way to the Euphrates River in modern-day Iraq (Gen 15:18; Deut 1:7)

#### **Gen 15:18-21** ~ 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying,

#### “To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite

#### 20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim 21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.

#### **Deut 1:7-8** ~ ‘Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. 8 ‘See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them.’

#### Deut 1:7-8 also mentions the river Euphrates (Gen 15:18). These verses also mention the Amorites in conjunction with the land which God promised to give to the descendants of Abraham, the same land in Gen 15:18.

#### Note the parallel between the series of regions in v. 7 and the one word summary, “the land,” in v. 8.

#### But why is Canaan special?

#### (1) In Genesis 13:11-12, Abraham asks Lot to choose which side of the Jordan he wanted for his livestock. Lot chooses the land east of the Jordan, so Abraham ends up with Canaan, to the west (Gen 13:11-12). Canaan is tied to Abraham early on.

#### (2) God then establishes very specific boundaries for Canaan, not so with the *entire* Promised Land, beginning with a general outline (Gen 15:18-21) to definite markers (Num 34:1-12).

#### (3) Canaan is “a good and spacious land,” a “land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8, 13:5; Num 13:27; Deut 8:7-9; Jer 11:5; Ezek 20:6), a lush, fertile region.

#### Deut 8:7-9 says that it’s a land where the Israelites will not lack anything, from water to food to building materials.

#### In Ezek 20:6, the Lord calls Canaan “the glory of all lands.”

#### (4) It’s also the land that contains Jerusalem, which will become the place where God chooses to have His name dwell.

#### (5) Ultimately, it’s the land that God has specifically designated for His people, for them to dwell in and enjoy in His presence forever.

#### Summary: There is a full Promised Land extending from the Nile to the Euphrates. And within those boundaries, Canaan is specially set apart for God’s people to enjoy with Him.

#### When the Israelites take the Amorite lands of Sihon and Og, they are beginning the occupation of the Promised Land.

#### And this initial stage of the occupation reassures them that they will be successful in their conquest of Canaan once they cross the Jordan.

#### In fact, the language God uses in Deut 2:24 to call Israel to take Sihon’s land is conquest language used for taking Canaan (cf. Deut 1:21).

#### God says that He has already given this land to them.

#### Then he calls them to “begin to take possession” of the land and fight them.

#### So, possessing lands east of the Jordan is not merely a late development in the land promises to Abraham. It is a very integral part of those promises.

#### In 2:24, the Lord calls His people to take possession of Amorite land since He has already given it “into your hand” (v. 24; cf. Deut 1:19-21; Num 21:21-35). This marks, in a sense, the beginning of the possession of the Promised Land.

#### This promise is God’s rebuttal to the Israelites’ complaint in Deut 1:27.

#### **Deut 1:27** ~ and you grumbled in your tents and said, ‘Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us.

#### God calls the Israelites to take on Sihon with six imperatives in v. 24 (Arise, set out, pass through, look, begin to take possession, and contend/provoke).

#### The same word for “provoke” גָּרָה (*garah*) in vv. 5, 9, and 19 is used in v. 24, but now, Israel is called to actually provoke Sihon in battle.

#### In terms of the Amorites, Deut 7:3-4 reveals the irretrievable lostness of the Amorites. Gen 15:6 states that the Israelites won’t be allowed to occupy the Promised Land until “the inquity of the Amorite” is complete (a period over 500 years).

#### **Genesis 15:6** ~ 16Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

#### “…the Amorites, far from being a “brother” people, were inveterate foes of the Lord and his people, a nation of hopelessly unrepentant squatters who had to be removed from the lands promised to Israel’s forefathers (cf. Gen 15:16; Exod 3:8; 13:5; 23:23; 33:2; 34:11).”**[[58]](#footnote-58)**

#### Additionally, starting from “This day” (v. 25), the Lord will bring the terror of Israel upon all the nations “when they hear the report” of them, particularly regarding the exodus. This dread of Israel was prophesied earlier (Ex 23:27), seen in the Moabites (Num 22:3), and later testifed to by Rahab (Josh 2:9-11).

#### “The terror and fear God would put in those nations constituted an essential “weapon” for Israel in this war and the Conquest (cf. Ex. 15:15; 23:27; Num. 22:3; Josh. 2:9, 11, 24; 5:1; 9:24).”[[59]](#footnote-59)

#### “When they learned of Israel’s exploits, they would tremble and writhe with uncontrollable anguish, a state of affairs frequently associated with holy war contexts (cf. Exod 15:14–16; Josh 2:8–11).”**[[60]](#footnote-60)**

#### Interestingly, Moses initially doesn’t engage in battle with Sihon; he extends an olive branch to the Amorites by sending messengers “with words of peace” (v. 26) from Kedemoth.**[[61]](#footnote-61)**

#### His request is the same as the one made to the sons of Esau (vv. 27-28; cf. Deut 2:6).

#### “Moses promised they would not leave the main road, and therefore no plunder of the crops need be feared. The Israelites had already passed through the territories of Edom and Moab without war (v. 29). The Edomites had refused the right of passage to the Israelites (Num. 20:18–21). Probably the Edomites allowed Israel to pass by on their eastern border though they refused to let them pass through the middle of their territory. Moses also told Sihon that Israel’s ultimate destiny was not the territory of Sihon but was on the other side of the Jordan in the land the Lord was giving them.”**[[62]](#footnote-62)**

#### There is some debate regarding vv. 28-29: *Was Moses being diplomatic by exaggerating how receptive the Edomites and Moabites were (when they clearly were not), or was he stating the truth, that though they were not receptive, they did sell them provisions?*

#### Technically, Israel had safe passage through Edom and Moab (i.e., those nations did not start a conflict with Israel).

#### Evidence of Edom and Moab being unreceptive to the Israelites:

#### Num 20:14-21; Judges 11:17 ~ Edom’s negative response

#### No mention made of purchasing food and water

#### Num 22-24; Judges 11:17 ~ Moab’s hostility toward Israel

#### No mention made of purchasing food and water

#### Deut 23:3-4 ~ “No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their *descendants,* even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, 4 because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

#### Cf. Nehemiah 13:1-2.

#### The detail of the Moabites not meeting the Israelites with food and water aren’t mentioned in Deut 2 or in Numbers 20:14-21.

#### Evidence of Israel’s trek *around* Edom and Moab and not *through* those two lands:

#### Judges 11:18 ~ Israel “went through the wilderness and around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came to the east side of the land of Moab, and they camped beyond the Arnon; but they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon *was* the border of Moab.”

#### No mention made of either Edom or Moab selling food and water

#### So, nowhere do we have biblical confirmation that Israel bought food and water from the Edomites, Ammonites, or Moabites.

#### This does not mean that those on the border could not have sold them food and water, but that is an argument from silence at best.

#### So, based on the textual support that we *do* have, it seems best to hold that Moses is exaggerating the truth for diplomatic purposes, to ease Sihon and his people, who are not relatives of Israel.

#### “Moses states that the sons of Esau and the Moabites treated the Israelites equitably. But the accounts in Numbers and later in Deuteronomy 23:4 seem to paint a different picture. They may have sold water and food to the Israelites, but Edom didn’t allow them to pass through the land and the Moabites are hostile to the people of God.

#### Given the negative picture of the Edomite response in Numbers 20:14–21 and the Moabite hostility in Numbers 22–24, Moses’ positive portrayal of these nations in verse 29 is surprising. Has he forgotten so quickly? Obviously not, for later he will single out Ammonites and Moabites for *not* having offered them bread or water. These comments sound like diplomatic rhetoric, stretching the truth for the sake of argument, a common feature in political negotiations (cf. Jephthah’s speech in Judg. 11).”[[63]](#footnote-63)

#### In fact, when Moses solicited such permission from the king of Edom, the answer was resoundingly negative, so much so that “Israel turned away from them” (Num 20:21). As for Moab, the record is otherwise silent about any such overture at all. Moses clearly appeared to be exaggerating the level of cooperation he received from these neighbors of Sihon to the south. This way of looking at Moses’ communication with the Amorites is not contradicted by previous statements to the effect that Israel was to pay Edom (and by implication Moab) for supplies they might obtain from them (2:6). This would be done, obviously, only if and when Israel passed through these countries and requested these commodities, something for which there is no evidence. Indeed, later in this very book Moses condemned the Ammonites and Moabites for not having provided Israel with bread and water on their way to the promised land (Deut 23:4).

#### The ethical dilemma posed by this suggestion of duplicity (if such duplicity actually exists) on the part of Moses is troublesome, but one must remember in cases like this that humans, not God, are culpable and that the biblical record is an accurate and unbiased account of human behavior as it really is. For Moses to have stretched the truth (if, in fact, he did) is indefensible, but at the same time it is understandable given the exigencies of the situation and the nature of the negotiations in which he was involved.[[64]](#footnote-64)

#### Just as Edom didn’t allow Israel to pass through its land, so too does Sihon refuse Israel to pass through its land (v. 30).

#### Sihon may have refused because of fear, but more likely, he refused because of confidence in his own military might. He had recently experienced military success against the Moabites (cf. Num 21:26-30).

#### But the *ultimate* reason given for his refusal to let Israel pass through is a profound statement on the sovereignty of God (v. 30).

#### Moses states that the Lord hardened Sihon’s spirit and made his heart obstinate in order to deliver the king and his land into Israel’s hand.

#### The verb “harden” is from קָשָׁה (*qasha*), also used in Exod 7:3 in reference to the Lord’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.

#### The verb “made obstinate” is from אָמֵץ (*ametz*), also used in 2 Chron 36:12 to refer to an evil stubbornness.

#### Along with Pharaoh in the exodus account, we’re reminded of God’s sovereignty in appointing some to grace and others to wrath in Rom 9:19-24.

#### God confirms Israel’s impending victory by telling His people that He has already begun delivering Sihon to them. So now, Israel must begin to possess this land (v. 31).

#### Four times in the account of Israel against Sihon, Moses states that God delivered Sihon to His people (vv. 30, 31, 33, 36).

#### Then in vv. 32-37, Moses recounts the battle against Sihon at Jahaz, possibly modern Khirbet el-Medeiyneh, a city a few miles north of Kedemoth.**[[65]](#footnote-65)**

#### Verses 33-34 recount the total victory of Israel over Sihon.

#### The victory is attributed to the Lord, a fact which allows the Israelites to defeat, capture, and utterly destroy Sihon and his kingdom (v. 33).

#### Though the “battle belongs to the Lord,” the Israelites didn’t sit on their hands. The promises of God bolstered their faith and propelled them to take action by fighting and capturing “all his cities” (v. 34a).

#### “The people of God did not sit back and observe the acts of God; they entered the battle and experienced the presence of God in their active obedience and commitment.”**[[66]](#footnote-66)**

#### “The sevenfold repletion of “all” in verses 32–37 emphasizes the completeness of Israel’s obedience and the totality of victory. This pattern continues in the sequel (3:3–10).”**[[67]](#footnote-67)**

#### Verses 34b-35 depict in swift fashion the total annihilation of the people (“men, women and children”) of Sihon’s kingdom.

#### The word for “utterly destroyed” is חָרַם (*haram*), with the basic meaning of “devote.” In “holy war” contexts, it’s a technical term for devoting something to destruction on behalf of and for the Lord.

#### “Usually *ḥāram* means a ban for utter destruction, the compulsory dedication of something which impedes or resists God’s work, which is considered to be accursed before God.”**[[68]](#footnote-68)**

#### “The verb *heḥʿrîm* (the verb occurs only in the causative Hiphil and Hophal stems), rendered “completely destroyed” in the NIV…involves a sacred act of irrevocable consecration to God and absolute proscription from human use.”**[[69]](#footnote-69)**

#### Consider what happened to Achan and his entire family when he took some of the spoils of war from Ai when God designated the entire city for utter destruction (Josh 7:16-26)

#### The Israelites left no survivors (v. 34) and only took “the animals” for booty and “the spoil of cities” they had captured (v. 35).

#### The issue of the “holy war” campaigns of Israel against the Amorites and Canaanites will receive greater attention in Deut 7. But for now, here are some considerations when thinking about the ethical questions raised by texts such as Deut 2:34-35 and 3:3, 6.

#### “1. As Creator of all things and all human beings and as sovereign over all, God can do anything he wants with anyone and be right in doing so. He was Israel’s Commander-in-Chief. He accounts to no one for his actions or his commands, and by definition he does what is right. If he decides to command the Israelites to eliminate the Canaanites, he is perfectly within his rights…

#### 2. The ways of God are a mystery. Since we will never completely understand him, we might as well relax with the questions in our minds. Isaiah 55:8–9 offers some consolation.

#### 3. According to the biblical picture of the Canaanites, these peoples were extremely wicked, and their annihilation represented God’s judgment for their sin. The destruction of the Canaanites was neither the first nor the last time God would do this. The differences between the Canaanites’ fate and the fate of humanity (except for Noah’s family) as described in Genesis 6–9 involve scale and agency. With the Canaanites, as with many others in history, Yahweh used human beings rather than natural disasters or plagues and sickness (Lev. 26; Deut. 28).

#### 4. God never intended for the Israelites to make the policy of *ḥērem* as a general policy toward outsiders. Deuteronomy 7:1 expressly identifies and thereby delimits the target peoples. The Israelites were not to follow these policies against Aramaeans or Edomites or Egyptians, or anyone else (cf. Deut. 20:10–18).

#### 5. The Canaanites suffered a fate that ultimately all sinners will face: the judgment of God. The difference between them and other lost peoples is that they (especially the children) met their doom earlier than most. But in the last analysis, apart from the grace of God we are all Canaanites, and it is only by divine grace that modern nations are not cut off as they were.

#### 6. During biblical times people assumed a sense of corporate identity that is difficult for modern Westerners to understand. According to the ancient Near Eastern ideal, one found one’s significance and identity in relation to the community. When one member hurt, they all hurt; when one prospered, they all prospered (1 Cor. 12–14). Accordingly, few ancients would have objected to the fact that the general population shared the fate of kings and children shared the fate of their parents.

#### 7. God’s elimination of the Canaanites was a necessary step in the history of salvation. In order for Israel to achieve the goals that God had established for them—that they might declare to the world his glory and grace—they needed a clean slate and a holy land. Because they resisted Israel’s migration through their territory, the war of extermination against Canaanites was extended to Sihon and Og.

#### 8. Although the Canaanites as a whole were targets of God’s judgment, they had at least forty years of advance warning (see Rahab’s confession in Josh. 2:8–11). The conquest of Canaan caught few by surprise. Rahab illustrates the gracious fact that any individual who declared faith in Yahweh would be spared. Rahab’s incorporation into the community of faith was so complete that she became the ancestor of Jesus! (Matt. 1).

#### 9. God really does not play favorites. Yes, he chose Abraham and his descendants to be his covenant people, but Deuteronomy warns the Israelites repeatedly that if they ever forget God and behave like Canaanites, they will experience the same fate as the Canaanites (4:25–28; 7:25–26; 8:19–20; 28:15–68).[[70]](#footnote-70)

#### Some other considerations on “holy war”[[71]](#footnote-71):

#### Israel, and Israel alone, could engage in such military campaigns, and only when given special mandate by the Lord.

#### Those who were utterly destroyed were irremediably hardened; they were never going to repent and trust in the Lord. Plus, they would turn Israel away from the Lord to serve other gods, which was high treason in a theocratic kingdom. Israel had to be spiritually protected.

#### These wars would display both God’s power and wrath and grace and mercy, power and wrath in judging sin and grace and mercy in delivering Israel (and any who would believe in Him, like Rahab). Such displays would teach Israel and the nations that Yahweh alone is God and that He alone must be worshiped.

#### In the New Testament, the church is given no mandate to conduct a physical “holy war” against its enemies. In fact, the church is already thrust into a “spiritual war” and called to “stand firm,” not to fight the devil and his demonic forces or their physical counterparts (cf. 1 Cor 9:26; 2 Cor 7:5; 10:3; 1 Tim 1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim 2:4; 4:7).

#### In the end times, the physical warfare conducted by the Israelites in their conquest will resume (cf. Rev 6:1-8; 12:7-17; 16:12-16; 19:11-21). But at that time, angelic armies and the Lord Jesus Christ will be the ones fighting, not believers.

#### “None of these answers will satisfy everyone, and none of them should be taken in isolation. But when we consider this complex of considerations, we may relax, knowing that God is good and God is always right. The challenge for us is that we treasure his grace in our own lives and pray for him to extend that grace to others. Perhaps when they see what God has done for us, like Rahab non-Christians will confess faith in our God.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

#### Verses 36–37 describes the extent of the conquest.

#### Moses mentions that “there was no city too high for us” (v. 36) This natural fact is juxtaposed with the supernatural *relity* behind it: the Lord gave them the victory.

#### The rest of v. 36 provides the scope of Sihon’s territory. It ranged from the Arnon River to the south, to the Jabbok River in the north (the area of “Gilead”; cf. Num 21:24), the Jordan to the west, and Ammon to the east.

#### This region was fifty-five miles long and twenty to twenty-five miles wide.[[73]](#footnote-73)

#### Verse 37 reiterates the theme of obedience: Israel did not exceed the territory God had given them; they stayed away from Ammon, as the Lord had previously commanded (2:19).

**3:1-11 ~ The Conquest of Og of Bashan (Amorites)**

#### The final campaign involved taking the land of Og, king of Bashan. The battle against Og occurs at Edrei, about thirty miles east-southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

#### “The name Bashan refers to the mountain range north of the Jabbok River, east of the Sea of Galilee, as far as Mount Hermon southwest of Damascus (Deut. 32:14; Ps. 22:12[13]; Amos 4:1). Verse 10 suggests Og’s kingdom extended south to Salecah and Edrei (cf. 1:4). Situated strategically on a tributary of the Yarmuk, the southern border of Og’s territory, and on the King’s Highway, Edrei was to this king what Aroer was to Sihon.”**[[74]](#footnote-74)**

#### Og controlled the northern kingdom of the Amorites.

#### No peace offer is extended, as it was to Sihon of Heshbon.

#### The Israelites move so quickly that they came to Edrei, Og’s capital city, before anyone could halt their progress (v. 1).

#### The conquest narrative in 3:1-7 parallels that found in 2:32-37.

#### The Lord provides encouragement to fight Og, commanding the Israelites not to fear Og because He has already “delivered him and all his people and his land into your hand” (v. 2). God even provides a reminder of what they did to Sihon of Heshbon just recently.

#### The Lord is attributed with the victory (v. 3a).

#### No survivors are left, as all the men, women, and children are utterly destroyed (vv. 3b, 6). [See notes on *herem* above.]

#### Israel captures all sixty cities of Og’s territory, also known as the “Argob” (v. 4; cf. 2:36).

#### Mention is made of the numbers, names, and fortifications of the cities Israel took (vv. 4b-5), which emphasizes the magnitude of the victory.

#### The animals and the spoils of each city are taken for booty.

#### Verse 8 summarizes the conquest of Heshbon and Bashan in north to south fashion (a territory 140 miles long).

#### In vv. 9-11, Moses provides parenthetical historical details about Hermon, further specifics on the scope of Israel’s two most recent conquests, and a final note on King Og of Bashan.

#### The note on “Hermon” is triggered by its mention at the end of v. 8. “Sidonians” (Phoenicians) are from the coastal region of Sidon, northwest of Jersualem. A note on what the Amorites, the most recent occupiers of the area, call Hermon is also included.

#### In v. 10, Moses states in greater detail the scope of the land that Israel took from Og.

#### “They took the Amorite region east of the Jordan from the Wadi Arnon in the south to Mount Hermon in the north (cf. Josh 12:5; 13:11). Verse 9 interrupts the review with another parenthetical comment, this time clarifying the reference to Mount Hermon. Apparently Mount Hermon was the Israelite name for a mountain that the Sidonians (representing the Phoenicians) called Hermon Sirion, and one that the Amorites (who previously controlled it) called Senir. In verse 10 Moses reiterates the scope of the Israelites’ conquests, focusing on the highlands. Moving from south to north, he lists the conquered regions.”**[[75]](#footnote-75)**

#### Lastly, in v. 11, Moses states that Og was the last of the giant Rephaim.

#### His physical stature is confirmed by mention of his bed: made of iron, still in Rabbah in Ammon, and nine cubits long by four cubits wide (13.5 ft. by 6 ft.).

#### This detail invites readers to check the veracity of the historical record and the magnitude of the victory.

**3:12-17 ~ Allocation of Land East of the Jordan (The Transjordan)**

#### Moses divides vv. 12-29 into 4 parts, each beginning with “at that time” (vv. 12, 18, 21, 23).

#### “The phrase “at that time” (בָּעֵת הַהִוא; cf. 1:9, 16, 18; 2:34; 3:4, 8, 12, 21, 23; 4:14; 9:20; 10:1, 8), though usually referring to a rather remote past, can also recall events of the immediate past.”**[[76]](#footnote-76)**

#### Four first person verbs dominate each part: vv. 12–17, “I gave” (vv. 12, 13, 15, 16); verses 18–20, “I commanded” (v. 18); verses 21–22, “I commanded” (v. 21); verses 23–28, “I pleaded” (v. 23).**[[77]](#footnote-77)**

#### Additionally, vv. 12-17 exhibit a chiastic structure (A-B-C-B′-A′):

#### **A** The allotments to Reuben and Gad (v. 12)

#### **B** The allotments to the half-tribe of Manasseh**[[78]](#footnote-78)** (v. 13a)

#### **C** The parenthetical historical/geographic note (vv. 13b)

#### **B′** The allotment to the half-tribe of Manasseh: Jair and Machir (vv. 14-15)

#### **A′** The allotments to Reuben and Gad (vv. 16–17)**[[79]](#footnote-79)**

#### In vv. 12, 16-17, Moses recounts the allotments to Reuben and Gad.

#### In Numbers 32:1-5, Reuben and Gad jointly requested the hill country of Gilead and Bashan because they were cattlemen, and these lands offered good pasture (vv. 12, 16).

#### Initially, Moses is deeply troubled by their request. He considers it sinful for them not to cross the Jordan into Canaan.

#### But when these two tribes promise to fight with their brothers in the conquest of Canaan, Moses relents and gives them Sihon’s former territory.

#### According to vv. 16-17, their territory extends in this manner: from Chinnereth (Sea of Galilee) to the north; the Salt Sea/Dead Sea and the slopes of Mt. Pisgah to the south (Mt. Pisgah is directly northeast of the northern end of the Dead Sea); the Jordan river to the west; and the Jabbok river, to the east, as a border with Ammon.

#### In vv. 13a, 14-15, Moses recounts the allotments to the half-tribe of Manasseh.

#### This tribe receives the former territory of Og, king of Bashan (v. 13).

#### Interestingly, Manasseh wasn’t part of the original request of Reuben and Gad, but in Num 32:33, it becomes a part of the Transjordanian allotment.

#### Manasseh receives the other half of Gilead, left over from Reuben and Gad (cf. v. 12b), and all of Bashan.

#### Then in vv. 14-15, Moses recounts the allotments of two key descendents of Manasseh.

#### In v. 14, Jair**[[80]](#footnote-80)** (a great-grandson of Manasseh according to 1 Chron 2:22-23), takes the region north of Gilead called “Argob.”

#### This region extends from Geshur to Maacah (from east of the Sea of Galillee up northwest to a region roughly between Galilee and Mt. Hermon).

#### Then in v. 15, Machir**[[81]](#footnote-81)** (a son of Manasseh and grandson of Joseph according to Num 26:29 and 1 Chron 2:21) is given the southern part of Og’s kingdom, as far south as the allocation of Reuben and Gad (cf. v. 12b).

#### **3:18-20 ~ Moses’ Charge to the Transjordanian Tribes**

#### This section is bounded by references to the Lord giving land to His people (vv. 18, 20), expressing, yet again, His total control and power over all the nations.

#### Having allotted lands east of the Jordan, Moses then charges the fighting-age men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh to cross the Jordan with their brothers and aid them in the conquest of Canaan (v. 18; cf. Num 32:28-32).

#### While the conquest is taking place, wives, children, and livestock (of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh) are to stay behind until the men accomplish their task (v. 19). This action would show their total commitment to help their “brothers” accomplish what the Lord had called *all* Israel to do.

#### “As it turned out, this appears to have taken at least seven long years (Josh 14:6–15; cf. 22:1–4)…As to the matter of the security and maintenance of the families left behind, one must assume that the youth and the men over the normal maximum age for military service could more than meet these needs. Of course, it would also have been possible for troops from the west to recross the Jordan to take up arms on behalf of their loved ones should the need arise, particularly in light of the fact that Gilgal, just five miles west of the Jordan, was Joshua’s headquarters during the early years of the conquest (Josh 4:19; 10:6–7, 15, 43; 14:6).”**[[82]](#footnote-82)**

#### Only when their brothers’ lands are taken can these men return to their families (v. 20).

**3:21-22 ~ Moses’ Charge to Joshua**

#### Moses now discharges his final duty as the covenant-mediator and leader of Israel: to publicly charge his successor, Joshua, with leading the conquest of Canaan (cf. Deut 1:38).

#### The charge consists of the following elements:

#### (1) Joshua’s eyewitness experience of God’s defeat of the two Amorite kings (v. 21a), which function as the basis of the promise given next

#### (2) God’s promise that all other kingdoms will fall in similar fashion (v. 21b)

#### A command to not fear the Canaanite kings (v. 22a; cf. Deut 1: )

#### The reason to not fear them: the Lord their God, He ]emphatic use of the pronoun, ה֖וּא (hu)]**[[83]](#footnote-83)** is fighting for “you” (plural), for His people (v. 22b)

#### “Joshua had a formidable task before him, but he was called upon to undertake it in the sure knowledge of a God who had already shown himself faithful.”**[[84]](#footnote-84)**

#### “Moses’ final duty was to charge the people to conquer in the name of the Lord (v. 22) and to commission Joshua to lead them in that conquest, strong in the confidence that the Lord who had begun a good work for them would also perfect it (vv. 21, 28; *cf.* Num. 27:18–23; Deut. 1:38; 31:7, 8, 14, 23).”**[[85]](#footnote-85)**

**3:23-29 ~ Moses’ Request to Enter the Promised Land**

#### In vv. 23-25, Moses recounts how he pleaded with the Lord to let him enter the Promised Land but was refused his request.

#### That such a negative event is included in the record validates its historicity.

#### The verb for “plead” in v. 23 is (*ḥā·nǎn*), a very strong verb which in the Hithpael stem means “plead for grace, beg for mercy, make supplication, or request favor.”

#### “The Hithpael is used in supplications to God: by Moses who begs to see the Promised Land (Deut 3:23); by Solomon in dedicating the temple (I Kgs 8:33, 47, 59; 9:3; II Chr 6:24, 37); by the Psalmist (Ps 30:8 [H 9]; 142:1 [H 2]); and by Hosea (12:4 [H 5]) of Jacob’s appeal to the angel who wrestled with him. Job, who is advised by Bildad to supplicate God (Job 8:5), concedes that though he were righteous this would be his only recourse (Job 9:15).”**[[86]](#footnote-86)**

#### The *hithpael* stem of the verb חָנַן (“show favor, be gracious”) plus the preposition אֶל suggests a seeking of God’s favor in a pointed, specific way. Cf. D. N. Freedman and J. R. Lundbom, “חָנַן *ḥānan*,” etc., *TDOT* 5:31.**[[87]](#footnote-87)**

#### In v. 24, Moses calls the Lord “the Lord God” אֲדֹנָ֣י יְהוִ֗ה (*adonay yhwh*), *Adonai* emphasizing His sovereignty and *Yahweh* emphasizing His steadfast love and grace.

#### He then calls himself “Your servant” (v. 24).

#### “In prayers, “your servant” functions as more than a courtesy; it expresses humility and subjugation even as it reflects the hope that the “servant” will receive a measure of goodwill from his “master, lord.” See further H. Ringgren, “עבד,” *TDOT*, 10:392.”**[[88]](#footnote-88)**

#### Moses then states that “You [emphatic] have begun to show your greatness and strong hand,” implying that there is more to come (v. 24a).

#### In displaying His glory throughout the exodus and wilderness wanderings, even as recently as the defeat of the two Amorite kings (Sihon and Og), God has clearly separated Himself from all other gods (v. 24b).

#### The expression “strong hand,” יָדְךָ֖ הַחֲזָקָ֑ה (*yad’kah ha-hazakah*) appears several times in Deut: 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; 7:8, 19; 9:26; 11:2; 26:8; 34:12.**[[89]](#footnote-89)**

#### Moses states his request in v. 25: he wants to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. He intensifies his request by the number and kinds of terms he uses.

#### He calls it “the fair land,” “the good hill country,” and “Lebanon.”

#### Both “fair” and “good” are from the same word, טוֹב (*tob*). This is the common word for “good” or “desirable.”

#### “Some usages blend two or more of the areas of meaning discussed above. The “good land” of the Old Covenant included practical, economic, and esthetic overtones (Deut 1:25; Josh 23:13).”**[[90]](#footnote-90)**

#### “Lebanon” was referenced as part of the Promised Land in Deut 1:7.

#### The land is “good,” not just physically (cf. Num 13:17, “it certainly does flow with milk and honey”), but spiritually, because it was the land that the Lord had promised to His people. It was a sign of His steadfast love.

#### “For Moses, the land of Canaan was much more than a geographic place; it was a theological idea. Seen with spiritual eyes, the land was good, not because it was fertile, but because it was the land that Yahweh had reserved for his people; this was the destination that Yahweh had set for Moses when he called him to lead the people out of Egypt (Ex. 3:8).”**[[91]](#footnote-91)**

#### The Lord’s reply in vv. 26-27 sharply contrasts with Moses’ request.

#### Moses states that God “was angry” with him “on your account,” that is, because of the people.

#### The term translated “was angry” is from עָבַר (*abar*), and in the Hithpael stem, it’s used to express anger or strong displeasure (cf. Deut 3:26; Psa 78:21, 59, 62; 89:38).[[92]](#footnote-92)

#### The phrase “on your account” or “because of you,” לְמַעַן (*le-ma’an*), also appears in 1:37, where Moses brought up the people as the reason that he was barred access to the Promised Land.

#### The blame did lie at the feet of the people for their grumbling, but blame was also due Moses for not obeying the Lord and honoring Him before the people at the rock of Meribah (Num 20:10-12).

#### He then says that God wouldn’t listen to him on this matter any longer.

#### “Enough!” (v. 26) means something like “I’ve had enough!”

#### The Lord then commands Moses to stop bringing up this request. Apparently, he had been quite persistent.

#### “He [Moses] does not (and cannot) shirk responsibility for his intemperate smiting of the rock in the desert (Num 20:9–11), but he was insistent that what he did was motivated by their incessant complaining and by his desire to meet their demands for water. In sharp words of rebuke (“enough of this!”), the Lord forbade further discussion (v. 26). The matter was settled[[93]](#footnote-93)

#### “The very persistence of Moses in prayer, which aroused the anger of the Lord, was nevertheless one of his greatest gifts; it was his dogged faith and persistence that had finally brought the Israelites to the plains of Moab. So the request made by Moses was probably not in itself illegitimate. But there is a sense in which the great vision of Moses had slightly lost its focus. The vision of the promise had become a consuming passion to set foot in the land, but the vision had slipped from the Lord of the promise to the promise itself. It was the Lord himself who was to remain the true promise and vision of Moses.”[[94]](#footnote-94)

#### Then in v. 27, in a moment of agonizing bittersweetness, God commands Moses to the top of Pisgah in order to see beyond the Jordan into the land that he would not cross over (cf. Num 27:12).

#### Pisgah is modern-day Ras es-Siyagha, which rises 2,329 feet above sea level and is ten miles east of the Jordan River where it flows into the Dead Sea. From this vantage point, one could see all of Canaan from Hermon in the north to Beersheba in the south to the Mediterranean.[[95]](#footnote-95)

#### In v. 28, the Lord calls Moses, again, to pass the baton of leadership to Joshua. The task ahead is massive, so Joshua needs all the reassurance he can get.

#### The chapter ends in v. 29 with the Israelites remaining near Beth-peor, the site of their recent idolatry and the death of 24,000 by plague from the Lord (cf. Num 25).

#### In terms of timing, the Beth-peor episode in Numbers 25 happens shortly *after* the conquest of the two Amorite kingdoms (Num 21:21-35).

#### “The place is named variously as “Baal Peor” (Num. 25:3, 5; Deut. 4:3; Ps. 106:28; Hos. 9:10), “Beth Peor” (Deut. 3:29; 4:46; 34:6; Josh. 13:20), or simply “Peor” (Num. 25:18; 31:16; Josh. 22:17). Peor was a mountain near Mount Nebo to which Balak took Balaam to have him curse Israel (Num. 23:28).”**[[96]](#footnote-96)**

#### They will now go on to hear Moses exposition of the law in preparation for entrance into the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 4:1-40 ~ Exhortation to Obey the Law

* Moses has essentially caught Israel up to date in terms of her history of wanderings. He now turns his attention to the first exhortation, calling Israel to obey the Law.
* This final exhortation is a conclusion to the introduction of the suzerain/vassal treaty formula, as well as a sort of introduction to what follows in the restatement of the Law for the people.
* Further, the history of the unbelieving parents of the current generation forms a fitting introduction to the text of the exhortation. If disobedience leads to the wilderness and death, the exhortation to obey seems appropriate.

## 4:1-4 ~ Obey to Possess

🕮 **4:1-4** ~ 1“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. 2“You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. 3“Your eyes have seen what the Lord has done in the case of Baal-peor, for all the men who followed Baal-peor, the Lord your God has destroyed them from among you. 4“But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you.

* Moses begins this closing exhortation with the comment that the people ought to **listen to the statues and judgments** of what will follow. The phrase contains a summary of all that the Law contained, both in the moral requirements and the promises and blessings of the covenant.
  + - “The words *“statutes and judgments”* (as in Lev. 19:37) denote the whole of the law of the covenant in its two leading features. חֻקִּים, *statutes*, includes the moral commandments and statutory covenant laws, for which חֹק and חֻקָּה are mostly used in the earlier books; that is to say, all that the people were bound to observe; מִשְׁפָּטִים, *rights*, all that was du”e to them, whether in relation to God or to their fellow-men (cf. Deut. 26:17).[[97]](#footnote-97)
* Moses, however, is not simply going to repeat the Law to them, but will seek to **teach** them so that they will **perform** them. He wants to train them to do what is right through a proper teaching of the text. This focus on education is important because it represents a shift in focus for Moses. Rather than simply communicating the Law, he is seeking to instruct the people in the ‘how to’ of Law keeping.
* The purpose of this training represents the goal of Moses’ work with the nation. He is speaking to them s**o that they may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you**.
* This statement represents the linkage between the Abrahamic promises (Gen 15:1-22) and the Mosaic Covenant. In order for the nation to inherit the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, they will need to keep the Mosaic Covenant. This leads to the later ‘blessing and cursing’ section, where the land would be forfeited for covenant unfaithfulness.
  + - “For the immediate future, Moses was expounding the law, because only by obedience to the law would the Israelites take possession of the land after they had crossed the Jordan.”[[98]](#footnote-98)
* The gift of the land is not in question, however. The land is promised to Abraham unilaterally. Nevertheless, his progeny would have to keep the Law in order for the land promises to be fulfilled. Their inability is spelled out in the rest of the OT.
* However, the promise to grant the land will one day be fulfilled to the nation, but through a new covenant which will include a necessary heart change. Consider **Jeremiah 32:36-44** especially.
* Since the Law of the Lord was perfect (Psalm 19:7), any addition or subtraction would only taint it with the hand of man. Therefore, it was not to be tampered with.
  + - “They needed no additional rules or directives, and none of those given were superfluous; so the people were not to add to them or subtract from them."[[99]](#footnote-99)
* Further, any addition or subtraction would mean that they would be unaware of their covenant responsibilities, and would therefore fail in obeying the Lord.
* Therefore Moses instructs them to “keep the commandments,” which means that they leave it intact. They weren’t to add to it or take anything away from it.
* As if to illustrate the point, Moses reminds them of the episode of **Baal-Peor** (Num 25:1-5), where a number of the people were led into religiously motivated fornication with the Moabite women. This violated the first commandment, as they worshipped a false God, and also violated the stipulations regarding sexual fidelity.
* The rebellious idolators were taken and executed in broad daylight in the presence of all the people. the punishment indicated how God felt about violations of the Law, and particularly violations of His deity. They would not be tolerated.
* On the other hand, those who **held fast to the Lord** rather than follow into idolatrywere spared, and were still alive to hear the exhortation - in fact, **every one of them**, as Moses tells them.
  + - “This example was adduced by Moses, because the congregation had passed through all this only a very short time before; and the results of faithfulness towards the Lord on the one hand, and of the unfaithfulness of apostasy from Him on the other, had been made thoroughly apparent to it.”[[100]](#footnote-100)
    - “Those who had survived the incident and judgment at Baal-peor (presumably the same as, or close to, Beth-peor) were the ones *who kept close to the Lord*, and this was the life style that Moses encouraged in his address to the Israelites.”[[101]](#footnote-101)

## 4:5-8 ~ Wisdom and Obedience Before the Nations

* 🕮 **4:5-8** ~ 5“See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. 6“So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ 7“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? 8“Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?
* V. 5 is effectively a repetition of vv. 1-4, but Moses makes clear that his teaching is not simply his desire, but the command of God. The Lord wants them to understand the Law and to do it, and therefore he has appointed Moses (and, though not explicit, Joshua and the leaders to follow) in order to teach the people the Law unto obedience.
* However, beyond simply the fulfillment of the covenant to Abraham, Moses says that there is a side benefit to obedience, as the nations around them would understand that they are wise and knowledgeable. Interestingly, the keeping and doing of the Law is, for Moses, the very center of wisdom. Obedience to God’s rules defines wisdom (Prov. 1:7).
* By keeping these commands the nations would see the glories and wisdom of being God’s people, and would be drawn to Israel, thus fulfilling the call to be a blessing to the world, and ultimately bringing the fulfillment to the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3).
* The nations would see 3 things in Israel (vv. 6–8).
  + First, the Israelites would know how to apply God’s knowledge so as to have discernment and to be able to judge matters accurately.
  + Second, faithfulness to the Lord would allow the nations to see that the Lord had established intimacy with Israel.
  + Third, the nations would see that Israel’s law was distinctive, for its source was the Lord indicating its character was righteous.
    - “Thus the greatness would not even lie in the forms of government, which were specified in the law of the covenant, for these too were similar in many ways to those of the nations of their time, Rather the distinctiveness would lie in the intimate relationship the covenant created between God and his people.”[[102]](#footnote-102)

## 4:9-14 ~ Remembering Sinai, Moses’ Charge

* 🕮 **4:9-14** ~ 9“Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. 10“Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’ 11“You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. 12“Then the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice. 13“So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. 14“The Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it.
* With these promises and reminders laid out, Moses tells them that they must be very careful to keep their souls. The Hebrew is repetitious and emphatic (double use of *šāmar*, plus adv. *mĕʾōd*)[[103]](#footnote-103) indicating that Moses is quite serious about his commands concerning these things.
* However, it is not the life that they must watch, but rather the soul (*nephesh*). (Prov. 4:23) Unlike the pagan nations around them, the very nature of their religion would be one of love for God that flowed into acts of obedience, the heart became the seat of true and lasting righteousness.
* The need for reminder is spelled out as well - the nation should remember the events they had witnessed for the rest of their lives, and should also teach those statues to their children and grandchildren so that no one would ever forget or turn away from the true and living God.
* The nation could turn to idolatry in two ways:
  + The **depravity** of the human mind is so great that the miraculous deeds of God for His people (e.g., the Exodus and giving of the Law at Horeb) might slip fromtheir hearts if they did not constantly remind themselves of God’s mighty works. The concept of ***not forgetting*** occurs over and over again in the book of Deuteronomy: 4:9, 23, 31; 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19; 9:7; 25:19.)
  + Through **laziness** or apathy parents might fail to teach them to their childrenand thus their children would become idolaters. God trusts His great events of revelation, such as His giving the Law at Sinai, to faithful stewards who must never forgetthem and who must pass them on to their children.
* While the vast majority of the nation was not present at the time of the covenant, the nation as a whole was corporately united to God through it, and therefore the promises of the parents were binding on the children, and all successive generations.
  + - “The delivery of the law from Sinai was an era never to be forgotten in the history of Israel. Some of those whom Moses was addressing had been present, though very young; while the rest were federally represented by their parents, who in their name and for their interest entered into the national covenant.”[[104]](#footnote-104)
* Moses reminds them that when they came to Sinai, the mountain glowed and the site was terrifying (Heb 12:18ff). However, they **heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice.** The implication, of course, is that the true and living God, though massive and terrifying, is not physical, and should therefore not be represented in any way.
* Moses appeals to God’s majestic “appearance” via His audible voice (cf. John 4:24) at Mt. Sinai in Horeb. This was designed to produce a fear of God in the hearts of the people so that a covenant between them and the Lord could be possible. However, such fear of terror is not enough, and so Moses will link the the commands to love later in the book.
* Finally, Moses tells them that the Lord had actually instructed him to teach them from the Law. In this way, Moses becomes an object lesson. He fulfills the Lord’s command to teach them, and they ought to do the same in teaching their children (2 Tim. 2:2).

## 4:15-20 ~ Reject idolatry in favor of the unseen God

🕮 **4:15-20** ~ 15“So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, 16so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, 17the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, 18the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. 19“And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. 20“But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today.

* Moses spelled out one of the implications contained in the experience at Horeb. Since the Israelites saw no form (cf. v. 12) of God on that day they were never to attempt to represent Him with any form. This is not a stipulation against worshipping other gods (though that will come later), but against making a form of God in any manner.
* The religions of the ancient Near East worshiped idols in the shapes of various creatures mentioned in verses 16-18.
* Israel was never to limit her God in this way for it would limit his transcendence and therefore reduce Him to be like them.
  + - “This was the greatest danger of all and for a very good reason. Since in the Israelite conception the Lord was a personal God, the most obvious way of attempting to represent him would have been in human likeness. And yet this would have been contrary to an essential part of Hebrew theology. Man was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27) and yet man could not in any sense be said to be a complete representation of God, for God was transcendent (Gen. 1:1). To attempt to represent and limit God by human form in wood or stone would be to undermine the transcendence of God.”[[105]](#footnote-105)
* The people had recently left Egypt where nearly every god had various avatars in animal form - cows, monkeys, ibis, and scarabs were all fair prey in creating god images. vv. 17-18 spell out a specific injunction against making any form for god that reflects anything in creation - again, such a violation would be to limit the true and living God whom they had heard but not seen.
* Additionally, they were not to take the heavenly bodies (sun, moon and stars) to be their deities. Again, the ancient near eastern religions around them were all (including Egypt), in some way, linked to the worship of these parts of creation. The nation was to be different. Instead, these things were all given, not as objects of worship, but as means of blessing from the one true and living God.
  + - “This clause simply states that these celestial objects were given to all mankind for the physical benefit of the earth and were not proper objects of worship at all.” [[106]](#footnote-106)
* Unfortunately, this admonition was not heeded for long, for shortly after they entered into the land, the nation fell into the idolatry of their surrounding neighbors (cf. vv. 25-31).
* V. 20 indicates that the Lord was absolutely sovereign over even these other deities. All the Egyptian host of deities was nothing - the Lord had simply taken Israel out of there.
* The statement that Egypt is an **iron furnace** (*kûr habbarzel* - “a kiln in which metals and glass were melted down and refined[[107]](#footnote-107)”) reflects the might and power of Egypt at the time - unquestionably the chief global power during the age. God’s power, however, is so much greater that He simply moves them at a whim.
* Hence, the highest of the nations, Egypt, with her host of visible deities, was less than nothing compared to the Lord. Therefore, making any image would tarnish His greatness and glory.

## 4:21-24 ~ God’s jealousy

🕮 **4:21-24** ~ 21“Now the Lord was angry with me on your account, and swore that I would not cross the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. 22“For I will die in this land, I shall not cross the Jordan, but you shall cross and take possession of this good land. 23“So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the Lord your God has commanded you. 24“For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

* For a third time in these first chapters, Moses mentions his own exclusion from the promised land because of the people. Again, he states that it was **on your account**, indicating that the smiting of the rock was, in some way, their responsibility. In a stark statement about the judgment he has received, Moses says that he will **die**, rather than enter the **good land**.
  + - “The words give emphasis for the need of great caution on behalf of the audience. There is a great poignancy in Moses’ statement: *for I am about to die in this land*. The request for a change of decision had been denied (3:26), but the longing could not be hidden; he would die in *this land* (v. 22a), not in *this good land* (v. 22b), beyond the river Jordan."[[108]](#footnote-108)
* However, as with the other times, Moses’ mention of this event is linked with a purpose. He says that God was unwilling to allow him to enter because of his sin - this shows that God is a God who must be remembered, worshipped and honored. Anything else would result in His wrath. The people must therefore remember the covenant.
* Ultimately, the Lord would enforce his command. Like a **consuming fire** (Heb. 12:28) He would purify what is precious (just as fire purifies precious metals) and destroy what is worthless.
* As a jealous God (cf. 5:9; 32:16, 21) He will not allow another to have the honor that is due Him alone (Isa. 42:8; 48:11).
* Therefore Israel needed to be extremely careful to remember the covenant (cf. Deut. 4:9).
  + - “And in both places the warning has to do with idolatry, a practice that v. 23 says is tantamount to forgetting the covenant. This connection is almost self-evident, for the very essence of the covenant is the truth that there is only one God, the Lord, and the recognition and worship of any other is nothing other than high treason, covenant violation of the grossest kind (cf. Deut 6:4–5). As such, it demands and deserves the judgment of divine wrath, that of a “jealous God” who is a consuming fire (v. 24). The “jealousy” (or “zeal”) of God speaks not of a petty, selfish envy but of his right to sole recognition and worship by virtue of his sovereignty over and election of his people in covenant.177 This is why idolatry or any other kind of violation of covenant brings the severest judgment.”[[109]](#footnote-109)

## 4:25-31 ~ God’s judgment and faithfulness

🕮 **4:25-31** ~ 25“When you become the father of children and children’s children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord your God so as to provoke Him to anger, 26I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. 27“The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord drives you. 28“There you will serve gods, the work of man’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. 29“But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. 30“When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice. 31“For the Lord your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.

* Moses looks forward to a day when the nation will have taken possession, settled in, and begun to prosper in the land. This prosperity, though promised, Moses says will ultimately lead to the idolatry among the people, and therefore the anger of the Lord. This prophesied event happens almost verbatim in the future (see especially Hos. 13:4-6).
* Moses summons the heavens and earth as witnesses to the covenant. The witnesses of the covenant were the heavens and the earth - the whole created order - which would witness that the nation was not obeying the terms set forth.
  + - “Thus the making and renewing of the covenant were witnessed by *heaven and earth*: these “witnesses” were permanent things, unchanging in contrast to the fickleness of man. If the Israelites were, at some future date, unfaithful to the covenant and they were to make an image of their formless God, then that faithlessness would be known as certainly as the permanence of the heaven and the earth, and the people would suffer: *you will not live long in it, for you will certainly be annihilated.”*[[110]](#footnote-110)
* Despite the warnings, Moses outlined the future judgment of Israel, which culminated in the northern 10 tribes being exiled to Assyria (ca. 722 b.c.; 2 Kgs. 17) and the southern two tribes being deported to Babylon (ca. 605–586 b.c.; 2 Kgs. 24, 25).
* The progression out of the land is stark -
  + The would **perish quickly** from the land. They would **not live long**, but would be **destroyed**. This is not a statement of full annihilation, since the next phrase indicates survivors. This happened in explicit detail, first under the judges, and then finally, under later kings of Assyria and Babylon.
  + They would be **scattered among the nations** and greatly reduced in number. Nehemiah identifies this statement as having been fulfilled (Neh. 1:8).
  + They would **serve idols** there in those lands. Jeremiah calls the nation to remember the rightful punishment as they ask him why God was judging them. (Jer. 5:19, 16:13)
* However, though they would certainly receive all this judgment, God promises that they will remember Him there in the lands where they are scattered.
  + - “Exile need not signal the end of Israel’s covenant hopes; if the captives of the days to come would seek the Lord fervently and sincerely, they would find him even on distant shores. The intensity of their longing is expressed in the cliché “with all your heart and with all your soul” (*bekol lĕbābkā ûbĕkol napšekā*), a formula, interestingly enough, that is used in covenant contexts to speak of the degree of commitment that Israel was expected to display toward the Lord (cf. Deut 6:5; 10:12). To seek him in captivity, then, was to renew one’s pledges of covenant loyalty.”[[111]](#footnote-111)
* Although the Jews returned in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (ca. 538–445 b.c.), they never regained their autonomy or dominance. Thus, the days of promised restoration and return look forward to Messiah’s return to set up the millennial kingdom.
* Throughout the Pentateuch, “the latter days” refers to the time when Messiah will establish His kingdom (cf. Gen. 49:1, 8–12; Num. 24:14–24; Deut. 32:39–43). Moses’ reference here is an explicit statement regarding God’s care of the nation into the distant future.
* Their restoration would happen through three acts of God:
  + He would **not fail** them - literally to ‘drop’ them (*rafah -* to relax, let go). Though they have been unfaithful to the covenant, God will remain faithful to them.
  + He would not **destroy** them - The remnant spoken of as being scattered would not be completely destroyed. There would always be some portion of the people who would survive - God’s faithfulness to the patriarchs depended on that promise being upheld.
  + He would not **forget** - God mercifully, not because they deserve it, will fulfill the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with repentant Israel in the future. God will not forget the Word that He has given to Abraham and his seed (cf. Rom. 11:25–27).
* 🕮 **4:32-40** ~ 32“Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything been done like this great thing, or has anything been heard like it? 33“Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived? 34“Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? 35“To you it was shown that you might know that the Lord, He is God; there is no other besides Him. 36“Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. 37“Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, 38driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today. 39“Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other. 40“So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time.”
* The statements about God’s merciful care for the nation lead Moses into a lengthy rehearsal of the privilege of the nation, as well as a final exhortation. The recounting of the history of the nation revealed the faithfulness of God to His people.
* No other nation in the history of the world had had this level of divine privilege. While the heavens and earth were the witnesses to the covenant, Moses now summons them as witnesses of God’s kindness and mercy.[[112]](#footnote-112)
  + v. 33 - Israel had the privilege of hearing God speak, as He did in giving the law at Mt. Sinai, and surviving such an awesome experience. The stunning part of God’s mercy is that, rather than destroy them for their sin, He had spared them.
  + v. 34 - Israel had witnessed her own removal from Egypt by the hand of God. This was no small feat, in human terms, but God had done it.
    - “The nations of the earth might indeed have their mythic and epic traditions about the intervention of their gods on behalf of their ancestors or even themselves, but none of these can compare in the least to the act of delivering a disorganized, dispirited, militarily inexperienced horde of slaves from the dominion of the mightiest power on earth.”[[113]](#footnote-113)
* He had done this in order to ‘**discipline**’ (NASB, Piel of *yāsar*) or teach them. Their privileges were intended to teach them that He was glorious and to be obeyed. They should know God and His exclusivity as such. He is the one true and living God, and t**here is no other**.
* Because God is unique, and has blessed, cared for, provided for, and loves Israel, they ought to obey His commandments. Additionally, Moses holds out the reality that their obedience is also connected to the blessing that it would **go well** with them, and that t**hey would live long on the land**. Such a statement is not a motive to obedience, but is a fruit of obedience. Moses holds out the blessing that God will allow them to stay in the land that He lovingly promised to the patriarchs.
* While the nations’ possession of the land at any point is contingent on their obedience, the Land will be theirs permanently (**for all time**) as is detailed in 6:24; 11:1; 14:23; 18:5; 19:9; 28:29, 33, chapters 29 and 30. This is also borne out in the grammar of v. 40.
  + - “The grammatical and syntactical construction of v. 40 favors the view that “for all time” (כָּל־הַיָּמִים) refers to God’s giving (נֹתֵן) and not to “living long” (תַּאֲרִיךְ יָמִים) in the land. That is, the “living” long is conditioned (לְמַצַן) upon obedience of the decrees and commands, but the “for all time” is an unconditional gift to Israel as a covenant entity if not to any particular members. The NIV reflects this correctly. Weinfeld (*Deuteronomy 1–11*, 214) argues cogently that “for all time” refers to the gift because to link it with “living long” would create a tautology.”[[114]](#footnote-114)

## 4:41-43 ~ The 3 Cities of Refuge

* 🕮 **4:41-43** ~ 41Then Moses set apart three cities across the Jordan to the east, 42that a manslayer might flee there, who unintentionally slew his neighbor without having enmity toward him in time past; and by fleeing to one of these cities he might live: 43Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, and Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites.
* These 3 verses are a narrative insertion at the end of Moses’ speech. The setting aside of 3 cities on the E side of the Jordan by Moses showed that Moses willingly obeyed the commandments God gave him.
  + **Bezer** - associated with Bozrah with many scholars. Modern day location is called Umm el-*ʿAmad*.
  + **Ramoth-Gilead** - Modern day Tell Ramith, is well-attested among scholars. The city figures prominently in the death of Ahab and the righteous prophet Michaiah (1 Kings 22), as well as a number of wars with the kings of Aram.
  + **Golan** - Modern day *Saḥem* el-Jolan is also well known among scholars. Just 40 miles north of Ramoth-Gilead. Famous for its pasture lands (1 Chron 6:71).
* He was an example of the type of obedience that God was calling for in 4:1–40 (cf. Num. 35:14; Josh. 20:18).

4:44-28:68 ~ Moses’ Second Address - The Ten ‘Words’

* Chapters 1-4 represent the preamble to the covenant agreement between God and Israel, with Moses as the narrator. The nation has been in covenant disobedience, essentially since Sinai, and has thereby incurred God’s wrath.
* Nevertheless, God has been faithful to keep them, and has not destroyed them. The generation that disobeyed has all perished in the wilderness (all those above 20 years of age), and the new generation now stands at the Jordan river, prepared to cross over and take the land.
* Moses concludes the historical recounting with a general summary of the events, as well as an exhortation to obey the Law, and a prophecy about what would happen in future generations.
* Moses now begins the full declaration of the Law for the invading generation. The Law begins with an introduction, moves to the 10 commandments, and then Moses reminds them what happened immediately after Sinai.
* This is the second of the three addresses, and represents an exposition of the previous covenant terms, as a renewed agreement with the invading generation. It is the longest of the three addresses.
  + - “The law about to be presented is then clearly identified as the same law (testimonies, statutes, and judgments) that was proclaimed to the Israelites at Horeb/Sinai after the Exodus from Egypt (v. 45); it is not a new covenant in Deuteronomy, but the renewing of an old covenant.”[[115]](#footnote-115)

## 4:44-49 ~ Part 1 - Introduction to the Declaration of the Law

* Moses provides an introduction for the people prior to beginning the explanation of the Law. The introduction provides a brief summary of the setting for the covenant renewal, both in time and space.
* The term used here for **law** (*tôrâ*) is generally used for the entire body of Mosaic writing - the pentateuch. However, since the law was, at this moment, being codified, it makes sense that Moses would use this word as the introductory statement of the covenant agreement.
* Moses is said to set the law **before the sons of Israel.** The term (*sham*) means to lay down as authoritative. This was not another offering of the covenant, but Moses’ own exposition of the covenant that already existed.
* Making the statement more clear, Moses add additional information regarding exactly what the Torah contained - the **testimonies and the statutes and the ordinance**s that were originally given when the nation **came out of Egypt**. The word translated testimonies (*ʿēdôt*) indicates the stipulations or details of the covenant, while the two following terms relate to the specific laws given to the nation. The timing of the giving of the Law is stated later, after the exodus and the conquering of the Amorite kings.[[116]](#footnote-116)
* v. 46 seems to indicate that a later redactor/editor added the introduction as a way of delineating between the first and second address (see Merrill, p. 138). However, while the text may appear this way, the previous introduction also contains similar grammar (for example 1:1, 4:41). It appears that Moses, having delivered the content of the messages, provides the background, setting, and relevant historical details.
* Moses concludes the introduction with a summary of the defeat of the Amorite kings (Sihon and Og), and the possession of their lands, which are stated in geographical terms.
* Regarding Sion vs. Sirion:
  + - “Note on Sirion: the reading *Sirion* here is based on the evidence of the Syriac, though the MT reads *śîʾōn*. In the original text, the reading was probably *śrn*, before the use of medial *mater lectionis*, introduced around the sixth century B. C. This was misread at an early date as *śʾn*, the /*r*/ and /*ʾ*/ being easily confused in early Hebrew script; compare the respective forms in the Gezer calendar. With this wrong reading, when orthographic revisions were made, the /*y*/ was placed in the wrong position, *śyʾn*, on the basis of the ancient misreading, the proper form being *śryn*. The basis for the initial misreading probably lies in that *śryn* was not a Hebrew word, but from a North Canaanite dialect, Sidonian (see 3:9).”[[117]](#footnote-117)

## 5:1-5 ~ Part 2 - Summons to Obey the Law

* Moses summons **all Israel** to hear the renewal of the covenant. As with the initial offering, the entire nation is called together to hear and affirm the terms.
* Moses uses for the first time the famous ‘Hear’ (*shāmaʿ*), a word meaning ‘obey’ more than simply to listen. Each subsection of the first portion of the discourse begins with this word.
  + - “The verb carries with it the sense “obey”: hearing that leads to obedience is demanded of the people. The verb is used with the same sense in the context of the Near Eastern treaty…as stated at the end of the verse: *you will learn them and you will take care to do them*.”[[118]](#footnote-118)
    - “Chapters 5–11 subdivide into three parts, each of which begins with “Hear, O Israel” (5:1b; 6:4; 9:1). Homiletically, these three parts represent three constituents of authoritative preaching: (1) the Scripture lesson (5:1b–6:3), highlighting the foundations of covenant relationship; (2) the theology arising from the Scripture (6:4–8:20), focusing on the essence of covenant relationship; (3) the appropriate response arising from that theology (9:1–11:32), demonstrating love for Yahweh as evidence of covenant relationship.”[[119]](#footnote-119)
* He makes clear what ‘hearing’ means at the end of v. 1, telling the people that they should **learn them and observe them carefully**.
* Moses uses the last two terms in 4:45 to describe the contents of the address - **the statutes and ordinances**. These are the laws which Israel must obey in order to stay faithful to the covenant.
* Verse 2 stipulates exactly what would happen in the ensuing discourse. Moses is restating the covenant made with the nation at **Horeb** (Sinai). The statement **the Lord our God** indicates that the covenant is still binding, not only on the first generation of Israelites, but on all successive generations, whether they were present at the time of the making of the covenant or not.
  + - “Though the people he was then talking to were less than twenty years of age at the time of the Horeb experience, they were nevertheless there and were representative of Israel. Caleb and Joshua were exempted from the decree of death in the desert and were older. Whether the people then standing before him were individually at Horeb was not important. The covenant-treaty was made by the nation represented at Horeb, and the covenant remained in force to all succeeding generations until abrogated or qualified by the Lord.”[[120]](#footnote-120)
* Having made it clear that the covenant was the one made at Sinai, Moses continues by clarifying the distinction between the present covenant and the Abrahamic. Merrill’s explanation below is particularly helpful.
  + - “This is in line with the generally recognized theological fact that the Horeb-Deuteronomy covenant is by both form and function different from the so-called Abrahamic. The latter is in the nature of an irrevocable and unconditional grant made by the Lord to the patriarchs, one containing promises of land, seed, and blessing. The former is a suzerain-vassal arrangement between the Lord and Israel designed to regulate Israel’s life as the promised nation within the framework of the Abrahamic covenant. The existence of Israel is unconditional, but its enjoyment of the blessing of God and its successful accomplishment of the purposes of God are dependent on its faithful obedience to the covenant made at Horeb. Thus the covenant in view here is not the same as that made with the fathers (i.e., the patriarchal ancestors), but it (and that at Horeb) finds its roots there and is related to it in a subsidiary way.”[[121]](#footnote-121)
* Moses also says that the covenant at Sinai was made with **those alive today**. This is not necessarily contradictory with the fact that many had died or been born in the wilderness after Sinai. All those who were alive at that time were under the terms and stipulations of the covenant. There was no room to be in the nation but outside the covenant.
* The phrase **face to face** is not to be taken literally, of course, given that they saw no form (4:12). Instead, the Hebrew idiom indicates that the nation experienced the presence of God first hand. Moses was present, however, and stood between God and the nation as a mediator of the covenant, because of the fear of the nation. Moses did not create the covenantal terms, but simply mediated them to the people.

## 5:6-21 ~ The Ten Commandments

* Moses then repeats the ten commandments (or decalogue) to the nation as the heart of the covenant regulations. The ten commandments represent the basis for what it means to be in obedience or disobedience to the covenant.
  + - “The Decalog is at the heart of the message of Deuteronomy. It is the divinely given foundation of the covenant relationship, the standard set by the suzerain God as a basis for the continuing relationship with his vassal people.”[[122]](#footnote-122)
* v. 6 begins the repetition of the laws with an introduction which links the nation to their God. The particular nature of the covenantal relationship is important because God identifies Himself as their Lord and master. While the Abrahamic covenant was God’s promise of their continuation and blessing, this covenant now stipulates the means by which they will inherit those blessings. In that sense, it was to be a means of maintaining nearness to God, rather than salvation, as Paul makes clear later (Rom 10:1-5).
  + - “In the language of treaty and covenant, his people had formerly been vassals subject to the suzerain authority of the worldly power of the pharaoh; the liberation of the Exodus took them away from the subjection to the old suzerain authority, but introduced them to a new suzerain authority, God himself. The new authority, however, had acted in love for the people and the obligations imposed upon them in the covenant reflected no less the love of God. This, then, is the context in which the Decalog is to be understood; it was law for a people already redeemed, not designed per se to redeem the people.”[[123]](#footnote-123)
* The **first commandment (v. 7)** is laid out in its exact wording from Ex. 20:3. As their sovereign, any idolatry was immediately a violation of the covenant stipulations, as well as a degradation of His glory.
* The phrase translated **before me** (*ʿal pānāy*) literally means before my face, and indicates the presence of YHWH. No other God can be brought into the presence of YHWH to be worshipped in any sense. God is the single, exclusive deity of the nation, and the worship of any other deity is to sever oneself from His people.
  + - “The fact that “other gods” (*ĕlōhîm ʾăḥērîm*) are mentioned does not, of course, concede that they exist in reality. The nations accepted their existence, but Israel was to refuse to permit them a place alongside Yahweh even if they went so far as to admit their possibility. The command is not so much an apologetic for the sole existence of Yahweh, then, as it is a prohibition about allowing them in his same company as a theoretical rival.”[[124]](#footnote-124)
* The **second commandment (vv. 8-10)** is also nearly word for word with Ex. 20:4-6, and instructs the people to avoid making any image that would represent the true God. Not only should the people not worship any other God, but they are warned to not even make images of the true God. This prohibition was extensively discussed in ch. 4.
* To build or create anything in any likeness for the purpose of **worship** would have externalized the commands of the covenant which should have flowed from the heart. As such, the people could appear to worship the true God, but could maintain heart independence. This is exactly the accusation against the nation by Isaiah (Is. 29:13), which is then picked up by Christ in Matt. 15:6-9. All such worship is vanity.
* Further, to keep one’s heart distant while feigning worship was to provoke the **jealousy** of God, and to train the **next generation**, and therefore all subsequent generations, that hypocrisy was actually true worship. To do so would be tantamount to **hate**, an incredibly strong statement of the depth of the sin of externalized religious duty.
* ‘Going through the motions’ of religion, without a heart that is truly worshipping and loving God is the worst form of hypocrisy, and received the greatest level of condemnation from Christ (see the woe passages of Matt. 23).
* However, while those who externalize worship are the objects of divine wrath, those with a true heart of love are the objects of divine **lovingkindness** (*ḥesed*). This word carries with it the concept of divine electing love and care. It is unconditional, but, when it is received, causes the recipient to respond in love, thus cementing the appropriate relationship for obedience by the people. Therefore, God is said to show **lovingkindness** to those who **love** Him and **keep His commandments**. This is not the basis for His love, but the fruit of His love.
  + - “No term is more theologically significant than *ḥesed*, translated in the NIV here as “love.” It speaks of God’s unmerited favor by which he elects people to covenant relationship and on the basis of which he extends all its blessings. In fact, *ḥesed* and *bĕrît* (“covenant”) are used as synonymous (Deut 7:9) and interchangeable terms (Deut 7:12). As the basis for covenant election, *ḥesed* is unconditional, for it is a manifestation of pure grace. Within that relationship, however, *ḥesed* is part of a reciprocal process, a disposition conditioned upon the love (*ʾāhăbâ*) and obedience of those who owe them (v. 10).”[[125]](#footnote-125)
* v. 10 carries the same order of obedience as Christ’s command in John 14:15 - love must always precede obedience. Anything less is not, in fact, obedience.
* The **third commandment (v. 11)** flows from the first and second - that is, the exclusivity of the true and living God, and is a replication of Ex. 20:7.
* It was common practice in Ancient Near Eastern religions (and is in modern ones as well) to invoke the name of a deity as a word of cursing of someone or something, or as part of an incantation. Therefore, to use the name of a god would be to personify all that the god is into the word, and use the deity as a sort of tool for human ends. In this way, the name of the deity would be used as a ‘club’, lifted up against the enemy (Balak’s request of Balaam is a prime example). In fact, the literal translation of the Hebrew here is “You shall not **lift up** the name of Yahweh your God without reason.”[[126]](#footnote-126)
* By implication, however, any use of God’s name for selfish purposes would also be a violation of this commandment. Using God as a talisman of sorts to accomplish personal ends is simply to denigrate God below the thing desired - to make an idol of the desired outcome that is of greater import than God Himself. No wonder God will not **leave** such transgressors **unpunished**.
* The **fourth commandment (vv. 12-15)** contains the longest explanation of any of the ten, and is the injunction to **observe the Sabbath** and **keep it holy**. The wording differs here slightly from the Exodus statement. Rather than ‘remember’ in Ex. 20:8, the word used here (*šhāmôr*) means to ‘take care’ or ‘carefully observe’. The word ‘remember’ (*zāḵôr*) is used later, however, in v. 15.
* This command applied not only to the men, but to all the women, children, servants, visitors, and even animals.
  + - “Everyone was required to set aside the Sabbath as a day wholly devoted to the Lord. Obviously, a day cannot be holy in the moral sense, so the meaning of keeping the seventh day holy is that of the normal meaning of the verb, to set it apart for a particular purpose. In this instance it is to withhold that day from profane use so that it may be used for other purposes such as reflection on the Lord and his works of creation and redemption. The form of the verb *qdš* (*piel*) when it is used in this sense of setting apart reflects a factitive nuance such as to “put the seventh day into a state of holiness.”[[127]](#footnote-127)
* The reasoning associated with the fourth commandment differs from the Exodus account. There the purpose was rooted in creation - God had created the world and then rested, and therefore the people were to follow his example of work and rest.
* However, the Deuteronomy account links the Sabbath to God’s work in redeeming His people from the rule of Egypt. In fact, v. 15 specifically says that the commandment was linked to the exodus from Egypt from that time as well.
  + - “The Exodus, too, was a type of *creation* and thus forms an analogy to the creation account in Genesis. The Exodus from Egypt marks in effect the creation of God’s people as a nation, and the memory of that event was also a reminder to the Israelites of their total dependence upon God. Whereas at one time the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, with no appointed day of rest from their continual and monotonous labor, God’s deliverance made them potentially a nation, and the sabbath was to function as a day of rest in which the deliverance from the former bondage could be remembered with thanksgiving.”[[128]](#footnote-128)
* The Sabbath is the only command of the 10 not repeated in the NT, at least implicitly. As such, this command is not binding on the NT church. While the principle of rest and commitment to the Lord and worship on a given day is good, the precise command is left as a conscience issue by the NT authors. Believers can feel free to observe a day of rest to the Lord, but can also feel free to not do so, without sinning. (note especially Col 2:16-17, Rom. 14:4-6)
  + - “In the NT the ritual elements of the Jewish Sabbath are superseded by the work of Christ and by faith in him. The Sabbath observance changed to the first day of the week, now called the Lord’s Day, to focus on the new life effected and epitomized by the resurrection of Christ Jesus. However, even now the observance of the Lord’s Day must subscribe to Colossians 2:16–17: “Therefore do not let anyone judge you … with regard to … a Sabbath day.… the reality … is found in Christ” (cf. John 20:1, 19, 26; Acts 2:1; 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10).”[[129]](#footnote-129)
* The **fifth commandment (v. 16)** shifts the focus off of one’s relationship with God and onto relationships with people, starting with parents. The shift is obviously one the flows out of a right relationship with God, however.
* The commandment is to honor parents. The word **honor** (*kabbēd*) comes from the root word meaning heavy or important. The idea then, is to respect parents in a real and tangible way.
* The command carries with it two promises - first that their **days would be prolonged**, and second that **go well with you on the land** that they were to go in to possess.
  + The first implies that obedience to the commands that were to be taught from fathers to sons (see 4:40) would result in long life. Failure to hear and obey those commands would mean suffering and sorrow.
  + The second offers blessing in the land - that it would go well with them in the land of promise.
* Paul repeats this command verbatim (Eph. 6:2-3), and repeats these promises, but attaches the ‘earth’ to the first promise and leaves the second promise to stand alone without any land reference (“that it may go well with you and that you may live long on the earth.”)
* The difference would appear to be that obedience to the commands of God as taught by parents would mean that things would **go well** with a child, whether in the promised land, or in any other land. Further, one who obeys this command to honor parents will likely have a **long earthy life** as well, since parents provide protection and support for their children. Thus the promises are not tied so much to the location of where the children are, but to the moral principle that to honor parents carries with it a blessing for the children.
* The **sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments (vv. 17-19)** all repeat the exact words of Exodus as well. These three represent a descending order of relationships. It is wrong to steal a life (by murder), a wife (by adultery), or property (by theft). Each is a violation of the proper order of the people of God, and is therefore a violation of the covenant with Him. Jesus would later go on to expand these beyond simply the physical sins to include the heart issues, just as the tenth commandment would do in v. 21.
* Of particular interest is the question regarding **murder** in the sixth commandment - is the prohibition against killing of any kind, or only regarding homicide? A quick perusal of the other portions of the law (even the details of the conquest of the Amorite regions in chapter 4) should answer the question. The commandment is particular to murder, though the word is not specific. Other forms of killing (warfare, government authority, etc.) are all permitted biblically.
  + - “Though there is no technical term in Hebrew for premeditated homicide, the translation of the verb *rāṣâ* as “murder” in the NIV rendition of the sixth commandment (v. 17) is most accurate. Usage elsewhere as well as overall theological context makes a clear distinction between the prohibition here and the endorsement otherwise of capital punishment, killing in warfare, the application of *ḥērem*, and the like.”[[130]](#footnote-130)
* The **ninth commandment (v. 20)** is the final of the four regarding theft. It is also wrong to steal a person’s character. To **bear false witness against your neighbor** was to assassinate his character in public - to unrighteously vilify an otherwise Godly man. To do so was to pervert justice and therefore to violate the covenant of a God who is holy and just.
* The t**enth commandment** (v. 21) prohibits any kind of coveting. This command is manifestly different from the previous sets. It also functionally summarizes the previous three.
  + - “What has been manifest empirically in acts and words is now hidden in thoughts and cravings. Also of interest is the fact that this last commandment appears to be a summary of at least the previous three. To covet another’s wife is tantamount to adultery, to covet another’s properties is akin to theft, and to covet anything else would certainly cover such matters as a person’s good standing in the community.”[[131]](#footnote-131)
* This movement from the external life to the heart reveals the true nature of the each of the previous commands. God was not interested simply in not murdering, but that the people would not consider murder. The same was true with adultery (Matt 5:21-30). And so the final commandment deals with the internal dispositions of the heart, and is therefore useful for Paul (Rom. 7:10ff) when dealing with violations of the law with those who were self-righteous.

## 5:22-33 ~ Moses as Mediator

* The final section of chapter five details Moses’ role at Mt. Sinai when the ten commandments were given. It is a summary of the historical events surrounding the theophany at Sinai, and the response of the people and Moses.
* Moses makes it clear that the people heard the voice of God speak the ten commandments (‘**these words**’) from the mountain. That **He added no more** should not be surprising. The ten commandments represents the center of the moral law of the Mosaic covenant, and therefore were codified first. God gives these commands to Moses on the stone tablets as the foundation of the legal system He would then explain.
  + - “He “added nothing more” (v.22) refers to these Ten Commandments that were spoken and then written by God on the two stone tablets. They constitute the basic behavioral code that was to determine not only their allegiance and life-style but also that of all succeeding generations as well. No other such short list of commands begins to compare with the effect that these have had in world history. In spite of being constantly broken, they stand as the moral code par excellence.”[[132]](#footnote-132)
    - “This at once identifies with precision the corpus that Moses had just reviewed and also suggests that what was on the stones, namely, the Ten Commandments, was a self-contained section of unusual importance to the larger covenant text.”[[133]](#footnote-133)
* The text also makes clear that God Himself wrote the tablets of stone.
* Having heard God’s voice, the people come to Moses in terror, represented by the **heads of the tribes and elders**. Their request of Moses is repeated to remind the people what had happened.
* The people acknowledge God’s grace, having experienced first hand His glory and power, and having heard His voice, and still living through the experience. However, they were continually terrified by the voice of God, and tell Moses that if they hear His voice again, they’ll certainly die.
* Their statement regarding their experience (**who is there of all flesh - "***baśsar* (lit. “flesh”), which implies mortality and fragility see Jer. 17:5"[[134]](#footnote-134)) is an implicit statement of their own frailty and humanity - they were flesh, and YHWH was not. Being aware of their own mortality and sinfulness, they were unable to do anything but ask Moses to mediate for them.
* As they request Moses to be their mediator, they repeat their intention to do the things that God commands them to do. This role represents the ‘third party’ to the treaty structure - the one who codifies the treaty and acts as the mediator for the two parties.
  + - “They were not consciously trying to avoid their responsibilities and they committed themselves to hear and obey Moses in his role as mediator between them and God: *we shall listen and we shall act* (v. 27).”[[135]](#footnote-135)
* The Lord **heard** them and approved of their humility. This was the intention of the revelation on the mountain - that the people would know and understand who YHWH really was as the true and living God. As such, the people had understood, and their attitude of humility was appropriate (this is made explicit in Ex. 20:20-21).
* However, while their words are humble, and their request is humble, their hearts are NOT humble. The Lord bemoans their externalism, denounced in the ten commandments, and says cries that He wishes their hearts were as humble as their words.
* Indeed, the verse indicates that if their hearts would truly **fear** Him, they would **obey** His **commandments**, and that would result in everlasting peace for them. And yet, this is simply not the case.
* Nevertheless, the statement showed an initial reverence (though from a wrong heart) and so the Lord had told them to return to their tents. Moses, however, is commanded to stay and receive all the rest of the Mosaic covenantal information.
* The Lord now uses the full description of the covenant again - **commandments, statues and judgments** - which includes the covenantal obligations beyond just the legal terms.[[136]](#footnote-136) Moses was to teach them all of these things so that they would obey them in the promised land. Little did Moses know at the time that he would need to teach them to two successive generations. However, unlike the people, Moses remained faithful, and did teach the people.
* The historic review ends in v. 31, and Moses applies it to the people. He tells them that they must absolutely do all that God has **commanded them**, and **not turn to the right or to the left**. The metaphor of walking on a straight path is used to describe their obedience to the Law (Matt 7:13-14) - true obedience is staying on the right path without turning in any direction.
* The final words of exhortation conclude with a blessing attached to obedience.
  + - “As the grammar and syntax make clear, the narrative ends here and the exhortation begins. That narrative had consisted of a summary of events at Sinai culminating with the connection between the covenant stipulations and life in the land. The exhortation ends the same way but stresses that the quality of life they anticipated was possible only as the people obeyed the terms of the covenant (v. 33). Blessing is never automatic but is always conditioned upon compliance with the will of God.”[[137]](#footnote-137)

Deuteronomy 6:1-25 ~ First Commandment Explained

* Having given them the summary of the Law in the ten commandments, Moses now turns to a more full explanation of the first commandment regarding the centrality and uniqueness of Yahweh.
* The beginning of the chapter flows from the end of chapter 5, indicating that the words that God commanded Moses to say to the people are now coming to fruition.

## 6:1-3 ~ Moses’ Exhortation Continues

* Having communicated the words that the God had spoken in light of the words of the people, Moses now moves to the teaching portion of the text, beginning with a fuller explanation of the first commandment.
* The first words, the **commandment, the statutes and the judgments**, where the word commandment is in the singular, is interesting. Moses effectively says that the first commandment, explained in the text to follow, is the basis for all other statues and judgments for the people.
  + - *This is the commandment, the statutes and the ordinances*—the singular (*commandment*) may refer to the same principle underlying all the law (though see 5:31), in which case *statutes and ordinances* are in apposition, describing the general laws based on the first principle.[[138]](#footnote-138)
* Moses has already indicated that the Lord **commanded him to teach** the people these commandments (5:31) and therefore, he undertakes to carry out his task, according to the Lord’s command.
* Of course, the goal of Moses’ teaching was that they would **do them in the land**. His great hope was that they would truly heed the commandments that he would explain to them, and that they would obey them, though his hope was mitigated by his own prophetic words of their failure (4:26-31). Nevertheless, he fulfilled the command of God and taught the people.
* However, the statement in 5:32-33 regarding turning to the right or to the left now becomes an exhortation regarding their hearts. In order to not sin against the Lord in their actions, they must fear (reverence) the Lord in their hearts. A lack of fear in the heart would inevitably lead to sin in the life.
  + - “The grand design of all the institutions prescribed to Israel was to form a religious people, whose national character should be distinguished by that fear of the Lord their God which would ensure their divine observance of His worship and their steadfast obedience to His will. The basis of their religion was an acknowledgment of the unity of God with the understanding and the love of God in the heart.”[[139]](#footnote-139)
* **Fearing God**, in the context, is explicitly reverence, rather than terror, made clear by the statements in chapter 5 about the people having survived hearing the voice of God. Additionally, Moses says that the commandment he is teaching them (the first commandment) has, as it’s purpose (**so that you may**) their fear of God. The end point of the commandment to love God is that they would ultimately reverence Him. This fear of God, genuine worship, would carry on throughout the successive generations, to **son and to grandson**.
* The ultimate end of such a heart of reverence would be that their obedience would lead to long life on the land they were possessing. The succession - love —> worship —> obedience —> blessing is made explicit here, but is spelled out in more detail in vv. 4-8.
* Once again, Moses links their faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant with the Abrahamic covenant. That they would **multiply greatly…in a land flowing with milk and honey** is, clearly, the fulfillment of the **promise** made to Abraham.
* The phrase **milk and honey** is hyperbolic, designed to show the people that the land they are possessing will be filled with richness and blessing. Both commodities were of high value, honey being very difficult to find and harvest, and milk requiring the constant care of animals for its production.
  + - *A land flowing with milk and honey3*—the phrase occurs a number of times in Deuteronomy (11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20) and describes the richness of the land which the Israelites were soon to possess.[[140]](#footnote-140)
    - The description of the country as “a land flowing with milk and honey” (v.3) occurs eighteen times in the OT from Exodus 3:8 to Ezekiel 20:15—fourteen of these occurrences are in the last four books of the Pentateuch when the people were looking toward the Promised Land. Once it refers to Egypt (Num 16:13), but all the other references are to Canaan. The figure describes a land of plenty, a land of fertility.[[141]](#footnote-141)

## 6:4-8 ~ The Sh’ma

* Moses now turns to the most famous phrase in Judaism. Known as the *Shema* (שְׁמַ֖ע), the word transliterates the Hebrew word for ‘listen’, or ‘hear’. The implication, as stated in 5:1, of hearing is obeying. To hear is, in a very real sense, to take it to heart. The phrase is still recited by orthodox Jews twice per day.
* There are a wide variety of ways to translate the phrase, and a number of arguments have been made. The literal translation is ‘YHWH our God, YHWH one’. However, this allows for myriad translational possibilities.
* Most commentators agree that the first half of the statement is not simply a statement of Israel’s possession of YHWH as their God, but a statement regarding the marvelous reality that He was their God
  + Note particularly the NASB, NIV, and ESV translations all stating the uniqueness of Israel’s covenant relationship to YHWH.
* The possessive suffix (*nu*) indicates that the people truly and rightly had as their God the one true and living God, YHWH. This was intended to direct Israel to the glorious blessing of having been chosen by God to be His people. The statement indicates God’s preceding work of having chosen and elected Israel as His people, alone and of all people most blessed. For this reason, all obedience must flow universally from this covenant choice of God for His people - He had unilaterally loved them. They must now love Him in response.
  + - “This is not strictly a monotheistic confession (cf. 4:35, 39) but a cry of allegiance, an affirmation of covenant commitment that defines the boundaries of the covenant community.”[[142]](#footnote-142)
    - “Thus because of who and what he is in regard to his people whom he elected and redeemed, the Lord rightly demands of them unqualified obedience.”[[143]](#footnote-143)
* The second half of the phrase is widely understood to be a statement of God’s uniqueness - he is ‘one’ - that is, alone as the only true and living God. While it does stipulate the monotheism of Israel, over against all her polytheistic neighbors, the phrase is probably more a reference to the absolute uniqueness of God (Note esp. Zech 14:9 where the uniqueness of YHWH as king over the earth and all its inhabitants in the future is declared).
  + - “This clause not merely precludes polytheism, but also syncretism, which reduces the one absolute God to a national deity, a Baal (Hos. 2:18), and in fact every form of theism and deism, which creates for itself a supreme God according to philosophical abstractions and ideas. For Jehovah, although the absolute One, is not an abstract notion like “absolute being” or “the absolute idea,” but the absolutely living God…” [[144]](#footnote-144)
* In light of God’s uniqueness and God’s sovereign choice and love of Israel as a nation, the people are called to respond in like manner - with love(1 John 4:19 especially). V. 5 is, perhaps, the most important verse in Deuteronomy, since it communicates that very basis of all the obedience and commands that follow, as well as providing a framework for all biblical obedience in the NT.
* All biblical obedience must flow from love for God, which is found in the whole person. Christ, in the synoptic Gospels, uses this verse as a basis for obedience to the whole law, which would have been widely accepted at the time (note the lawyer’s response to Christ’s question in Mark 10:27).
  + - “The command to love is central because the whole book is concerned with the renewing of the covenant with God, and although the renewal demanded obedience, that obedience would be possible only when it was a response of love to the God who had brought the people out of Egypt and was leading them into the promised land.”[[145]](#footnote-145)
* Christ’s quotation of this text would have been understood, but was not being lived. His rebuke of the Pharisees was that they appeared to live the law on the outside but were full of hypocrisy (Mthw 15:6ff, 23:1-36) - they were not truly loving God. Hence, Christ’s understanding of the verse goes beyond simply the external conformity to the Law.
* Each of the synoptics contain a variation of the quotation:
  + *Matthew 22:37*: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, and with all your **soul**, and with all your **mind**.’ (spoken by Christ)
  + *Mark 12:30*: ‘…and you shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, and with all your **soul**, and with all your **mind**, and with all your **strength**.’ (spoken by Christ)
  + *Luke 10:27*: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, and with all your **soul**, and with all your **strength**, and with all your **mind**.’ (spoken by the lawyer)
* The purpose of this commentary is not to create a full defense of the harmony of the Gospels. However, the variations in quotation which arise partially because of different events within the life of Christ, reflect the nature of the statement. The quotation is not meant to provide a detailed analysis of the ontology of the human spirit, but should serve instead as a wholistic statement about the nature of true love for God. Love for God is with the entire self, even among components that cannot be divided.
  + - “The exhortation to love “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” is not a study in faculty psychology. It is rather a gathering of terms to indicate the totality of a person’s commitment of self in the purest and noblest intentions of trust and obedience toward God. The verse does not invite analysis into ideas of intellectual, emotional, and physical parts. The words behind heart, soul, and strength basically relate to what a person is or how a person directs himself toward another person. It is, therefore, not inaccurate for the NT writers to quote (or translate) the Hebrew words, which are often synonymous, by differing Greek words, which are also often synonymous, since the words taken together mean to say that the people are to love God with their whole selves.”[[146]](#footnote-146)
    - “…it is in a very real sense true to say that the entire book is a commentary on the command which stands at its beginning: ‘You shall love the Lord your God …’[[147]](#footnote-147)
* The Hebrew words themselves represent a complete statement about the whole person. The ‘heart’, the seat of the emotions and will, is considered the center of the man. The ‘soul’ is conceived of as the immaterial portion of the person - the life or spirit. The ‘might’ is the functional use of the external self. That each of these should love God is effectively saying that the whole person is to love God.
* Having reduced the whole law into a set of ten commandments, and then having reduced that set of commandments into a singular injunction, Moses repeats his command to the people that they tell these commandments to succeeding generations. They must first have them in **the heart**, and then they must **teach** them to their **children** **diligently**.
* The word translated teach (piel of שׁנן) communicates the idea of sharpening or whetting - that is to engrave.[[148]](#footnote-148) The idea is that it must be constantly engraved into the heart and mind of the successive generation in such a way that it would not be forgotten.
* This leads to the hyperbolic statements regarding when it should be taught - **talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up**. The sentence is not supposed to be a ‘to do’ list of the various times when the topics of the Sh’ma are to be discussed, but rather that the comprehensive love of God in the father ought to spill out into teaching these things to the son in every circumstance of life.
  + - “The commandments were to be the subject of conversation both inside and outside the home, from the beginning of the day to the end of the day. In summary, the commandments were to permeate every sphere of the life of man.”[[149]](#footnote-149)
* In like manner, the statements in vv. 8-9 are hyperbolic, intended to direct them to have these commands always on their minds (**forehead**), and in their work (**hands**), as well as in their homes (**doorposts**) so much so that they should be apparently tied there. The words of the commands should permeate every aspect of life.
* Of course, these verses have been taken literally by the Jewish people over the successive generations. Orthodox Jews still tie small boxes to their heads and hands containing strips of paper containing this text and several others.
  + - “In postbiblical Judaism and to the present day a miniature box containing verses of the Torah (Exod 13:1–10; 13:11–16; Deut 6:4–9; and Deut 11:13–21) were placed inside the four chambers of the box, the whole being known as the *tĕpillîn* (“prayers”) or phylactery (cf. Matt 23:5). A similar box with only one chamber but containing the same texts was worn on the forearm as a “hand phylactery.”[[150]](#footnote-150)
  + The word *tephillin* has uncertain etymological origins, likely meaning something like prayers, but not concretely. The actual word in the text is *totafot* (טוֹטָפוֹת), meaning bands or ties, was intended to be taken as a symbolic reality of the word being always before or between the eyes - that it would always be in the line of sight.
* The command to write them on the doorposts and gates has also been taken literally by post-biblical Judaism. Most Jews place *mezuzah,* the proper noun form of *məzôzoṯ* (doorposts), a small box fixed to the doorposts containing various biblical texts.
  + - “The mezuzah was a small box containing a parchment; a mezuzah discovered in one of the Qumran caves contained the text of Deut. 10:12–11:21.”[[151]](#footnote-151)
* Some have argued that Moses had a literal interpretation in mind but this is difficult to see. The progression from inward to outward - heart, self, head/hands, doorposts would indicate that Moses’ intention is that the command to love God should permeate literally every aspect of being, rather than that the people ought literally to write these things and put them in boxes where they are never read.

## 6:10-15 ~ Applying the Sh’ma in the Promised Land

* This commandment, the functional core of the ten commandments and therefore, of the whole law, must be kept in order for the Lord to bless His people. He assumes that the Lord will give them the land so much so that he speaks about it as a foregone conclusion. However, the statement is based on the promise He **swore** to **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**.
* Therefore, Moses envisions the people in the land, and describes the potential danger that they will inevitably face. He lists a series of five blessings that would tempt their hearts.
  + Great and splendid cities *which you did not build*
  + Houses filled with good things *which you did not fill*
  + Hewn cisterns *which you did not dig*
  + Vineyards and olive trees *which you did not plant*
  + And you eat *and you are satisfied*
* The land is described in all its beauty and pleasantness, filled with good things, and vineyards and orchards. Life would be good and easy and they would be satisfied. This is, in fact, the very description that the Lord paints for the people at the end of the conquest (Josh 24:13), as having fulfilled these very words.
* The tone, however, shifts sharply. All the goodness that the land would provide is suddenly not a blessing but a risk. The satisfaction that the people would feel might put them into spiritual danger, so much so that they would **forget the Lord** and the commandment that He had made for them in their love for Him. Set in relief against the command to love the Lord, the pleasantness of the land might woo the people into loving the good things rather than their giver.
  + - “In the land, its very richness and goodness could lull the people into an attitude of forgetfulness which would be disastrous. In the good land, they were to remember their past and the *Lord, who brought you out from the land of Egypt* (v. 12).[[152]](#footnote-152)
* Moses then states the remedy in three positive commands (repeated again in 10:20), a summary of the first commandment. They must:
  + **Fear the Lord** - (*yârē*) the first command is to fear God, used here as ‘reverence’ or ‘worship’. The answer to turning away from God is true worship, which would flow from a heart of love.
  + **Serve the Lord** - (*taʿăḇoḏ*) - the word is the same as used in the previous verse, the **house of slavery**. They had to turn from serving Pharaoh as slaves, to serving God as worshipful and loving vassals.
  + **Swear by His name only** - the swearing by the name of YHWH is not making an oath and calling YHWH as witness (forbidden elsewhere), but rather an oath of allegiance to His name alone (note esp. Ps. 63:11).
* Having given three positive commands, Moses then gives the negative corollary in v. 14, effectively restating the first commandment (5:7), though in respect to the immediately surrounding nations.
* Moses gives the reason why their sin should terrify them - God is jealous for them (on God’s being provoked to jealousy, note esp. Deut. 32:16-26). He demands exclusive worship from them, since He is the One who has brought them into the promised land.
  + - “Many find the jealousy ascribed to God (v.15) very difficult to understand because jealousy can be such a vicious sin, producing much grief and animosity. But one must recognize that the provocations that give rise to the Lord’s anger are most severe. Biblical history shows that such provocations frustrate the love of God until his patience with their idolatry ceases to be a virtue. Only then does his jealousy call for redress.”[[153]](#footnote-153)
* The eventual result of their unfaithfulness will be that God will **wipe them from the face of the earth**. This should not be thought of annihilation, but of a removal from the promised land into which they are entering. There is no thought of complete annihilation since that would violate the earlier promises made to the patriarchs.

## 6:16-19 ~ Do Not Test God

* Having warned the people regarding their worship of Him alone, Moses tells them that they cannot put God to the test.
  + The testing of God happened at Massah (literally, *testing,* Ex. 17:1-7). This event is used by the Psalmist as the prime example of the unbelief of the wilderness generation. Rather than trust God to provide, they demand a sign to prove that God truly is with them.
  + The particular test in the case of Massah is effectively telling God to ‘prove it’ by some miraculous sign, rather than trusting in God’s providential love and care.
  + This verse is used by Christ during the temptation with the Devil (Matt 4:5-7). There, Satan tells Christ that the OT promises God’s protection, and that Christ should therefore ‘prove’ that God is with Him by casting Himself down off the temple and being saved by angels. To do such a thing would have been the equivalent of demanding that God prove His promises, rather than trusting the promises in the midst of God’s providential care.[[154]](#footnote-154)
  + Additionally, it is interesting to note that the temptation to test God in the conquest and fulfillment periods will be in response to great blessing, while the testing of God at Massah was in response to the suffering in the wilderness. In either case, the temptation for the people will be to question God’s presence and love for His people in spite of His promises to them.
    - “Whereas in the past Israel’s loyalty to Yahweh had been tested by deprivation, in the future they will be tested by being “satisfied” (v. 11). Crises of need tempt people to demand a response from Yahweh, but crises of prosperity tempt them to forget him and to become self-sufficient.”[[155]](#footnote-155)
* Quite to the contrary, God will certainly prove Himself faithful, just as **He has spoken** (v. 19) and **sworn to the fathers** (v. 18). This will be in their **possession of the good land**, and the **driving out of all the enemies** of the people. He will certainly fulfill His promises, simply because He is God, and must, by His character.
* Knowing that God would always provide and care for them in this way according to His promises, they ought to devote themselves to obedience to the covenant, rather than test His willingness to bless them. This they can do as they obey His commandments (which, in the context, is linked to the first commandment), and His statutes and ordinances.
* Unlike the Abrahamic promises, however, the particular blessings for each generation are contingent on their obedience to the covenant stipulations.
  + - “The conditional aspect of the covenant is clear in the statement that the people must do “what is right and good” before the Lord *so that* the favorable results of conquest and dispossession might follow (vv. 18–19).”[[156]](#footnote-156)

## 6:20-25 ~ A Script for Future Conversations

* Moses then provides a script for future dialogue with the children who will be born in the land but who will not remember or have participated in the deliverance.
* The question of the son is remarkable for a number of reasons.
  + First, he speaks of the covenant that the **Lord OUR God commanded YOU**. The young man has embraced his position as a member of God’s covenant people, beloved of God, but is unaware of the purpose or the implications of the commands.
  + Second, the question is not regarding the many specific laws of the covenant, but rather the **meaning** of ALL the stipulations. In other words, the son is asking what the basis for the covenant is. The answer, of course, is v. 4 - the basis for the covenant is the very nature of God Himself, and His choice of Israel as His covenant people. Obedience will certainly flow out of the heart of one who is so beloved of God.
* And yet, in order to prove the love of God and His choice of them as a nation, the father’s response is scripted.
* Vv. 21-23 are a reminder of the slavery of the people in the land of Eqypt, God’s might in removing them from the grasp of Pharaoh, and His kindness in providing them with the promised land (see also 4:32-34). In all this, God has proven both His care and His lordship over them.
  + - “Taken as a whole, Yahweh’s rescue of the Israelites was a judicial act whereby he freed them from slavery to Egypt and claimed them as his own vassals—a status symbolized by the stipulations, decrees, and laws he had revealed to them.”[[157]](#footnote-157)
* As their loving redeemer and absolute sovereign, God has provided the covenant commands in order to bless the people.
  + - “In his mind Yahweh had revealed the stipulations, decrees, and laws for four purposes: (1) to govern Israel’s conduct (“to obey all these decrees”); (2) to instill in them reverent awe for their God (“to fear the Lord”); (3) to ensure Israel’s well-being in perpetuity (“so that we might always prosper”; cf. 28:1–14); (4) to maintain/sustain Israel’s life.”[[158]](#footnote-158)
* The script concludes with a remarkable comment on the nature of the covenant and its root. Moses concludes by saying that the father should tell his son that it **will be righteousness** (Gen 15:6) for them if they will observe **all this commandment** (singular) in the presence of their God.
* The commandment referred to here in the singular is the first commandment - the love from the people in response to the Lord’s choice and love for them. If they will observe this commandment - to love their God because of all that He has done for them - that is, to believe that He loves them - this will result in righteousness for them.
* Righteousness was never about the exact keeping of the Law, but about faith in God’s loving choice of them, and the resultant love for God that would result in their covenant faithfulness.
  + - “Then in strongly evangelical terms Moses equated faithful compliance with the covenant to righteousness (v. 25). Later Judaism wrongly concluded that covenant keeping was the basis for righteousness rather than an expression of faithful devotion. But true covenant keeping in the final analysis is a matter of faith, not merely of works and ritual.”[[159]](#footnote-159)
    - Righteousness in this context describes a true and personal relationship with the covenant God, which not only would be a spiritual reality, but would be seen in the lives of the people of God. Thus the answer to the son’s question finally focuses on the proper relationship of a man to God, and the fruit of that relationship in daily life.[[160]](#footnote-160)

Deut. 7:1-26 ~ Second Commandment Explained

* Chapter 6 spells out the specific application of the first commandment. Moses now turns in chapter 7 to give details regarding the keeping of the second commandment. Both the temptations that the people will face as they enter the land, and the blessings for keeping the commandment are spelled out in detail.
* The first and second commandment are closely linked - having no other gods before the Lord, and not having idols of any kind are very similar. Nevertheless, Moses continues his exhortation and moves into a discussion of the dangers of turning to other gods.
* The chapter as a whole (approx. 350 words in Hebrew) is a sermonic retelling of Exod. 23:20-33 (approx 150 words in Hebrew). Moses takes this promise of God’s presence going before them into the land, and the resultant blessings and requirements, and brings out the spiritual significance of the events.

## 7:1-5 ~ Future Risks of Idolatry

* Moses begins with a statement regarding the certainty of the conquest. **When the Lord** accomplishes His promises for the people, certain events will become greater risks. Nevertheless, the Lord will Himself **clear away** the nations that are present there. The verb (*nāšal,* also v. 22) is rare, but explicitly refers to military conquest (see 2 Kings 16:6).
  + - “Moses describes the anticipated hostilities from the perspectives of both divine and human protagonists. Yahweh’s role will be to “drive out” the inhabitants of the land and “deliver” them into the hands of the Israelites.”[[161]](#footnote-161)
* In this sense, the work of God to clear away the inhabitants is accomplished through the means of the Israelite armies. They are understood to simply be the tools to accomplish God’s purposes. Those who remain, or who are not driven out are subject to the *herem*, the ban.
* The list of nations here contains seven people groups, the sum of whom are referred to as greater and stronger than Israel.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Hittites | Ambiguous term, used of various peoples. Likely invaders from Turkey at this time. Later Hittites (i.e. Uriah, 2 Sam 11:3) were allied with Israel. |
| Girgashites | Listed in every catalogue of nations until post exilic times (Neh. 9:8). Nevertheless little is known of their whereabouts in the land. |
| Amorites | Likely a general term used for the peoples (often of the hill country, but not exclusively) on both sides of the Jordan river. |
| Canaanites | Another general term for the geographical inhabitants, but likely related to the plains-dwellers to the West. |
| Perizzites | Not a tribe of the Canaanites (Gen. 34:30), but nevertheless widespread. Likely congregated in the central hill country. |
| Hivites | Generally thought to be in the northern parts of the country, near the slopes of Lebanon (Judg. 3:3). Also in Gibeon. |
| Jebusites | Congregated around the region of Jerusalem and not finally vanquished until the time of David. |

* The command for the people is clear - there are two things they must do. They are required to **smite** them and then to **utterly destroy** (הַחֲרֵ֤ם תַּחֲרִים֙ *haḥārēm taḥârîm*) them. The first term can be used to describe striking down or defeating. The second term, repeated for emphasis, indicates holy destruction, sometimes referred to as ‘the ban’ (see lengthy excursus in Ch. 2). The nations should be utterly destroyed, with no one left alive, and the cities and villages razed to the ground.
  + - “[The term] seems to serve as shorthand for a complex series of actions: (1) defeating the military forces of a city; (2) slaughtering the population; (3) burning the town; (4) sowing it with salt (Judg. 9:45); (5) pronouncing a curse on it (Josh. 6:26); (6) consecrating it to Yahweh.”[[162]](#footnote-162)
* Further, there were two things they were strictly forbidden to do - first, to **make a covenant with them**, and second to **show them mercy**.
  + The first term, translated treaty in the NASB, is the term for covenant (בְּרִ֖ית *bərîṯ*), the same word used of the covenant with God.
    - “The Israelites were bound primarily by their *bərîṯ* (covenant, treaty) with the Lord, and though this was a religious bond, it was also a political bond, for it set aside Israel as a distinctive nation among other nations. To make a treaty with other nations would indicate a lack of faithfulness on the part of the Israelites to their suzerain God.”[[163]](#footnote-163)
  + The second term, translated favor in the NASB, indicates heart felt mercy or favor toward another. The people were not to spare them or show them mercy.
* Moses proceeds to forbid **intermarriage,** both the sons as marrying others, and others marrying the daughters. While Deut. 21:10-14 seems to allow for just such events, the rules associated with such marriages were there to govern them, knowing that the people would be inclined to such sinful behavior. However, God’s initial design was for intermarriage to be forbidden. (Note the prohibition in Neh. 13:23-27 and Ezra 9,10)
* The basis for this command was that the foreign marriages would eventually **turn** the hearts of **the sons away from following God**. The danger for the people would be that the foreign marriages would provide a vehicle for idolatry to enter the land, and therefore incite the **anger** and judgment of God.
* Interestingly, these are the exact terms used in 1 Kings 11:1-8 to describe the apostasy of Solomon and the resulting idolatry that happened in Israel, and well as God’s judgment.
* Rather than show them mercy, intermarry with them, or make covenants with them, God provides the instructions for how to deal with the idolaters.
  + **Tear down the altars** - any wood or stone altar was to be smashed and scattered in order to leave no trace.
  + **Smash their sacred pillars** - These were likely representative of the male deities in the Canaanite religions.
  + **Hew down their Asherim** - The Asherim represented the female deities. The common practice of the day was to bring together representatives of both deities to have sacred intercourse. God appropriately despises this practice.
    - “The cult carried on in their name was of the most sensual and sordid type, one practiced in the temples and also under the open sky at high places and in groves of trees. Prominent in its services was sacred prostitution involving priests and priestesses who represented the male and female deities.”[[164]](#footnote-164)
  + **Burn their graven images with fire** - These were likely either wooden or gilt carvings of deity symbols used for pagan worship. God commands that they be burned to obliterate any possible return to the practice.

## 7:6-11 ~ The Basis for Loyalty to Yahweh

* Moses provides the reasons for the nation to be loyal to the Lord.
* The first reason is that the **people are holy to the Lord** (עַ֤ם קָדוֹשׁ֙ -*ʿam qādôs*). They ought to be wholly separated from the sort of moral filthiness that surrounded them, particularly as God’s people.
* This holiness is a direct result of God’s **choice** of them. They are his **treasured possession** (סְגֻלָּ֔ה - *seg̱ullāh*), chosen from among all the peoples on the earth. This terminology is carried forward into the NT regarding the church. When God chooses people or nations, they are treasured by Him.
  + - “Via the LXX this notion of God’s people as his treasured possession appears in the NT where the church is “God’s possession” (Eph 1:14), “a people that are his very own” (Titus 2:14), and “a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9).”[[165]](#footnote-165)
    - “Moses substitutes the cold political term *gôy* (“nation”) with the warm relational term *ʿam* (“people”) and views Israel’s status as his “holy people” to be the grounds of their actions against the Canaanites and their pagan installations, rather than the result of covenant obedience. In effect, he contrasts persons and objects “devoted to destruction” (*ḥrm*) with those devoted to God for a sacred relationship. The reference to Israel as Yahweh’s *segullâ* (“treasured possession”) involves a rare word that occurs only eight times in the Old Testament. While six of these use it metaphorically of Israel, the key to understanding the concept is found 1 Chronicles 29:3 and Ecclesiastes 2:8, where the word denotes valued possessions, specifically the treasure of kings.”[[166]](#footnote-166)
* Moses proceeds to explain why God set His love on the nation. He begins negatively, stating that it has nothing to do with numerical superiority. In fact, they were the **fewest of all peoples**. This was not true at the time of this statement but was certainly true during the time of the patriarchs. Abraham was literally alone, and then with a single heir. Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve were still vastly smaller in number than the other nations, and yet were a people unto themselves. God’s choice was completely unrelated to the nation’s status or position.
* On the contrary, God chose to love the nation simply because of His sovereign election and choice. He says **the Lord did not set His love on you or choose you…but because the Lord loved you**. The basis for God’s love for Israel was very simply God’s choice to love Israel. There was no external reason.
  + - “…they were chosen because the Lord loved them; the reason for God’s special love, though it contained within it a purpose, remains essentially a mystery. On the basis of that love, God had called Abraham and his descendants and had made the covenant promise to them.”[[167]](#footnote-167)
    - “Why God loved them is not stated in the Pentateuch, but the focus of thought is obvious—it is the character of God rather than any excellence in the people that accounts for the choice.”[[168]](#footnote-168)
* The absolute freedom of God to choose His own people is the very reason for His choice, and then for His covenant, and finally, for His **redeeming them from the house of Pharaoh, king of Egypt**. The statement ‘king of Egypt’ reflects the amazing power of Pharaoh that God swept out of the way in order to bring the people of Israel to Himself.
* This free, sovereign, electing grace of God on the nation of Israel will continue **to the thousandth generation**. This takes the dual form of His covenant (*habbĕrît wĕhaḥesed* - literally ‘covenant loyalty’), and His lovingkindness (*ḥesed*). God will absolutely retain His love on everyone who will maintain their love and loyalty to Him.
* For those who **hate** Him, however, God has nothing but disdain and rejection. In the context, hate is covenant disloyalty. He will certainly move them to destruction rapidly - literally, He would **repay them to their face**. The statement reflects both he speed with which the Lord would punish them, and the confrontative nature of the destruction - it will be absolute rejection and decimation because of their disloyal to the covenant. Ultimately, however, God is faithful to His covenant, and loves those who love Him.
  + - “This expression occurs only here and probably means that the judgment would not be reserved for unborn generations but would fall immediately upon those who had sinned in this manner, right there and then. This view finds support in the fact that God “will not be slow” to repay (lit., “will not be afterward” in doing so).”[[169]](#footnote-169)
* This, of course, begs the question of how the nation will ever love Him. They cannot, simply because their hearts are wicked. And yet, Moses concludes by commanding their obedience. Again, the verbiage begins with the singular **commandment** from which flows the **statutes and judgments**. If they will love Him, the will certainly obey Him, and this is Moses’ command.
* Again, the structure of the passage follows the same pattern - God’s election —> Israel’s response of love —> careful obedience.

## 7:12-16 ~ Blessings for Obedience

* Moses now provides the blessings that God will pour out on the nation, should they choose obedience. Of course, this is all based on the precondition of His election of them. And yet, if the nation will remain loyal to the covenant, God will certainly bless them.
* V. 12 is the most explicit statement of the link between the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants. God states that if Israel will **listen** and **obey** the judgments that Moses will provide, He will certainly maintain the blessings of His **covenant** and **lovingkindness** upon the nation which He swore to the patriarchs.
* The link does not mean that their obedience was required for the blessings to continue (i.e. that without obedience, the covenants would cease). Rather, the verse simply links the level of blessing to the level of covenant faithfulness of the people. God would provide the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob upon each successive generation, as they maintained loyalty to the covenant.
  + - “This did not mean that obedience merited divine blessing, but rather that obedience maintained the proper covenant relationship with God; and his people could experience the blessing of God only when the covenant relationship, which involved reciprocal responsibilities, was properly maintained.”[[170]](#footnote-170)
* Remarkably, God promises the very stipulations of the Abrahamic covenant on the nation in v. 13 - He would **love**, **bless**, and **multiply** them (Gen. 17:2; 22:17; 26:4, 24; 28:3; 32:12[13]; 35:11; 48:4; Ex. 32:13; Lev 26:9).
* The specific nature of this blessing is spelled out both positively and negatively, in v. 13b-14a and 14b-15 respectively.
* The positive blessings utilize very unique words for each item, all of which correspond to Canaanite deities (see below). The intended effect is to state that the real source of all blessing is YHWH, who is over all other so-called deities. The people must remember that only through obedience to Him, and loyalty to His covenant, will the blessings promised by the pagan deities come. If they would obey the commands to crush, burn, and destroy these false Gods, the true and living God would pour out those very blessings upon them.
  + - “All the expressions in verse 13b are linked with the Canaanite pantheon. *Dāgān* (“grain”) recalls Dagon, later the primary god of the Philistines (Judg. 16:23; 1 Sam. 5:2–7), though worship of this deity was widespread among the Canaanites. For “wine,” Moses substitutes the common word *yayin* (cf. 14:26) with *tîrôš*, which is cognate to the name of the god Tirshu/Tirash, attested in the El-Amarna letters and in Ugaritic texts. For olive “oil,” Moses substitutes the common word *šemen* (cf. 8:8) with *yiṣhār*, from a root meaning “shiny.” Some speculate that *Yiṣhār* is the name of the god of olive oil. The rare expression for “calves of your herds” (lit., “the increase of your cattle”) occurs elsewhere only in 28:4, 18, 51, and in Ex. 13:12. Replacing the more common *ʿēgel* (cf. 9:16, 21), *šgr* seems to be linked to the name of the deity Shaggar/Sheger, whose veneration has been attested in Ugaritic, Emar, Deir *ʿAlla*, and Punic texts. However, the mythological connection is most transparent in the designation for “lambs of your flocks” (*ʿašterôt ṣōʾnekā*), which substitutes for the more common *kebés* (cf. Ex. 29:39) or *késeb* (Deut. 14:4). The veneration of Ishtar/Astarte, the goddess of fertility, was among the most widespread of any divinity in the ancient Near East.”[[171]](#footnote-171)
* The positive blessings conclude with the statement that they will be **blessed above all the peoples**. God’s power to bless the nation is linked to His power over all things. If the nations around Israel could claim blessings by their deities, Israel’s would surpass them all because of God’s omnipotence.
* Since all of these ‘gods’ are meaningless, obeying the second commandment of the decalogue would simply make sense. Not only are all those other gods powerless and false, but the one true God can actually provide the sought-after blessings.
* The negative blessings (those things which would NOT happen) are spelled out in detail as well.
* First, there would be no barrenness. Barrenness in animals meant eventual starvation, and barrenness in people meant eventual decimation. But God promises that both **male and female** would never be **barren**, both with people and animals. The perpetuation of the nation would fall on the shoulders of God who brought new life.
* Second, God promises to remove all sickness from the nation. Not only would people be born, but the maladies that had affected them in Egypt (especially the plagues, but also malaria, dysentery, and leprosy).
  + Ancient historians comment that most of the deadly pestilences that would wipe out populations during this time came from Egypt.[[172]](#footnote-172)
* Rather, God would send these sicknesses upon the enemies of Israel. The nation wouldn’t even have to fight to keep their enemies at bay, because God Himself would fight for them with natural diseases.
* V. 16 is not a restatement of the command to decimate the populations, but a promise of future military success. They **shall consume** (lit. ‘eat’**-**וְאָכַלְתָּ֣) the Canaanites before them, since God has promised to **deliver** them into their hands. However, when this happens, the nation must be careful to follow the commandments about what to do with the people and their gods - they must all be destroyed, so that the nation would not be **snared** by them.
* Hence, the nation must keep the second commandment, turn away from and destroy any other God, and they will know and receive the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic covenant.

## 7:17-24 ~ Encouragements to Faith

* Having commanded the people, promised all these blessings, and offered Himself as their aid, God proceeds to effectively ‘argue’ with their internal and unspoken doubts.
* The temptation would be to **say in the heart** that the nations are **greater** and **stronger**, and that they would be defeated. This is an explicit link back to v. 1 about the seven nations. Of course, this was true, but the Jews should not doubt that God would bless them as they obeyed Him.
* God provides the response to this type of fear. over the course of the next eight verses. First, God tells them that they **should not be afraid of them**. He commands their courage, regardless of the massive size of the armies that stand in front of them.
* The cure for lack of courage was not only the promises God had made, or the command to obey, but the memory of God’s faithful work for them in Egypt. There, God had personally brought about victory for the nation without them lifting a finger. In Canaan, God would use Israel’s armies as his tool to accomplish a similar victory.
  + - “Now, adopting a method of argument that would be widely used in later Judaism, *qal wahomer* (“from the heavy to the light”), Moses does not minimize the power of the seven Canaanite nations, who do indeed pose a formidable foe. His point is that if Yahweh was able to rescue them from the Egyptians, then these petty kingdoms, which have for some time been subject states to the pharaohs, are nothing at all to him.”[[173]](#footnote-173)
* The comparison with **Pharaoh and Egypt** is important. None of the nations that Israel would face could hold a candle to the military might and prowess of the Egyptians. If God had vanquished them single-handedly, certainly He would accomplish His promise to them here in Canaan.
* Moses explicits calls God “**YHWH your God**”. The true God of Israel had already shown Himself mightier than the highest military’s gods. He would do the same for them in Egypt.
* The work of God in Egypt is spelled out - they saw **great trials** come upon the Egyptians (lit. testings). This refers to the plagues and the subsequent exodus. These were accomplished through **signs and wonders** (the miraculous plagues that had overcome Pharaoh’s resolve), and the **mighty hand and outstretched arm** of God in their departure. God had done the work by His own hand with power.
* The concluding phrase of v. 20 is important. In the very same way, God will do to all those **nations** of whom Israel is **afraid**. Therefore, the nation must remember the power and might of God, who has promised to fight for them.
* But beyond just the reminder of God’s work in Egypt, He also promises them a number of other helps. First, He says that He will send **hornets** among them. This has been understood both metaphorically and literally. However, there is no reason to take this as a metaphor. God sent hornets among the enemies of Israel to accomplish His purposes.
  + - “Literally the word *ṣirʿâ* denotes a species of wasp/hornet whose sting may be fatal, especially if one is attacked by an entire swarm. Moses has precisely this image in mind when he changes the identity of the hornets’ targets from the Canaanite tribes in Exodus 23:28 to “the survivors who hide from you.” When Yahweh commissions the swarm of insects to attack the Canaanites, they will pursue them relentlessly into every cave and bush to which they flee, and will sustain that attack until all perish.[[174]](#footnote-174)
* Interestingly, while there is no mention in the Mosaic accounts, Joshua recounts that the hornet played a pivotal role in the defeat of Sihon and Og as well (Josh 24:12). God used even nature to destroy the nations in Israel’s way.
* God’s presence **in their midst** would provide the necessary power to overcome the nations, and they would be successful only because He was with them.
* He will personally remove the nations from before Israel **little by little (**מְעַ֣ט מְעָ֑ט - small, small**)**. The statement reflects the methodology of God in using the armies of Israel to accomplish His purposes. While He certainly could have simply wiped them from the land **quickly** (as with the vanquishing of Pharaoh), the population of Israel at this time was too small to fully populate and subdue the land, and therefore **wild beasts would grow too numerous** for the people to control. However, by implementing this destruction in small portions, the nation would be able to take over the land and keep the animals subdued.
  + - “The command to annihilate (v. 2) must be qualified, therefore, to allow for a gradual process of expulsion, one that would not leave the land unpopulated and open to the wild animals.”[[175]](#footnote-175)
* God had made the same promise to the first generation (Ex. 23:30-31).
* Nevertheless, in spite of the relatively methodical process, God would not fail to clear the land of the Canaanite tribes. Israel’s God would be triumphant over the nations who stood before Him. He explicitly says that He will **throw them into great confusion** (literally ‘confuse with great confusion’[[176]](#footnote-176) - וְהָמָם֙ מְהוּמָ֣ה גְדֹלָ֔ה) until they are destroyed. This confusion occurs explicitly in Gibeon (Josh. 10:10), when the people must destroy the Amorites from the hills.
* YHWH would accomplish the destruction, not only of the people, but of their **kings** who would have no name remembered **under heaven**. The statement is interesting for two reasons. First, the list of vanquished kings in Josh. 12:7-24 contains no names. Second, Israel had no king. The elimination of all the names of all the kings that had stood in His way would have meant to Israel that their King, YHWH, was the king of all kings. Hence, no one would stand in their way, but all would be destroyed.

## 7:25-26 ~ The Second Commandment Restated

* Finally, Moses concludes this section by restating the second commandment regarding idolatry, but with the added warning regarding the very materials used to make the idols. Nothing can be taken that is tainted by idolatry, but must be destroyed completely.
* The images must be **burned with fire**. The grammar of the sentence is emphatic, placing the object of the burning, the images, at the head of the sentence. Everything must be destroyed that had any link to idolatry.
  + - “After the nations were destroyed, their images had to follow suit (v. 25a; cf. v. 5). The gold and silver that adorned such idols could not be saved and used by the Israelites, for it, like the people, were under *ḥērem* and thus subject to annihilation (v. 25; cf. v. 2).”[[177]](#footnote-177)
    - “The association with false religions made the metals totally unsuitable for use within the Israelite community, which might again be tempted to misuse the materials to make a representation of God as had been done in the past (see Exod. 32).”[[178]](#footnote-178)
* Not only might the people being left alive become a **snare** (v. 16), but even the materials used for making the idols would become a snare. As such, it was **under the ban**, and must be fully destroyed.
* However, interestingly, everything that was under the ban would pass its curse to whoever possessed it. To take what was under the ban would result in being under the ban oneself. This command is precisely what happens to Achan (Josh 7:25-26) who had to then be killed, burnt, and buried to fulfill the cleansing that the ban represented.
* The idolatry is specifically called an ‘**abomination**’ to the Lord, a word that Moses will employ frequently going forward.
  + - “The reason, specifically, for their being thus categorized is that idols and their accoutrements are detestable to the Lord. This means that what they symbolized was so counter to the Lord and his purposes that they could not coexist with him (cf. 12:31; 18:9, 12; 27:15; 32:16; 1 Kgs 11:5–7; Isa 41:24; 44:19).”[[179]](#footnote-179)
    - The word *tôʿēbâ* (“abomination”; NIV “detestable”) occurs in verses 25 and 26 for the first time in the book and serves as Moses’ favorite expression for the abhorrent nature of idolatry (cf. 12:31; 13:14[15]; 17:4; 32:16).[[180]](#footnote-180)
* Not only were idolatrous things an abomination to God Himself, the people should view them in the same way, according to v. 26. They should **abhor** them with the kind of hatred God had for them.
* By hating the very materials the idols were made of, the people were effectively fulfilling the second commandment, not only by the letter but also by the heart.

Deut. 8:1-11:32 ~ God and Israel Contrasted

* Moses has explained the first and second commandments to the people in chapters 6 and 7. Having come to the conclusion of the explanatory section of these two commands, Moses now presents a lengthy explanation of the work of God in the past and how the nation has been prepared for what will come in the future.
* This section of discussion from chapter 8-11 revisits how God’s faithfulness has interacted with Israel’s unfaithfulness.
* This contrast, which will culminate with a restatement of the first command, and a repetition of the warnings of chapters 6-7, is played out in history as Moses reviews the rebellion of the nation, the punishment of God, and the subsequent care of God in spite of their sin.
* The entire section effectively warns against disobeying the first and second commands - not only because they will lose the blessings God has promised them, but also because God will, in spite of their sin, remain faithful to the covenant and therefore punish them, before restoring them.

## Deut. 8:1-5 ~ God’s Fatherly Care

* Moses begins this lengthy discussion by restating the admonition that they should obey the commandment that he is presenting to them. The word here is singular, as in 6:1, 25 - (מִצְוָה - *miṣwâ*). If they would obey the first commandment spelled out in 6:4-5, and the immediate implications of it in the second commandment, they would undoubtedly inherit the land.
* This statement is really a summary statement of all that is about to follow, as Moses unpacks the historical account of God’s faithfulness to the covenant, even to the most reprehensible generation in Israel’s history.
  + - “Also in line with previous literary and theological pattern, Moses recalled the past—especially from the time of covenant making at Sinai-Horeb—as a means of underscoring both the redeeming and preserving grace of God and the wicked unbelief and insufficiency of his people Israel (vv. 2–5; cf. 4:1–8; 1:6–3:29).”[[181]](#footnote-181)
* Moses now explains the purpose of God in bringing them into the wilderness. The entire process was designed to reveal to the nation what was in their heart by **humbling** them and **testing** them.
* The test was to determine if they would **keep His commandments or not**. The language seems to indicate that God was seeing what was in their heart by the test. However, vv. 3-5 make it clear that the Lord was not doing this for His knowledge, but for their discipline and instruction regarding His care.
* Notably, the test would reveal what was **in their heart**. Time and again, the nation would fail the test, revealing their wickedness and rebellion, inciting punishment, and finding God faithful to the covenant.
* The great test was their hunger. The Lord brought them to a place of desperation in hunger for the very purpose of humbling them. Had they been able to escape this situation of their own power, the people would have depended on themselves (note 8:18). However, having been humbled, it became clear that their very lives were completely dependent on Him alone.
* Having brought them to the point of need, the Lord provided for them with food that **neither they nor their fathers knew**. The point is that they had no idea where the food would come from - they would certainly never had imagined that bread would fall out of the sky! However, God did exactly that in order to train them about His character and their needs.
  + - “Feeding with manna is called a humiliation, inasmuch as God intended to show to the people through this food, which had previously been altogether unknown to them, that man does not live by bread alone, that the power to sustain life does not rest upon bread only (Isa. 38:16; Gen. 27:40), or belong simply to it, but to all that goeth forth out of the mouth of Jehovah.”[[182]](#footnote-182)
* V. 3 closes with words used by Jesus in His wilderness experience with Satan. The temptation to make bread from stones is parried by this verse (Matt 4:4, Luke 4:4). This brings up a question regarding how this verse was used by Christ, and what its original intended meaning might be.
  + *View 1* - The verse could mean that spiritual provision and direction from God - His word proceeding out of His mouth - gives life to the soul of man, and therefore Christ’s use of the statement is an appeal to the spiritual direction He had from God’s word.
  + *View 2* - The verse could mean that all provision comes from God exclusively - that is, by God’s will alone - and that the word ‘everything’ in v. 3 makes this clear.
  + *View 3* - This verse could mean that God’s words are actual spiritual food, nourishing the soul, and of greater importance than physical food.
* The problem with view 3 is that the point of the test was regarding physical food. God kept them from receiving the food, not to show them how important His word was (that is, more important than bread), but to humble them, and then provide for them as a lesson.
* The problem with view 3 is that, while it is true that the word in v. 3 is ‘everything’, Christ’s own words in Luke 4:4 use the term ‘word’ - hence Christ did not see this as a statement of God’s will, but a statement regarding God’s word.
* Therefore, view 1 seems to be the most clear. Life, according to Moses, is not just about bread, but about obedience to God’s commands. Those who obey the words of God will have life (note v. 1 as positive, and v. 20 as negative regarding God’s words). Those who seek only after bread, and therefore sin to get it, will not find life.
  + - “Therefore, it seems best to understand that “which comes from the mouth of God” to be his revealed will, represented by the Supreme Command and all the stipulations, decrees, and laws. To live one must also ingest (take to heart, 6:6) the life-giving commands that come from the mouth of Yahweh, and let them energize one to do his will (cf. 17:19–20; 31:11–13).”[[183]](#footnote-183)
* The overall argument, both from v. 3 and from the gospel accounts, is that one must obey more than eat, since through obedience, one trusts God for provision, and also protects his soul. Christ, then, is telling the devil that He will obey, rather than create bread for His physical nourishment, trust in God to provide what He needs.
* With the manna, God also made certain that their **clothing did not wear out,** nor did their f**eet swell**. These are statements regarding God’s care - their miraculous clothing lasted 40 years, proving that God was with them. And their physical bodies were maintained, though they walked through a massive wilderness where foot injuries would mean certain death (Neh 9:20-21).
* These miracles were designed to **discipline** the people **as a man disciplines his son**. However, while the word can mean this, the miraculous provision of God is more in line with education rather than correction. These miracles were intended to teach the nation about God’s faithfulness to them.
  + - “The disciplinary action of God may involve admonition, correction, and severity, but it is prompted by the love of God for his people. The wilderness period was thus the time of adolescence in Israel’s history, when the people learned to understand by experience the way in which God wished them to walk.”[[184]](#footnote-184)

## Deut 8:6-10 ~ Obedience and God’s Blessing

* The flow of thought, though connected, should have a slight break here. The NASB ‘therefore’ is too strong. ESV translates it ‘so’. However, the purpose of the Lord’s disciplinary education should have its effect on the people.
* Verse 6 acts as a transition from the sufferings of the wilderness to the blessings of the promised land. Not only should the experiences of suffering in the wilderness push them to obedience, but that learned obedience must then be in their hearts as they enter into the blessings of the land.
* Canaan was a land with abundant water supplies, **a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills**. Moses concentrates on the general water supplies, rather than the rainfall of the land.
* These water features contrasted greatly with the single source of water in Egypt, the Nile.
  + - “The country he was leading them into had great natural benefits: streams, pools, and springs flowing in the valleys and from the hills (v.7). This contrasted both with Egypt proper and with Sinai. Egypt relied on one river while Sinai had none; Canaan had more rivers and, in addition, had springs in valleys and hills (fed from the water in the limestone base of much of the country; see Baly, p. 20). [[185]](#footnote-185)
* The massive blessings of the promised land continue in the next section. All of the abundance of water would produce an abundance of harvest. The staple items for survival would all be present in abundance.
  + - “Moses catalogues the most important horticultural products of the land. Wheat and barley were the main grains of the region, used especially in the baking of bread and other pastries, but also in the production of beer. Vines provided a valuable source for both food (grapes and raisins) and drink (wine).19 Figs and pomegranates were the staple fruits, both of which could be eaten fresh or dried. Olives for oil provided one of the most valuable commodities in ancient households. The oil was used for cooking, lighting, ointments, perfumes, cosmetics, lubrication, anointing the sick, and sacred services.21 If the term for “honey” is understood as the product of bees, it seems out of place. Most therefore interpret the word to denote the nectar of fruit, particularly “date honey,” used as a sweetener.”[[186]](#footnote-186)
* The description of blessing continues in v. 9. They will **eat without scarcity**, and will **not lack anything**. These phrases indicate that the land would be so abundant in production that the people would enjoy the benefits without interruption.
* The final word about the blessings of the land deals with natural resources. Both iron and copper are said to be widely available, so much so that the rocks themselves would be iron. Interestingly, these resources were mostly available in areas outside of the land of Canaan, but still within the confines of the Abrahamic covenant.
  + - “It becomes clear from the final reference that the conception of the promised land that underlies the description of these verses is a very large one. Copper and iron could be mined for the most part in the vicinity of the Arabah, particularly from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba; there may also have been deposits of iron ore in Transjor-dan. Thus it is clear that the land described in these verses is not just Palestine to the west of the Jordan; there is a larger conception of the promised land, which should perhaps be related to the description contained in Deut. 1:7–8.”[[187]](#footnote-187)
* The nation will enter, **eat**, and be **satisfied**. The abundance of blessing would ultimately satisfy the people. However, in the moments of satisfaction, Moses reminds them that they should **bless the Lord** because of His gift of this **good land**. This statement functions as a bridge to remind them of the danger of forgetting God in the land, beginning in v. 11.

## Deut. 8:11-20 ~ Dangers of Forgetting God

* The first word of v. 11, **Beware (**literally, ‘watch yourselves’**)**, explains the entire context. The training in the wilderness (vv. 1-5) was designed specifically so that the nation would see and remember when they received the blessings (vv. 6-10), and therefore obey.
* The great danger would be that they would **forget the Lord**. This danger, just like love, occurs in the heart, but manifests itself in the life. If they forget God, says Moses, **they will not keep His commandments, ordinances, and statutes**.
  + - “The threat envisioned is not the Canaanite nations but the Israelites themselves. If, in the midst of prosperity, they forget Yahweh, they become their own worst enemy.”[[188]](#footnote-188)
* In this case, the test is no longer the sufferings and lack in the wilderness, but the blessings and abundance of prosperity in the promised land. The human heart is so wicked that it can sin with lack and it can sin with plenty.
* v. 12 begins with the word otherwise (פֶּן - *pen*), which provides a structure for the following two verses. Vv. 12-13 describe an overabundance of prosperity - eating, houses, livestock, wealth - literally everything is multiplying. However, all of these are stated in the passive. These things simply ‘multiply’, indicating that God is the one who is providing the blessing for the nation.
  + - “The same Hebrew verb, *r-b-h*, is used in all three cases. It is the leitmotif of chapters 7–8 (see introductory Comment preceding chap. 7). Although the increase of Israel’s cattle and wealth, like the building of houses (v. 12), will naturally require effort on its part, Moses does not say “and you have multiplied your herds and flocks,” but rather “your herds and flocks have multiplied.” In this way he avoids giving the impression that this increase will be due to Israel’s own activity.”[[189]](#footnote-189)
* As all these blessings are amassed by the people, God specifically warns them about their hearts - they would become **proud** (literally ‘lifted up’ - רום) as they sat on the stack of all their wealth and prosperity.
* The byproduct of this forgetting would be that they would **forget the Lord** who had chosen them. This great danger is the root of all their sin - as they forgot God’s election and care, they would turn away from Him.
  + - “The chief danger was that they would become amnesiac about their history and in the pride of the present would forget the sacred story of their election and redemption.”[[190]](#footnote-190)
* Moses describes the fruit of a lifted up heart would look like in v. 17 - ‘**My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’**
  + Their pride, and wholesale dismissal of God, would cause them to believe that it was their own labor that brought them these blessings, rather than the divine care of God for them.
    - As the Israelites came to rejoice in the prosperity of their newly acquired land, it would be easy to remember how hard they had fought for it, how much they deserved it after so many trials—but at the same time to forget that the land was the gift of God, that any military success they might have had was only because of God’s presence in the midst of the people. Prosperity, in other words, could very easily lead to pride; to be proud was to think that the prosperity had been achieved as a result of their own human achievement, and to think in this way was to *forget the Lord your God* (v. 14a).[[191]](#footnote-191)
* Once again God’s care for them in the wilderness, as a reflection of His choice of them, is made clear by a recounting of His works.
  + He brought them up out of Egypt and slavery. However, this freedom was not unto complete autonomy, but unto submission to God.
    - “The Exodus event had been the liberation of Israel from human servitude and had made possible submission to God in the covenant formed at Sinai. Israel was not a free nation, though the newly found prosperity in the promised land might lead to the delusion of freedom. The freedom from Egypt was significant only in that it formed the basis for a new allegiance, the allegiance given to God in the covenant.”[[192]](#footnote-192)
* He led them through the **terrible wilderness**. The journey to the promised land would require traveling through the barrenness of Sinai. The region is described as being full of **fiery serpents and scorpions**, and **without water**. God’s care of them began with Him leading them through the misery of the land between Egypt and Canaan. After some time it might begin to seem that they had always been in the land, the opposite was true. It was at God’s direction that they entered the land.
* In the wilderness, God had provided for them with **water** out of flint rocks, and with **manna** from the sky, a food which **their fathers** had never even conceived possible. When there was nothing for them to eat or drink, their provision came from God alone. This entire process was designed to **humble** them and **test** them.
* The test was constant in the wilderness, and the dependence of the people was apparent each morning. Only the food for the day was provided, and therefore the people would have to depend on God for the next day’s provision. Yet God always remained faithful, day after day, so that the nation could see that He was trustworthy.
* Interestingly, for those children born during the wilderness years, they had never experienced anything but manna. They would have perhaps found it commonplace, and so God says this is something that no generation before them would have even conceived of.
* Ultimately, all these sufferings were designed to be a great benefit to the people **in the end**. God was not hurting them through the season of suffering, but blessing them by providing a visible manifestation of His provision for them. By humbling them, He was ensuring that they would not forget Him when they entered the promised land.
  + - “It was for this reason that the desert experience came before the gift of land, to humble the people. It was itself a gift, despite its harshness (15), whose purpose was blessing in the end (16b). And it was designed to remain in the people’s memory, so that they might not forget, once they had reached journey’s end in the promised land, that all their good comes from God (14, 18).”[[193]](#footnote-193)
* The Lord’s hand in their lives should have been evident, and His purpose was to help them to remember His care of them, in light of the Abrahamic **covenant** made with the **fathers**. The wording seems to indicate that God’s provision of abundance was simply a reflection of His grace on the people through the covenant made with the patriarchs.
  + There is some debate as to how to render the phrase **that He may confirm** in v. 18. The MT contains a preceding *waw (*removing the ‘so that’ aspect), whereas some LXX manuscripts, some Qumran texts, and the Sumerian Pentateuch eliminate the *waw*, suggesting that the prosperity of the nation is the covenant. The previous reading is best.
    - “This suggests it is by the means of prosperity that the covenant of the Lord is seen to have validity or even that prosperity is essential to covenant reality. This is clearly against the whole tenor of covenant theology that allows no conditionality to covenant initiation. Rather, material (or any other kind of) success is a concomitant of covenant fellowship. It provides evidence that the covenant relationship exists, but it is by no means its prerequisite. Thus the reading with *waw* is to be preferred because it allows God’s grace as the source of all wealth to be also the source of the covenant itself. Blessing and covenant are two sides of the same coin”[[194]](#footnote-194)
* Moses summarizes the section by stating the results that will follow. Forgetting God is tantamount to violation of the first commandment, and worshipping idols is a violation of the second commandment. Should this occur, the nation will forfeit the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, and will ultimately face the same punishment as the nations that they were dispossessing - they would perish from off the land - fulfilled at the time of the Assyrian conquest.
  + - “This would strike right at the heart of the covenant relationship, the acknowledgment of the uniqueness and exclusiveness of the Lord as expressed in the first two commandments (5:7–10; cf. 6:12–15; 7:1–5) and the Shema (6:4–5). The language of the warning is packed with covenant overtones such as “follow [lit., “walk after”] other gods” (cf. 5:7), “worship [lit., “serve”] them,” “bow down to them” (5:9), and “testify against you” (cf. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; Amos 3:13).”[[195]](#footnote-195)
    - Employing expressions encountered earlier, Moses reviews the conditions that are absolutely unacceptable to Yahweh: forgetting Yahweh (cf. vv. 2, 11, 14, 18), going after other gods (cf. 5:7; 6:14; 7:4), serving them (4:19, 28; 5:9; 6:13; 7:4, 16), and prostrating themselves in homage and submission to them (cf. 4:19; 5:9). All these responses represent betrayals of allegiance to Yahweh and a violation of the Supreme Command (6:4–5).[[196]](#footnote-196)
* The section closes with the statement that all of this judgment would come because they would not listen to the **voice of the Lord**. This is a remarkable statement.
* At Sinai, the people had refused to listen out of fear, which was spoken of approvingly on the surface in 5:25. However, the great need was not for them to hear with their ears, but to hear with their hearts, as in 5:29 and then explicitly in 6:4-5. Ultimately they had to believe the Gospel they had heard.
* This refusal to hear with the heart is the very reason for their final judgment and captivity:
  + - “And the Lord said to me, “Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. **7**For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. **8***Yet they did not obey or incline their ear*, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his *evil heart*. Therefore I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.” (11:1-13 contains a complete revisiting of this very idea, with the first and second commandments restated, and Israel’s refusal to hear as the basis for their being dispossessed of the land.)
* The danger of hearing without believing is made explicit for NC believers in Heb 4:1-2 - true hearing is believing, and specifically believing the Gospel of God’s choice.

Deut. 9-10:11 ~ God’s Faithfulness & Israel’s Rebellion

* The reminders and warnings of chapter 8 regarding the first and second commandments are now fleshed out in the history of Israel. Moses has already reminded the nation of their historical sinfulness, but now, after teaching them the implications of the first and second commandments, he comes to the center of their rebellion in the golden calf incident.
* The section is an independent literary unit, designed to showcase the rebellion and stubbornness of the nation, and the mercy and grace of God.
* The repetition of **40 days and 40 nights,** always associated with prayer, showcases Moses’ intercession for the people, and the depth of the sinful tendencies of the nation, and the consistent mercy of God.
* In the overall flow of the book, Moses is providing a clear illustration of God’s remarkable faithfulness and mercy to the nation in spite of their sin. This proves that God has chosen them (a fact which is repeated again and again in this section), and will terminate in chapter 11 with a repetition of the first and second commandments.

## Deut. 9:1-5 ~ Introduction

**“Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities bfortified to heaven, 2.a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know and of whom you have heard *it said,* ‘Who can stand before the sons of Anak?’**

**3. Know therefore today that it is the Lord your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the Lord has spoken to you. 4. Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, ‘Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,’ but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the Lord is dispossessing them before you. 5. It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**

* This subsection through 10:11, like the beginning of the book, traces the historical events that lead the nation to their current position. However, while the first chapters were travel related, this section summarizes the center of Israel’s rebellion in making the golden calf.
* However, in spite of their flagrant violation of the first and second commandments, the nation was still intact - a startling testimony to the grace of God, and a motivation for loyalty on the part of the nation.
  + - “Thus the theme serves once again as an element of warning in Moses’ address; the people and their predecessors had been stubborn in the past, but they must learn to yield to the graciousness of God.”[[197]](#footnote-197)
* The first verse begins with the formal statement ‘**Hear**!’. Again, it is apparent that Moses is warning the people, and calling them to listen and obey what they will hear. In the context, the call to hear is the call to believe the promise that God will give them the land and fulfill His promise to the patriarchs.
* The certainty of the promise is made clear by the statement from Moses that the people would **dispossess nations** that were far **greater** in number and stature than the Israelites. The cities were **fortified to heaven**, and the people themselves were so massive that their stature had become proverbial (“**Who can stand before the sons of Anak?**”).
  + - “Obviously the challenge facing this generation is no different than it had been thirty-eight years earlier. The quotation in verse 3, “Who can stand up to the sons of Anak?”, has a proverbial ring. Assuming a negative answer, in effect the Canaanites were saying, “You may have dispossessed Sihon and Og, but no one can dislodge us from our land.”[[198]](#footnote-198)
* The point of these three statements regarding the invincibility of the nations in Canaan is to lead into the statement in v. 3 that YHWH would accomplish what Israel never could in her own power.
* The Lord promises three things:
  + 1. That He will **cross over before** them **as a consuming fire** - previously, the phrase was used in the context of God’s jealousy. Just as God would purify unrighteousness from among His people, in the same way He would purify unrighteousness from in front of His people’s armies.
  + 2. That **He will destroy them** - regardless of the military and physical stature of the nations facing Israel, God would fight on their behalf and, through their armies, destroy these nations.
  + 3. That **He will humble them before** the nation - the proverb may state that no one can stand before the Anakim, but with YHWH leading, they would eventually be made to bow before Israel and come under their rule.
* The overall picture is one of complete victory in the face of insurmountable odds. This is all in according with what the Lord has already **spoken to** them. Again, faith in God’s promise is the great need of the hour.
* However, in v. 4-5, Moses seems to preemptively respond to their dangerous thought that God’s blessings in giving them the land were the result of their personal **righteousness**. At first glance, this seems to contradict the very principle of the Mosaic covenant - that is, that obedience would bring the blessing of the people, and settlement in the land. However, these statements speak of God’s *giving* them the land, rather than their continuing to *possess* the land.
* The land promise itself, and God’s fulfillment of it were both acts of God’s grace. The subsequent keeping of the land, however, would rest on the covenant loyalty of the nation.
  + - “This shocking and humbling disclosure, far from placing Israel’s election on any basis other than grace, emphasizes that very truth; for the whole point here is that all peoples, Israel included, are wicked and undeserving of any divine favor. For one people to be chosen to salvation out of all other possible candidates is a mystery beyond human understanding.”[[199]](#footnote-199)
  + The two verses give two reasons for Israel’s blessing. The first is the **wickedness** of the Canaanite peoples. This is made clear in Gen 15:16, where God tells Abraham that their wickedness is not yet complete.
  + The second is the **oath** made to the patriarchs, a consistent theme in Deuteronomy.
* This introduction serves to lay the foundation

## Deut 9:6-14 ~ Stubbornness on Display at Sinai

**“Know, then, *it is* not because of your righteousness *that* the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people. 7“Remember, do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. 8“Even at Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, and the Lord was so angry with you that He would have destroyed you. 9 “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, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water. 10 “The Lord gave me the two tablets of stone written by the finger of God; and on them *were* all the words which the Lord had spoken with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. 11 “It came about at the end of forty days and nights that the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.12 “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Arise, go down from here quickly, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made a molten image for themselves.’ 13 “The Lord spoke further to me, saying, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed, it is a stubborn people. 14 ‘Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.’**

* Many commentators take v. 6 as a conclusion statement of the introduction. However, the understanding of Israel’s stubbornness is what follows, and the verbal form at the beginning of v. 6 could be allowed to go either way (‘**and know’ or ‘know, therefore’**). The flow of the following verses seems to indicate that the stubbornness of the nation is a new topic that Moses has begun to deal with.
* Rather than being a **righteous** people, Moses now undertakes to prove that Israel is, in fact, **stubborn** (literally a people stiff in neck - עַם־קְשֵׁה־עֹ֖רֶף - *am qeshe oreph*). This concept is brought up three times in this short section (through ch.11), but becomes a characteristic evaluation of the nation at future times (see Isa. 48:4).
* V. 7 is a statement regarding the stubbornness and sin of the people throughout the **wilderness** years which **provoked** God to wrath. The two statements - that they had **provoked** God (הִקְצַ֛פְתָּ - *qāṣap*) and that they had been **rebellious** (מַמְרִ֥ים - *mārâ*) - are a summary statement of the past 40 years. Essentially when the left Egypt, the entire desert wandering time was one of sin. These same two verbs are repeated in Ps. 106:32-33, in reference to the rebellion of nation and Moses’ sin.
  + - “This general statement Moses then followed up with facts, first of all describing the worship of the calf at Horeb, according to its leading features (vv. 8–21), and then briefly pointing to the other rebellions of the people in the desert (vv. 22, 23).”[[200]](#footnote-200)
* Moses chooses the golden calf incident in v. 8 as his example of their remarkable stubbornness, and rightly so. No other event so symbolized the rebellion of the nation as when they built an idol in the very sight of the mountain where God was communicating with Moses.
  + - “The choice of Horeb was no doubt dictated by its central significance; if there was a time above all others when the people should have been faithful, it was during the events associated with the formation of the covenant in Horeb (*you provoked the Lord to anger even in Horeb*, v. 8). But the people’s behavior at Horeb was such that God almost destroyed them; clearly, there could be no ground to argue that the gift of the land would be reward for righteous behavior!”[[201]](#footnote-201)
* Moses states that the Lord **almost destroyed** the people there. This is, of course, personification. The Lord was angry for the sin, but was nevertheless sovereign over the events surrounding this sin. The verbs used are generally associated with the enemies of the nation.
  + - “Once more he used the rare verb *qāṣap* to describe the Lord’s anger, a wrath so severe that it seemed that he would annihilate (*šāmad*) his chosen people (v. 8; cf. Exod 32:10). Though *šāmad* commonly refers to the Lord’s enemies elsewhere and sometimes in connection with *ḥērem*, the ban (cf. Deut 2:21–23; 4:3; 7:24; 9:3), here the target of his anger was Israel (vv. 14, 19, 25; cf. 28:48, 63).”[[202]](#footnote-202)
    - “So intense was Yahweh’s provocation at their rebellion that within forty days of sealing the covenant, he threatened to destroy them (v. 8). So much for moral superiority! Instead of the Israelites’ righteous character commending them to Yahweh, these people have earned divine fury.”[[203]](#footnote-203)
* Moses proceeds to walk through the events at Horeb in v. 9-14, proving the rebellion of the nation.
* Moses recounts his experience, at least in part, of being on Horeb. He calls them the **tablets of the covenant**, a clear reference to the nation’s agreement with God. This statement starts by creating the coming irony - at the very moment that Moses was receiving the terms of the covenant, the nation was below, violating the very first command.
* He tells about the time - he was on the mountain for **40 days and 40 nights**, and during the entire time, **he neither ate bread nor drank water**. This statement clearly shows the miraculous nature of the encounter between God and Moses.
* Jewish commentators claim Moses is elevated to the status of angel.
  + - “Midrashic commentators see Moses’ abstinence as raising him to the status of angels. His assumption of supernatural qualities while he was with God is also implied by the statement in Exodus 34:29–35 that, as a result of speaking with God, his face began to radiate an awesome light.”[[204]](#footnote-204)
* However, though this is clearly miraculous, it does not indicate that Moses was angelic. Rather, it is clear that Moses was the recipient of divine grace during the time on the mountain.
* Many have noticed the similarities between Moses and Christ. The time frame, the physical deprivation, and the quotations from ch. 8 make these appear compelling. For example, see Merrill below:
  + - “This clearly miraculous sojourn gives tangible support to Moses’ own observation that “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut 8:3). Jesus too was deprived of food for forty days (Matt 4:2), and in the midst of his temptation to create bread from stones he quoted Deut 8:3 to make that very point (Matt 4:4). One cannot help but note the reference to bread and stones in light of the experience of Moses, who received the Word of God on stone tablets even while being denied physical food and drink.”[[205]](#footnote-205)
* However, while these similarities are interesting, and may well give the some insight into the temptations of Christ, it is nevertheless unstated in the NT. For that reason, while the connections are interesting, and perhaps almost compelling, it is best to not be dogmatic about the nature of the connections.
* Moses then describes the events that occurred on the mountain, albeit briefly. V10 details that the Lord inscribed the details of the covenant, especially the Ten Commandments, onto stone tablets with His own finger.
  + - “Nowhere else in Scripture is God said to have written anything. Indeed, he consistently revealed himself to human penmen through dreams and visions (or even “face to face,” Num 12:6–8), and they inscribed his words for him. The personal attention to the Ten Commandments underscores their fundamental importance to the entire covenant revelation.”[[206]](#footnote-206)
* That the Lord recorded His words from the day of **assembly** is important. As Moses renews the covenant, and seeks to prove the stubbornness of the nation, he continually focuses attention on the making of the covenant.
* Moses again repeats what the Lord did for him on the mountain in v. 11. The tablets were made by God, and then written by God, and, after 40 day and 40 nights, the Lord gave the tablets to Moses.
* During the time of Moses’ miraculous communion with God, the people were acting differently. They were sitting at the base of the mountain and had created a **molten image**. The Lord tells Moses to **go down quickly** and deal with the people and what they were doing.
* Strikingly, the Lord refers to the Israelites as ‘**your people whom you brought out of Egypt.**’ This statement indicates the Lord’s indignation against the nation. They had sinned against Him through a violation of the covenant, and particularly **by turning aside from the way in which he had commanded them -** an explicit reference to the first and second commandments, both of which had been violated by the molten calf.
* The designation of the people as stiff-necked was not first Moses’, but the Lord’s, according to v. 13.
  + - “The phrase “stiff of neck,” which literally speaks of an ox resisting the yoke of his master, may have been prompted by the sight of the golden calf; with classic irony the people have become like the image they worshiped.”[[207]](#footnote-207)
* Having passed judgment on the people, the Lord asks Moses to ‘**Let me alone**’ in v. 14. Amazingly, the Lord effectively says that He won’t act against the nation without Moses giving his consent. This is a remarkable statement, as though the Lord needs Moses’ permission to act. However, in opening this dialogue, the Lord effectively preempts Moses’ intercession for the nation.
  + - “…the divine *Leave me alone* (v. 14a) was taken by Moses, not as a direct prohibition, but as an invitation to intercession. That he could interpret the words in this way was made possible only through the closeness of his communion with God during the preceding forty days and forty nights.”[[208]](#footnote-208)
* The Lord even offers to make a **nation from Moses**, as a means of removing all external motives for intercession. The offer includes a promise to make the nation **mightier and greater** than the current nation This offer is rejected immediately by Moses, and he chooses instead to press the Lord toward faithfulness to the covenant.
* Some have taken this interaction to show God passibility (changeableness) or even as a point for open theism and against God’s sovereignty. However, such a reading is inaccurate. While it is true that the Lord threatens to destroy the nation at this time, He also appoints the means, even in his own word usage, by which the nation would be spared.
  + - “Psalm 106:23 describes Moses in similar terms: God “would have destroyed them had not Moses His chosen one confronted Him in the breach to avert His destructive wrath.” This role is related to the concepts of divine anger and jealousy. God’s emotional involvement with man is such that outrageous sin provokes Him to passionate anger, not merely detached disapproval. To balance this anger, the prophet is appointed to argue the case for mercy.”[[209]](#footnote-209)
* As a point of fact, this destruction and remaking of the nation would not actually violate God’s promises to the patriarchs, since He would still have made a nation from their progeny.

## Deut 9:15-24 ~ Moses intercedes on behalf of the nation

**“So I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was burning with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. 16 And I saw that you had indeed sinned against the Lord your God. You had made for yourselves a molten calf; you had turned aside quickly from the way which the Lord had commanded you. 17 I took hold of the two tablets and threw them from my hands and smashed them before your eyes. 18 I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you had committed in doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke Him to anger. 19 For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the Lord listened to me that time also. 20 The Lord was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him; so I also prayed for Aaron at the same time. 21 I took your sinful *thing,* the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it very small until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that came down from the mountain.**

* This section now details what Moses did to appease the anger of God in response to the sins of the nation. Moses first makes it clear that he came down the mountain, and the people were worshipping the calf in the very presence of God on the mountain. The fire was still burning, even as they violated God’s commands!
* What the calf represented has been hotly debated. Some have argued that it was fully idolatrous. Other have argued that it was intended to be a representation of YHWH, or, perhaps a footstool or mount for Him. Interestingly, many ancient religions portrayed their gods as riding on calves. This has often been linked to the dependence on the regenerating of cows for milk and sustenance. Regardless, the calf was a supreme violation of the covenant.
  + - “What the calf represented is debated. The most likely view is that it did not represent another deity, but a pedestal or mount on which YHVH was thought to be invisibly present, much as the cherubs in the Holy of Holies were conceived as YHVH’s throne. In any case, it is clear from Exodus 32:8 that even if the original motive for making the calf was nonidolatrous, the people immediately fell to worshiping it and violated the Decalogue’s prohibition against worshiping idols.”[[210]](#footnote-210)
* In a highly symbolic gesture in v. 17, Moses **throws** the two tablets onto the ground and smashes them, Charlton Heston style. The statement that it happened **before their eyes** only serves the heighten the intensity of the moment. This moment serves the overall theme of the section - there was no righteousness in Israel that generated God’s grace to them.
* Moses, having just come down the mountain, and that without sustenance, again falls on his face and prays for the people for forty days and nights without food or water.
  + - “The forty-day session with the Lord to which Moses referred was that in which he had received the revelation of the covenant in the first place (Exod 24:18; cf. 32:11–14). It was appropriate, then, that he spend forty more days in confession and repentance as he awaited the renewal of the gracious covenant of the Lord.”[[211]](#footnote-211)
* The contents of this prayer are revealed later in the chapter. However, the prayer itself is clearly heartfelt. Moses knew that the Lord had already threatened the destroy the nation. He had seen God’s wrath against Nadab and Abihu. Indeed, Moses goes so far as to say that he was afraid of the **hot displeasure** of the **wrath** of God in v. 19 for their violation of the first commandment.
  + - “Moses characterizes Israel’s crime as “all the sin the people had sinned by doing the evil in Yahweh’s eyes” (pers. trans.; cf. 4:25). The definite article on the word for “evil” suggests a specific crime, in this case and generally elsewhere, the violation of the first commandment.”[[212]](#footnote-212)
* However, a relieved Moses reported that **the Lord listened to him that time also**. Clearly this practice of pleading on behalf of the nation was a consistent thing.
* Not only the nation, but Aaron also was at risk, according to v. 20. Moses prays for him as well, during this time of intercession, and the Lord spares his life.
  + - “By allowing himself to be overborne by the tide of popular clamor, Aaron became a partaker in the guilt of idolatry and would have suffered the penalty of his sinful compliance, had not the earnest intercession of Moses on his behalf prevailed.”[[213]](#footnote-213)
* Moses’ destruction of the **sinful thing** (lit. sin - חַטַּאת) is radical. He follows three steps:
  + 1. He **burns** it with fire - this would have reduced the golden image to a lump without form, eliminating the idol worship.
  + 2. He **crushed** it, **grinding it up into powder -** this would have eliminated any potential that the people might seek to reconstituted the idol.
  + 3. He **threw the dust into the river** that came down from the mountain - all vestiges of the idol were thereby eliminated.
  + 4. Not mentioned here, the Exodus account says that Moses made the people drink the water with the gold in it, thereby moving the idol into its proper place - excrement (Ex. 32:20).
* With this complete destruction, there would have been nothing left for the people to worship at all.
  + - “Moses threw the dust into water in order to make the Israelites drink it. Ramban suggests that this was in order to degrade the idol further by turning it into human waste. Rabbinic exegesis, followed by some modern scholars, takes the forced drinking as a kind of ordeal designed to identify the guilty, comparable to the “waters of bitterness” ritual for testing the suspected adulteress (Num. 5:11–31).”[[214]](#footnote-214)
  + This view, however, is unspoken in the text. Further, it appears the entire nation was involved in the idolatry. Therefore there would be no need to seek out the guilty. Rather, this was the defamation of the idol.
* vv. 21-24 outline four other times of extreme rebellion. This section only seeks to seal the deal, so to speak, about Israel’s rebellion and sin.
  + **Taberah** - At Taberah, the nation had already begun grumbling against the Lord, though they were only three days’ journey from Sinai. (Num 10:35–11:1) The name means ‘burning’ because the Lord consumed some of the disobedient stragglers of the nation.
  + **Massah** - a place of testing, because the people had complained over the lack of water, even before the people had reached Sinai. It was there that the people tested God, and Moses provided water by striking the rock. (Ex. 17:1-6)
  + **Kibroth-hattaavah** - The people had grumbled because of the lack of meat, and the Lord had sent quail to them. However, as the people gorged themselves on the quail, the Lord destroyed some of them, leading to the name, ‘graves of craving’. (Num 11:4-32)
  + **Kadesh-barnea** - Of course the crowning moment of faithless sin was the refusal to enter the promised land.
* The point of all these events is stated clearly in v. 24 - from the very moment Moses **knew** the people, they had been **rebellious** against the Lord.

## Deut 9:25-29 ~ Moses’ prayer

**“So I fell down before the Lord the forty days and nights, which I did because the Lord had said He would destroy you. 26 “I prayed to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord God, do not destroy Your people, even Your inheritance, whom You have redeemed through Your greatness, whom You have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 27 ‘Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not look at the stubbornness of this people or at their wickedness or their sin. 28 ‘Otherwise the land from which You brought us may say, “Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land which He had promised them and because He hated them He has brought them out to slay them in the wilderness.” 29 ‘Yet they are Your people, even Your inheritance, whom You have brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm.’”**

* Again Moses repeats that his prayer lasted **forty days and forty nights**. This prayer, he says, is because the Lord had said that He would destroy the people.
* Moses’ prayer is constructed around three basic arguments for why God should not destroy the nation. They center on His character, promise, and ownership. A comparison with other prayers of intercession by Moses is below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Exodus 32:11–14** | **Numbers 14:13–19** | **Deuteronomy 9:26–29** |
| Israel is Yahweh’s people, not his (v. 11a). |  | Israel is Yahweh’s people, not his (v. 26a). |
| Yahweh has invested great effort in saving the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt; by implication, to destroy them would mean this effort was wasted (v. 11b). | Yahweh has invested great effort in saving the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt; by implication, to destroy them would mean this effort was wasted (v. 13). | Yahweh has invested great effort in saving the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt; by implication, to destroy them would mean this effort was wasted (v. 26b). |
| Yahweh’s reputation among the nations will be damaged if he destroys Israel; they will think his intent was malicious from the beginning—to destroy Israel in the desert (v. 12). | Yahweh has been uniquely close to his people; he is in their midst and has been personally leading them; by implication, it makes no sense to destroy them (v. 14). | Hold back for the sake of the patriarchs; overlook the sin of their descendants (v. 27). |
| Hold back for the sake of the patriarchs; to them he promised to multiply their seed and give them the land of Canaan as their possession forever (v. 13). | Yahweh’s reputation among the nations will be damaged if he destroys Israel; they will think that he slaughtered them in the desert because he was unable to carry through on his promise to give them the land (vv. 15–16). | Yahweh’s reputation among the nations will be damaged if he destroys Israel; they will think that he brought them out to destroy them in the desert because he was unable to carry through on his promise to give them the land, and because he hated them (v. 28). |
|  | Yahweh’s gracious character is in question; he has proved himself merciful in the past—may he be gracious again and forgive his people (vv. 17–19). | Israel is Yahweh’s people, not his (v. 29a). |
|  |  | Yahweh has invested great effort in saving the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt; by implication, to destroy them would mean this effort was wasted (v. 29b). |

[[215]](#footnote-215)

* Initially, Moses pleads with God based on His ownership of the people, calling them His **inheritance**, and reiterating that they belong to Him. This is in response to God’s separation from the people in v. 12 because of the golden calf. He repeats this idea twice, forming a set of bookends to His prayer.
* This concept, then, moves Moses to remind God of His work in bringing the nation out of Egypt **with a mighty hand** - a work that proved God’s superiority to the Egyptian gods. Were the Lord to **slay the people there in the wilderness**, His glory in bringing them out would be greatly diminished.
* Finally, Moses reminds Him of His promises to the patriarchs, and pleads with God not to **look at the stubbornness** of the people. This reference is not regarding the promise to make the nation great, since that would have still continued through Moses, but a reference to the lives that the patriarchs lived - they were His **servants.** For their sakes, the nation could be spared.
* The three prayers represent an understanding of the nation as a tool for God’s glory. Their existence proved His faithfulness to His promises, His mercy proved His position as covenant Lord over them, and His giving of the land to them proved His kindness and grace in spite of the their failures.
* Modern readers can misunderstand this prayer and take it to make God into a sort of petulant tyrant who needs to be talked out of a tantrum. Quite to the contrary, Moses’ intercessory prayer is in the plan of God to help the nation understand that their entrance into the land, and indeed their very existence, is solely contingent on God’s merciful choice of them. This points the nation back to 6:4, and God’s care as the basis for their response to Him. It was solely of divine mercy, and should illicit love.
* The entire section is intended to draw attention to Israel’s complete failure, and God’s grace (v.4).

## Deut. 10:1-5 ~ The tablets rewritten

**“At that time the Lord said to me, ‘Cut out for yourself two tablets of stone like the former ones, and come up to Me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood for yourself. 2 ‘I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered, and you shall put them in the ark.’ 3 “So I made an ark of acacia wood and cut out two tablets of stone like the former ones, and went up on the mountain with the two tablets in my hand. 4 “He wrote on the tablets, like the former writing, the Ten Commandments 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. 5 “Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and there they are, as the Lord commanded me.”**

* Moses then recounts the amazing grace of God in reestablishing the covenant with the nation. Remarkably, the covenant **tablets** were to be rewritten, even though their destruction had symbolized the destruction of the covenant between God and the people.
* Moses’ intercessory prayer had clearly been heeded, and the people remained God’s people. However, more than simply a rewriting of the text, the point of the new tablets was that the covenant would be renewed as a result of God’s grace to the people.
* To symbolize the grace of God, Moses was to put the tablets into the **ark of the covenant**, which he was to build prior to coming up the mountain. The law being placed into the ark, under the ‘mercy seat’, reflected that God’s justice should have destroyed the people, but His mercy stood between the law and the people.
* Moses obeys, and **makes the ark of acacia wood** and c**uts the two tablets of stone**. Again, the Lord writes on the tablets the same words (the Ten Commandments) which were on the first tablets.
* The building of the temple accouterments in Exodus falls into a different timeline - namely, after the second ascent. This would make sense, though it changes, at least in part, the events of Exodus, leaving the timeline as follows:
  + The covenant ceremony (24:1–11)
  + Moses’ ascent of the mountain (24:12–33:23)
  + Narrative of the ascent (24:12–18)
  + Instructions for the tabernacle (25:1–31:18)
  + The golden calf (32:1–33:23)
  + The construction of the parts of the tabernacle (35:1–40:16)
  + The re-ascent of the mountain (34:1–35)
  + The assembly of the tabernacle (40:17–38)
* However, a simple answer is that the ark was constructed prior to the ascent, and the rest were constructed after.
* Moses says that God gave them to him, indicating that God’s gracious gift to him, as representative of the nation, was the reinstatement of the covenant, in spite of their disobedience and violation.
  + - “*Then the Lord gave them to me* (v. 4b)—more is involved than simply that another copy of the law was provided because the first two tablets unfortunately got broken. The shattering of the first tablets symbolized the breaking of the covenant relationship because of Israel’s sin in making the calf. The second writing of the law and the gift of the tablets is indicative of the graciousness of God and the response of God to the intercession of Moses.”[[216]](#footnote-216)
* The whole scene is designed to reflect the grace of God on the nation, though they had violated the first and second commandments from the very beginning. They had rebelled in every way possible, the crowning moment of which was the golden calf. And yet, in all this rebellion, and through His anger against them as a nation, the Lord remained faithful to His covenant choice of them. He cannot change!
* As the nation stood on the border of the Jordan, ready to enter the land, God’s choice of them, and His faithfulness to them in spite of their failures should have been believed and trusted. This would be the basis of their obedience in the land.

## Deut 10:6-11 ~ The journey continued

**“(Now the sons of Israel set out from Beeroth Bene-jaakan to Moserah. There Aaron died and there he was buried and Eleazar his son ministered as priest in his place. 7 From there they set out to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land of brooks of water. 8 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 until this day. 9 Therefore, Levi does not have a portion or inheritance with his brothers; the Lord is his inheritance, just as the Lord your God spoke to him.) 10 “I, moreover, stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights like the first time, and the Lord listened to me that time also; the Lord was not willing to destroy you. 11 “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Arise, proceed on your journey ahead of the people, that they may go in and possess the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.’”**

* Some argue that vv. 6-9 are a later addition to the text of the book by an unnamed narrator. The main reason for this is the third person address regarding the sons of Israel. Moses consistently uses the second person plural throughout the book.
* This, however, is a shortsighted interpretation of the text. Moses’ own reflection of the events could certainly have included a simply summary of the events and locations that followed. Particularly given the details of the ark, the need to reference Levi and his duties would have been forefront in Moses’ mind. Also, v. 9 includes a second person pronoun (**the Lord your God)** which is part of the overall parenthetical narrative, but could only have been spoken by Moses.
* The events of vv. 6-7 contain some geographical variations from Numbers 33, where Aaron is said to have died on Mt. Hor (v. 38). Here, **Aaron** is said to have died at Moserah, after the nation journeyed to Beeroth Bene-Jaakan (*the wells of the sons of Jaakan*).
* The chronological difficulty arises only if one takes Moserah to be the same as Moseroth (Num 33:31), which seems to have come before Bene-Jaakan. However, because of the vast number of completely unknown locations in the travel log in Numbers 33 and in Deuteronomy, a dogmatic statement of variation is impossible. Instead, it seems more clear that the different accounts represent varying names for locations in the area, very few of which can be pinpointed with any modern accuracy.
* The theological principle, however, is clear from the text. Aaron’s death was, like Moses’ own punishment, the result of his disobedience. The soul that sins will die, and though Aaron was spared in the moment, eventually he was punished as well. However, in spite of any single personal failure, the Lord’s faithfulness would continue. Aaron’s son **Eleazar was appointed to minister as priest in his place**.
* Having commented on God’s faithfulness to place a son of Aaron as the priest before Him, Moses speaks of Levi and his children has those who would serve before the Lord forever, rather than having an inheritance.
* Here the Levites are said to have three distinct roles -
  + 1. To **carry the ark** - the covenant responsibilities, as well as the mercy of God, were to be with the people forever. The Levites were tasked with carrying the ark and maintaining, in that sense, the covenant between the Lord and the people.
  + 2. To **stand before the Lord to serve Him** - this statement reflects the work of the Levites in maintaining the covenant from God’s side. They were to offer the necessary sacrifices and do the necessary acts in order to maintain God’s mercy toward the people.
  + 3. To **bless in His name** - this statement reflects the Levitical role of blessing the people in the name of God. They were the messengers of God’s covenant love and faithfulness to the nation, and as such, were called to bless the people in His name.
* Because of this unique role as mediators between God and the people, the Levites needed no inheritance in the land. Rather, God Himself was t**heir inheritance**, and from their service to Him they would derive their sustenance.
  + - “…the Levites, who were not to have a share in the promised land similar to that which was to be assigned to their fellow tribes, would nevertheless have a noble inheritance, namely, the Lord himself. They would live by participating in that which was given directly to the Lord. Though they would not have the physical security derived from their own personal property, they had the high honor of directly serving the Lord on behalf of their fellow Israelites.”[[217]](#footnote-217)
* Moses concludes the narrative by stating that he spent the same duration of time on the mountain, and then was instructed to continue on the journey. The overall message is therefore clear - the nation is rebellious, faithless, and sinful. However, God is loyal, faithful, and righteous, and therefore will remain faithful to His choice of the nation in spite of their sin and failure.

Deut. 10:12–11:32 ~ Love and Serve the Lord

* Moses has taken two chapters to consider the faithfulness of God for the nation in the wilderness and in the land (chapter 8) and then the rebellion and stubbornness of the people (9-10:11). He now concludes with the same encouragement he had in chapter 6 - love and serve the Lord.
* The first section consists of a three-fold direction and application for the people based on God’s grace. The second half of this section ends with the blessing and the curse and the need for covenant loyalty as a result.

## Deut. 10:12-22 ~ The Three Warnings

**12 Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 *and* to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? 14 “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. 15 “Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, *even* you above all peoples, as *it is* this day. 16 “So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. 17 “For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. 18 “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. 19 “So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. 20 “You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name. 21 “He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen. 22 “Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons *in all,* and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.**

* Moses now provides a summary for how they should respond in light of God’s amazing grace to them as a nation. This is **what God requires of them**. A simple structure is below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **The Issue** | **So what does Yahweh your God ask of you? (10:12a)** | **So what does Yahweh your God ask of you? (10:12a)** | **So what does Yahweh your God ask of you? (10:12a)** |
| The Requirement | I (10:12b–15) | II (10:16–19) | III (10:20–22) |
|  | You shall fear Yahweh your God, walk in all his ways, love him, and serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and keep the commands and statutes of Yahweh, which I am commanding you today for your good. (10:12b–13) | Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. (10:16) | You shall fear Yahweh your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. (10:20) |
| The Doxology | Behold, to Yahweh your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. (10:14) | For Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. (10:17) | He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. (10:21) |
| The Application | Yet Yahweh set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. (10:15) | He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. (10:18–19) | Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now Yahweh your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven. (10:22) |
| The Conclusion | You shall therefore love Yahweh your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commands always. (11:1) |  |  |

[[218]](#footnote-218)

* The five commands stated in v. 12, interestingly, do not begin with love, though the explanation of the first commandment did. The explanation lies in the fact that the commandments are divided by ‘and’ in the context. This provides a functional flow for what the nation must do. The first two commands are:
  + They must **reverence God** - the fear of God in Deuteronomy is not terror, but awe. Their hearts should move in worship toward God.
  + They must **walk in all His ways** - A life of obedience. This is the same as the statement in v. 13, to keep the Lord’s commands and statutes.
* Taken together, this is the first basis for the obedience to the Law, found and expressed at the foot of Sinai (5:24-28). The ‘and’ then transitions to the heart of the covenant, which then leads to obedience. The next three are:
  + They must **love Him** - So moving from fear/reverence, Moses requires that the nation love Him. This transition moves into chapter 6 and the Shema.
  + They must **serve the Lord with their whole heart and soul** - the heart that is truly loving the Lord will, from the heart, serve Him.
  + They must **keep the Lord’s commandments and statutes** - the nation must obey the commands of God. This is the conclusion of the statements, and the commands are for their **good,** from a God who has loved them and chosen them.
* These second three commands represent the same trajectory, from heart motivation to life conformity, but done according to a love for God. Moses holds out two statements on obedience, both rooted in heart issues. The nation must worship and love God, and from that heart, serve Him.
* The basis for this obedience is found in the doxological statement of v. 14 - quite simply God is the owner of the **heavens** and the **earth**. This same structure is made explicit in Psalm 8:3-4. **Highest heaven** (literally ‘heaven of heavens’) is not a cosmic statement, but a Hebrew idiom to mean totality. Everything above the earth, and all that is in it, is a possession of the Lord.
* However, in spite of His majesty and authority, He **set His affection** on the patriarchs and the nation that would arise from them. This is the basis for the commandment which was before, just as in the Shema.
  + - “The condescension of the Lord, Sovereign over all, to choose Israel is a theme expressed at the very beginning of the nation’s covenant history, for in the desert of Sinai the Lord had invited Israel into covenant partnership on the very basis of his elective grace. “Although the whole earth is mine,” he said, “you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5–6). This sentiment is echoed in Deut 7:6–8, where Israel is reminded that they possessed no special qualifications to be God’s people but became such only as he chose them among many options.”[[219]](#footnote-219)
* The second command follows closely and logically from this first one. Moses tells them to **circumcise their hearts,** and to **be stiff-necked no longer**. Very simply, Moses tells them that they must stop sinning from the heart.
* The plain fact was that their hearts still had not been cleansed of evil through the covenant (of which circumcision was a sign), so as to produce genuine obedience to the commands. This metaphor is used throughout the OT for the hearts of the nation, and again in the NT for the heart of a believer.
  + Later in the book, Moses will say that ultimately, in a future time, God will accomplish this for them (30:6-8).
  + The prophet Jeremiah, at the time of the exile of Judah, makes it clear that the nation’s requirement was just the same at that time, as now - that they would circumcise their hearts in obedience. (Jer. 4:4)
  + Finally, Paul picks up this metaphor in the condemnation of the self-righteous Jew in Romans 2:28-29, indicating that is is only those who are circumcised in heart that can please God.
* It would be foolishness of the highest order to fight against God who made heaven and earth, and yet the nation’s neck was stiff. Moses’ injunction here is simply to stop rebelling against God.
* Again, the basis for the command is found in God Himself. He is the God of gods (authoritative over heavenly beings), and the Lord of lords (authoritative over earthly beings) - a phrase used repeatedly in the NT. He is, therefore, **the great, the mighty, and the awesome God** who is over all things and who **shows absolutely no partiality or takes a bribe**.
  + The phrase ‘no partiality’ is literally ‘who does not lift up faces’ (אֲשֶׁר֙ לֹא־יִשָּׂ֣א פָנִ֔ים), a reference to a judge or king lifting the face to look at who was receiving the punishment. The blindfolded representation of lady justice reflects this same idea.
    - “God *does* require love; but those, for example, who outwardly obeyed the commandments, but did not love God, were in effect offering God a bribe. They were saying: “Look, I’m doing this and that correctly, so taking these things into account, perhaps the rest could be overlooked?” God required of man a wholehearted commitment in love, from which all other proper behavior stemmed; God saw what was in the heart and could not be persuaded or bribed into reducing his requirements of man.”[[220]](#footnote-220)
* The proof of God’s impartiality is that He provides **justice for the widow and the orphan.** This concept is expressed throughout the OT (Ps 68:5; 146:9, others) and is reflective of God’s care over all His creatures.
* He also shows l**ove to the alien** by providing **food and clothing** for him. This phrase hearkens back to v. 15, where God states his love for the patriarchs. However, the love God has for them is different than His love for the alien. To them he has given the blessing of the land and the unconditional covenant. To the alien He gives materials sustenance.
* Nevertheless, the nation should reflect God’s heart for the alien by loving the alien as well. Interestingly, this is the very concept that Jesus draws out in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27ff) when asked by the scribe. The neighbor (Lev. 19:18) is the alien halfbreed Samaritan who lives in their midst.
* The second motivation for loving the alien is a recollection of their own sojourning in the land of **Egypt**. They were aliens, and so they should remember and understand why they should have compassion.
* The third requirement is stated in v. 20 - that they should **fear**, **serve**, and **cling** to YHWH. These are the same verbs as in v. 12, with the exception of ‘cling’ or hold fast. This term is used of a heart affection for YHWH above any other affection (11:22, 13:14). These phrases
* Moses also says that they should **swear by His name**. This phrase completes the exact list of verbs found in 6:13 (for explanation, see commentary there).
* These verbs together represent the outworking of the command to love the Lord - the heart that is truly loving YHWH will fear, serve, and feel affection for Him and Him alone. The same injunction is made in Josh 23:7 after the conquest. The nation must continue to cling to the Lord.
* The reasoning for obedience of this third command is again rooted in the person of God Himself. He is their God and also is their **praise -** the one whom they praise by metonymy. And He has done **awesome things for them**, the first of which is turning a group of **70 people** into a massive nation over the course of 400 years. The concluding phrase, **the stars of heaven,** is a clear reference to the promise to Abraham in Gen. 15:5.
* All three motivations are rooted in the character of God and His grace to the nation. Because He chose them, they should respond by loving and serving and obeying Him.

## Deut 11:1-12 ~ Loving God, Keeping the Law, Blessing

**1 “You shall therefore love the Lord your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments. 2 “Know this day that I *am* not *speaking* with 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, 3 and His signs and His works which He did in the midst of Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land; 4 and what He did to Egypt’s army, to its horses and its chariots, when He made the water of the Red Sea to engulf them while they were pursuing you, and the Lord completely destroyed them; 5 and what He did to you in the wilderness until you came to this place; 6 and what He did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, among all Israel— 7 but your own eyes have seen all the great work of the Lord which He did.**

**8 “You shall therefore keep every commandment which I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land into which you are about to cross to possess it; 9 so that you may prolong *your* days on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them and to their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 “For the land, into which you are entering to possess it, is not like the land of Egypt from which you came, where you used to sow your seed and water it with your foot like a vegetable garden. 11 “But the land into which you are about to cross to possess it, a land of hills and valleys, drinks water from the rain of heaven, 12 a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning even to the end of the year.**

* This chapter will bring to a conclusion the long section detailing the grace of God and His care over the people in vv. 26-32.
  + - “The blessing and curse in vv. 26-32 follow in accordance to Israel’s attitude toward (1) the Lord’s dealings with his people in the past (vv. 1–7), (2) his promise to them of a good land (vv. 8–17), and (3) their adherence to and instruction of the covenant requirements to their offspring yet to come (vv. 18–25).”[[221]](#footnote-221)
* Again, Moses reminds them that they must **love God**, and from that love, **keep His commandments** to them.
* And Moses reminds them that they are not those who have **not seen the works** of God. While many of them would have been young, a large number of those alive would have been present at the events that Moses will describe in vv. 3-7. Moses includes four events that show the power and glory and judgment of YHWH:
  + First, Moses reminds them of the plagues in Egypt before Pharaoh was willing to allow the people to leave the land. (Ex. 7:8ff)
  + Second, Moses reminds them of the power of God in **destroying Pharaoh and his army** under the waters of the Red Sea. The entire army of Egypt was **engulfed** in the waters. (Ex. 14:28ff)
  + Third, in a simple phrase, Moses reminds the nation of all that God did for them during the years of **wilderness** wanderings.
  + Fourth, Moses reminds them of the events surrounding **Dathan and Abiram**, who, along with Korah, stood up to Moses and Aaron and sought to take leadership of the nation. (Num 16:1-35) Moses reminds them that the earth opened and **swallowed** them up along with **all their possessions** and **every living thing** that followed them.
* The people had seen these events **with their own eyes** - they knew that the Lord was powerful both to bless and to destroy.
  + - “Both of these lessons from history—the positive in Egypt and the negative in the desert sojourn—should have been fresh in the minds of Moses’ audience, for it was they, and not their children (cf. vv. 2, 5), who had seen them.”[[222]](#footnote-222)
* For this reason, in v. 8 Moses tells the nation that they must therefore **keep every commandment** that he is giving them. History should warn the nation that God was not to be trifled with and therefore, they should obey. From this command, two purpose statements are derived in 8b and 9.
* The first outcome of their obedience would be threefold - they would **be strong**, they **would go in**, and they would **possess the land**. All three statements have been covered in detail regarding the conquest.
* The second outcome of their obedience would be that they would **prolong their days on the land**. The statement reflects God’s bilateral covenant with Israel. The current generation would enter the land, but Moses tells them what is necessary to keep the land that has been promised to the fathers.
* To describe the land and its blessings, Moses explains the irrigation system of Egypt and how Canaan was different.
* According to Moses, the watering of crops in Egypt was **by foot**. The phrase could mean something akin to an irrigation system which included a pump of some kind, or could refer to much simpler methods.
  + - “Literally, “by your foot,” referring to some aspect of the Egyptian irrigation system. It may refer to the use of the foot for opening and closing sluice gates, or to the more primitive method of making and breaking down ridges of dirt to control the flow of water into the irrigation channels in gardens and fields, as has been observed in Egypt and Israel.[[223]](#footnote-223)
* In contrast, the land of Canaan was full of **hills and valleys**. Such landscape could not be watered by simple irrigation methods, but would be completely dependent on the **rain of heaven**.
* Further, Moses says that the eyes of God are always on Canaan. Though the people were dependent completely on the Lord to provide water for their crops, the Lord’s presence is assured. He would watch the land. The verb used here (דֹּרֵ֣שׁ - *dāraš*) is generally translated as ‘to seek’, but here carries a meaning of election. God had not only elected Israel, but He elected the land itself.
* God’s providential care over the land would be constant. From the b**eginning of the year to the end of the year**, God could be counted on to observe the land. However, while God’s ever watching **eyes** could be a sign of blessing, they could also be the sign of impending judgment, should the people choose to disobey.
  + - “The dependence of the land on God for irrigation is both an advantage and disadvantage, and the rabbis discussed whether verses 10–12 mean to praise the land or denigrate it. In the end they decided that the passage is one of praise but, as Rashbam observed, “This land is better than Egypt and all other lands to those who observe God’s commands, but worse than all other lands to those who do not observe them.”[[224]](#footnote-224)

## Deut 11:13-17 ~ The Rains Down in Canaan

**13 “It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, 14 that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil. 15 “He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. 16 “Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them. 17 “Or the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you.**

* The obedience of the people to the commandments which Moses is giving will certainly result in blessing. Specifically Moses focuses on the Shema, and its outworking in daily life. **To love God and serve Him with the whole heart and soul** would bring the blessing of God on the people and the land.
  + - “Moses begins by defining the passing grade, the correct response to the test (vv. 13–15). His exhortation involves themes we have heard before. The Israelites are to listen carefully to the commands and demonstrate their covenant commitment (“love”) as well as their unreserved vassaldom to Yahweh (“serve”). As elsewhere, by adding “today” Moses creates a sense of urgency. His injunctions are not for the distant future but are to be applied immediately. The Israelites must commit themselves today, even before they cross the Jordan, and in the perpetual present once they have crossed.”[[225]](#footnote-225)
* The blessing of God would be via **rain** with would come **in its season**. For an agrarian society, rain was the very basis of all life. If the rain didn’t fall, the people and livestock died. But if too much or ill-timed rain fell, it would also spell disaster. Therefore, the promise of rain in the proper season was a promise of abundance and blessing.
  + - “Contrary to common belief, the amount of rainfall in agricultural areas in … Israel is no less than in agricultural countries in the temperate zones. The difference lies not in the annual amount of rain, but in the number of rainy days and in the intensity of rain per hour or per day. In … Israel the entire annual amount falls in 40 to 60 days in a season of seven to eight months. In temperate climates precipitation occurs on 180 days spread over 12 months.”[[226]](#footnote-226)
* The rains are divided into two seasons - early and late, or autumn and spring.
  + - “In Israel, the first showers, known as the *yoreh*, fall intermittently in October and November. They soften the soil, which is hardened and cracked from the summer, and permit farmers to begin plowing and sowing. The rain increases from December through February, with about seventy percent of the year’s rain normally falling in these months. The final showers, or *malkosh* (“late rain”), come in April or early May, right before the final burst of growth of the grain and are crucial for its maturation. If the early or late rains come too soon or are delayed, this can unduly lengthen or shorten the growing season and stunt the growth of the grain, impede the harvest, or cause it to rot. The talmudic treatise *Taʿanit* prescribes fasting if the rain is delayed, and it observes that rain falling after the normal rainy season was considered a curse.”[[227]](#footnote-227)
* The rains would not only grow crops, but **grass** lands for the **cattle** and livestock so that the people would be abundantly fed. In all of this, the people would be fed and would be **satisfied**.
* On the contrary, vv. 16-17 tells us that should they fail to love and serve and obey God, the opposite would occur.
* The sin that would incur God’s judgment was a violation of the first commandment - a service to some other god besides YHWH. This would, of course, also lead to a violation of the second command.
* Should this occur, Moses says that God will **shut up the heavens** so that the rain will stop and the ground will no longer be fertile. This promise of future judgment regarding the rains is specifically repeated by Solomon at the commissioning of the temple (1 Kings 8:35), and then again as the sign of God’s judgment at the time of Elijah (1 Kings 17-18). The promise to the nation after her restoration is that God will send the early and late rains again (Joel 2:23).
* If the rain stops, Moses says that the nation will **perish quickly from the land**. God’s provision, and the blessing of the land, is therefore contingent on their loving Him.

## Deut 11:18-32 ~ The Blessing and the Curse

**18 “You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 19 “You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. 20 “You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as blong as the heavens *remain* above the earth. 22 “For if you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him, 23 then the Lord will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you. 24 “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; your border will be from the wilderness to Lebanon, *and* from the river, the river Euphrates, as far as the western sea. 25 “No man will be able to stand before you; the Lord your God will lay the dread of you and the fear of you on all the land on which you set foot, as He has spoken to you.**

**26 “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known.**

**29 “It shall come about, when the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. 30 “Are they not across the Jordan, west of the way toward the sunset, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oaks of Moreh? 31 “For you are about to cross the Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall possess it and live in it, 32 and you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the judgments which I am setting before you today.**

* Vv. 18-21 are almost an exact repetition of 6:6-9. Moses has led them on a lengthy discussion about their unfaithfulness and God’s faithfulness to prove to them that the Lord loves them and has chosen them. This should have inspired the nation to turn to Him in love, and therefore to obey Him. History would prove that no amount of God’s kindness to the nation would change their hearts, thus leading to the statements of the New Covenant in Jer. 31:31 and Ezek. 36.
* Fascinatingly, the final phrase of this repetition is added. Moses says that their obedience would ensure that the nation would have the land **as long as the heavens are above the earth**. This phrase indicates that the fixed order of creation would be the timetable for Israel’s blessing, should she obey. The same concept is repeated in Jer. 31:35-37 for God’s faithfulness to Israel and His care over her.
* In v. 22, Moses repeats the Shema, but with the addition of the outworking of it - that the people would **love** God, and would **walk** in all His ways, and **hold fast** to Him. Love and obedience are called for, and a heart that clings to God in these things.
* In vv. 23-25, Moses repeats the promise of God’s blessing on the nation that he has already spelled out. The repetition of the land borders in v. 24 (see 1:7-8) and the promise of God’s hand to make the nations dread them (see 2:25 and 7:23-24) are both repetitions from the previous sections.
* Moses says that everywhere their foot treads would be theirs. The picture is one of domination.
  + - “To tread on the land (*dārak*) was to assert dominion as many instances of the use of this verb attest. For example, Caleb’s land grant was that property on which he trod in faith (Deut 1:36), and in the blessing of Moses on the tribes he equated victory over Israel’s enemies with treading upon their “high places” (33:29). Isaiah is especially rich in this idiom. The prophet spoke of the returning exiles as treading a previously unknown path in triumph (42:16) and of the Lord himself treading victoriously over his fallen foes (62:1–3). The imagery here is of a wine vat in which the grapes are crushed underfoot until their “blood” (i.e., their juice) spatters the robe of the wine maker. The same picture appears elsewhere in Isaiah (22:5; 26:6; 28:3) and in the Book of Revelation, where Jesus Christ, as conquering King, rules the nations with an iron scepter and treads recalcitrant sinners under his feet like grapes in a winepress (Rev 19:11–16).”[[228]](#footnote-228)
* In sum, these verses represent the summary of all that has come before. Moses has made his case. The nation is rebellion and unfaithful. God is faithful, and has chosen the nation to be His people. They must trust in that love, and then serve Him with their whole heart and life. If they will do this, the Lord will fulfill the unconditional promises made to Abraham on them through the Mosaic covenant.
* vv. 26-28 summarize Moses’ entire point, and represent the conclusion to the covenant foundations. This statement is expanded into two chapters as Moses closes the book. In this way, the center of the covenant - the Shema - as a fulfillment of the first commandment becomes the center of the rest of the book.
* Additionally, the statements of 26-28 are expanded into a full explanation of the blessings and cursing attached to covenant loyalty in chapter 27-28. These are material blessings as a result of spiritual loyalty to YHWH. A structural outline is:

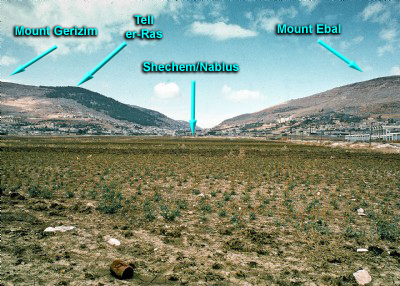
(a) The blessing and curse in the *present* renewal of the covenant (11:26–28).

(b) The blessing and curse in the *future* renewal of the covenant (11:29–32).

(c) The specific legislation (12:1–26:19).

(d) The blessing and curse in the *future* renewal of the covenant (27:1–26).

(e) The blessing and curse in the *present* renewal of the covenant (28:1–29:1).[[229]](#footnote-229)

* The mark of obedience or disobedience is to **listen** or **not listen** to the commands of God. Those who listen will obey, so long as their hearts are loving God and obeying the first commandment.
* On the contrary, those who do not listen are those who turn aside from the way in order to follow other gods, thereby violating the first commandment.
* The explanation of the law to follow was a reflection of Moses’ pastoral heart for them. His great desire was to see them blessed rather than cursed. His commentary is therefore an appeal to obedience unto a better and more full life, lived, not so much in the land, but in the fullness of the blessing of YHWH.

*(Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal, with Shechem in the middle)*

* Vv. 29-32 give specific direction regarding what the people should do when they cross the Jordan. Moses says that they should place the blessing on Mt. Gerizim, and the curse on Mt. Ebal. This is later described in more detail in 27:12-14.
  + - “The two mountains mentioned were selected for this act, no doubt because they were opposite to one another, and stood, each about 2500 feet high, in the very centre of the land not only from west to east, but also from north to south. Ebal stands upon the north side, Gerizim upon the south; between the two is *Sichem*, the present *Nabulus*, in a tolerably elevated valley, fertile, attractive, and watered by many springs, which runs from the south-east to the north-west from the foot of Gerizim to that of Ebal, and is about 1600 feet in breadth.”[[230]](#footnote-230)
* The practice of this would be to divide the nation into two groups by tribes, six on each mountain. For the blessing on Gerizim, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin, and for the curse on Ebal, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.
* The Levites would then call out all the words of the Law so that everyone in the nation could hear it.
* The language of Moses is certainly recorded explicitly here, as he asks the rhetorical question regarding the specific geographic location, including details of cities.
  + - “It is across the Jordan, beyond the road that leads west from the Jordan River to Shechem, between Gerizim and Ebal, in the land of the Canaanites, who live in the Arabah opposite Gilgal north of Jericho, next to the great trees of Moreh.”[[231]](#footnote-231)
* The only other time the oaks of Moreh are mentioned is in Gen. 12:6-7, which gives a key to why the location of Shechem. This was the location where Abraham was first given the promise of the land. It is therefore the first place where the nation would covenant with YHWH in the actual land.
* This makes Shechem a location of deep covenant importance. It is the location where Joseph’s bones were buried (Josh. 24:32). It is also the place where Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, foolishly divides the kingdom (1 Kings 12:1ff). Jeroboam I built a shrine in the location as a way to keep the people of Israel from traveling to Jerusalem for worship.
* Moses concludes with the confident statement that the nation will certainly **go over and possess the land and live in it**. As if almost begging, Moses concludes pastorally with the appeal that the people obey commands of God which he is explaining to them.

Deut. 10:12–11:32 ~ Love and Serve the Lord

* Moses has taken two chapters to consider the faithfulness of God for the nation in the wilderness and in the land (chapter 8) and then the rebellion and stubbornness of the people (9-10:11). He now concludes with the same encouragement he had in chapter 6 - love and serve the Lord.
* The first section consists of a three-fold direction and application for the people based on God’s grace. The second half of this section ends with the blessing and the curse and the need for covenant loyalty as a result.

## Deut. 10:12-22 ~ The Three Warnings

**12 Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 *and* to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? 14 “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. 15 “Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, *even* you above all peoples, as *it is* this day. 16 “So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. 17 “For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. 18 “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. 19 “So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. 20 “You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name. 21 “He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen. 22 “Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons *in all,* and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.**

* Moses now provides a summary for how they should respond in light of God’s amazing grace to them as a nation. This is **what God requires of them**. A simple structure is below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **The Issue** | **So what does Yahweh your God ask of you? (10:12a)** | **So what does Yahweh your God ask of you? (10:12a)** | **So what does Yahweh your God ask of you? (10:12a)** |
| The Requirement | I (10:12b–15) | II (10:16–19) | III (10:20–22) |
|  | You shall fear Yahweh your God, walk in all his ways, love him, and serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and keep the commands and statutes of Yahweh, which I am commanding you today for your good. (10:12b–13) | Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. (10:16) | You shall fear Yahweh your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. (10:20) |
| The Doxology | Behold, to Yahweh your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. (10:14) | For Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. (10:17) | He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. (10:21) |
| The Application | Yet Yahweh set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. (10:15) | He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. (10:18–19) | Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now Yahweh your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven. (10:22) |
| The Conclusion | You shall therefore love Yahweh your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commands always. (11:1) |  |  |

[[232]](#footnote-232)

* The five commands stated in v. 12, interestingly, do not begin with love, though the explanation of the first commandment did. The explanation lies in the fact that the commandments are divided by ‘and’ in the context. This provides a functional flow for what the nation must do. The first two commands are:
  + They must **reverence God** - the fear of God in Deuteronomy is not terror, but awe. Their hearts should move in worship toward God.
  + They must **walk in all His ways** - A life of obedience. This is the same as the statement in v. 13, to keep the Lord’s commands and statutes.
* Taken together, this is the first basis for the obedience to the Law, found and expressed at the foot of Sinai (5:24-28). The ‘and’ then transitions to the heart of the covenant, which then leads to obedience. The next three are:
  + They must **love Him** - So moving from fear/reverence, Moses requires that the nation love Him. This transition moves into chapter 6 and the Shema.
  + They must **serve the Lord with their whole heart and soul** - the heart that is truly loving the Lord will, from the heart, serve Him.
  + They must **keep the Lord’s commandments and statutes** - the nation must obey the commands of God. This is the conclusion of the statements, and the commands are for their **good,** from a God who has loved them and chosen them.
* These second three commands represent the same trajectory, from heart motivation to life conformity, but done according to a love for God. Moses holds out two statements on obedience, both rooted in heart issues. The nation must worship and love God, and from that heart, serve Him.
* The basis for this obedience is found in the doxological statement of v. 14 - quite simply God is the owner of the **heavens** and the **earth**. This same structure is made explicit in Psalm 8:3-4. **Highest heaven** (literally ‘heaven of heavens’) is not a cosmic statement, but a Hebrew idiom to mean totality. Everything above the earth, and all that is in it, is a possession of the Lord.
* However, in spite of His majesty and authority, He **set His affection** on the patriarchs and the nation that would arise from them. This is the basis for the commandment which was before, just as in the Shema.
  + - “The condescension of the Lord, Sovereign over all, to choose Israel is a theme expressed at the very beginning of the nation’s covenant history, for in the desert of Sinai the Lord had invited Israel into covenant partnership on the very basis of his elective grace. “Although the whole earth is mine,” he said, “you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5–6). This sentiment is echoed in Deut 7:6–8, where Israel is reminded that they possessed no special qualifications to be God’s people but became such only as he chose them among many options.”[[233]](#footnote-233)
* The second command follows closely and logically from this first one. Moses tells them to **circumcise their hearts,** and to **be stiff-necked no longer**. Very simply, Moses tells them that they must stop sinning from the heart.
* The plain fact was that their hearts still had not been cleansed of evil through the covenant (of which circumcision was a sign), so as to produce genuine obedience to the commands. This metaphor is used throughout the OT for the hearts of the nation, and again in the NT for the heart of a believer.
  + Later in the book, Moses will say that ultimately, in a future time, God will accomplish this for them (30:6-8).
  + The prophet Jeremiah, at the time of the exile of Judah, makes it clear that the nation’s requirement was just the same at that time, as now - that they would circumcise their hearts in obedience. (Jer. 4:4)
  + Finally, Paul picks up this metaphor in the condemnation of the self-righteous Jew in Romans 2:28-29, indicating that is is only those who are circumcised in heart that can please God.
* It would be foolishness of the highest order to fight against God who made heaven and earth, and yet the nation’s neck was stiff. Moses’ injunction here is simply to stop rebelling against God.
* Again, the basis for the command is found in God Himself. He is the God of gods (authoritative over heavenly beings), and the Lord of lords (authoritative over earthly beings) - a phrase used repeatedly in the NT. He is, therefore, **the great, the mighty, and the awesome God** who is over all things and who **shows absolutely no partiality or takes a bribe**.
  + The phrase ‘no partiality’ is literally ‘who does not lift up faces’ (אֲשֶׁר֙ לֹא־יִשָּׂ֣א פָנִ֔ים), a reference to a judge or king lifting the face to look at who was receiving the punishment. The blindfolded representation of lady justice reflects this same idea.
    - “God *does* require love; but those, for example, who outwardly obeyed the commandments, but did not love God, were in effect offering God a bribe. They were saying: “Look, I’m doing this and that correctly, so taking these things into account, perhaps the rest could be overlooked?” God required of man a wholehearted commitment in love, from which all other proper behavior stemmed; God saw what was in the heart and could not be persuaded or bribed into reducing his requirements of man.”[[234]](#footnote-234)
* The proof of God’s impartiality is that He provides **justice for the widow and the orphan.** This concept is expressed throughout the OT (Ps 68:5; 146:9, others) and is reflective of God’s care over all His creatures.
* He also shows l**ove to the alien** by providing **food and clothing** for him. This phrase hearkens back to v. 15, where God states his love for the patriarchs. However, the love God has for them is different than His love for the alien. To them he has given the blessing of the land and the unconditional covenant. To the alien He gives materials sustenance.
* Nevertheless, the nation should reflect God’s heart for the alien by loving the alien as well. Interestingly, this is the very concept that Jesus draws out in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27ff) when asked by the scribe. The neighbor (Lev. 19:18) is the alien halfbreed Samaritan who lives in their midst.
* The second motivation for loving the alien is a recollection of their own sojourning in the land of **Egypt**. They were aliens, and so they should remember and understand why they should have compassion.
* The third requirement is stated in v. 20 - that they should **fear**, **serve**, and **cling** to YHWH. These are the same verbs as in v. 12, with the exception of ‘cling’ or hold fast. This term is used of a heart affection for YHWH above any other affection (11:22, 13:14). These phrases
* Moses also says that they should **swear by His name**. This phrase completes the exact list of verbs found in 6:13 (for explanation, see commentary there).
* These verbs together represent the outworking of the command to love the Lord - the heart that is truly loving YHWH will fear, serve, and feel affection for Him and Him alone. The same injunction is made in Josh 23:7 after the conquest. The nation must continue to cling to the Lord.
* The reasoning for obedience of this third command is again rooted in the person of God Himself. He is their God and also is their **praise -** the one whom they praise by metonymy. And He has done **awesome things for them**, the first of which is turning a group of **70 people** into a massive nation over the course of 400 years. The concluding phrase, **the stars of heaven,** is a clear reference to the promise to Abraham in Gen. 15:5.
* All three motivations are rooted in the character of God and His grace to the nation. Because He chose them, they should respond by loving and serving and obeying Him.

## Deut 11:1-12 ~ Loving God, Keeping the Law, Blessing

**1 “You shall therefore love the Lord your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments. 2 “Know this day that I *am* not *speaking* with 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, 3 and His signs and His works which He did in the midst of Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land; 4 and what He did to Egypt’s army, to its horses and its chariots, when He made the water of the Red Sea to engulf them while they were pursuing you, and the Lord completely destroyed them; 5 and what He did to you in the wilderness until you came to this place; 6 and what He did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, among all Israel— 7 but your own eyes have seen all the great work of the Lord which He did.**

**8 “You shall therefore keep every commandment which I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land into which you are about to cross to possess it; 9 so that you may prolong *your* days on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them and to their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 “For the land, into which you are entering to possess it, is not like the land of Egypt from which you came, where you used to sow your seed and water it with your foot like a vegetable garden. 11 “But the land into which you are about to cross to possess it, a land of hills and valleys, drinks water from the rain of heaven, 12 a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning even to the end of the year.**

* This chapter will bring to a conclusion the long section detailing the grace of God and His care over the people in vv. 26-32.
  + - “The blessing and curse in vv. 26-32 follow in accordance to Israel’s attitude toward (1) the Lord’s dealings with his people in the past (vv. 1–7), (2) his promise to them of a good land (vv. 8–17), and (3) their adherence to and instruction of the covenant requirements to their offspring yet to come (vv. 18–25).”[[235]](#footnote-235)
* Again, Moses reminds them that they must **love God**, and from that love, **keep His commandments** to them.
* And Moses reminds them that they are not those who have **not seen the works** of God. While many of them would have been young, a large number of those alive would have been present at the events that Moses will describe in vv. 3-7. Moses includes four events that show the power and glory and judgment of YHWH:
  + First, Moses reminds them of the plagues in Egypt before Pharaoh was willing to allow the people to leave the land. (Ex. 7:8ff)
  + Second, Moses reminds them of the power of God in **destroying Pharaoh and his army** under the waters of the Red Sea. The entire army of Egypt was **engulfed** in the waters. (Ex. 14:28ff)
  + Third, in a simple phrase, Moses reminds the nation of all that God did for them during the years of **wilderness** wanderings.
  + Fourth, Moses reminds them of the events surrounding **Dathan and Abiram**, who, along with Korah, stood up to Moses and Aaron and sought to take leadership of the nation. (Num 16:1-35) Moses reminds them that the earth opened and **swallowed** them up along with **all their possessions** and **every living thing** that followed them.
* The people had seen these events **with their own eyes** - they knew that the Lord was powerful both to bless and to destroy.
  + - “Both of these lessons from history—the positive in Egypt and the negative in the desert sojourn—should have been fresh in the minds of Moses’ audience, for it was they, and not their children (cf. vv. 2, 5), who had seen them.”[[236]](#footnote-236)
* For this reason, in v. 8 Moses tells the nation that they must therefore **keep every commandment** that he is giving them. History should warn the nation that God was not to be trifled with and therefore, they should obey. From this command, two purpose statements are derived in 8b and 9.
* The first outcome of their obedience would be threefold - they would **be strong**, they **would go in**, and they would **possess the land**. All three statements have been covered in detail regarding the conquest.
* The second outcome of their obedience would be that they would **prolong their days on the land**. The statement reflects God’s bilateral covenant with Israel. The current generation would enter the land, but Moses tells them what is necessary to keep the land that has been promised to the fathers.
* To describe the land and its blessings, Moses explains the irrigation system of Egypt and how Canaan was different.
* According to Moses, the watering of crops in Egypt was **by foot**. The phrase could mean something akin to an irrigation system which included a pump of some kind, or could refer to much simpler methods.
  + - “Literally, “by your foot,” referring to some aspect of the Egyptian irrigation system. It may refer to the use of the foot for opening and closing sluice gates, or to the more primitive method of making and breaking down ridges of dirt to control the flow of water into the irrigation channels in gardens and fields, as has been observed in Egypt and Israel.[[237]](#footnote-237)
* In contrast, the land of Canaan was full of **hills and valleys**. Such landscape could not be watered by simple irrigation methods, but would be completely dependent on the **rain of heaven**.
* Further, Moses says that the eyes of God are always on Canaan. Though the people were dependent completely on the Lord to provide water for their crops, the Lord’s presence is assured. He would watch the land. The verb used here (דֹּרֵ֣שׁ - *dāraš*) is generally translated as ‘to seek’, but here carries a meaning of election. God had not only elected Israel, but He elected the land itself.
* God’s providential care over the land would be constant. From the b**eginning of the year to the end of the year**, God could be counted on to observe the land. However, while God’s ever watching **eyes** could be a sign of blessing, they could also be the sign of impending judgment, should the people choose to disobey.
  + - “The dependence of the land on God for irrigation is both an advantage and disadvantage, and the rabbis discussed whether verses 10–12 mean to praise the land or denigrate it. In the end they decided that the passage is one of praise but, as Rashbam observed, “This land is better than Egypt and all other lands to those who observe God’s commands, but worse than all other lands to those who do not observe them.”[[238]](#footnote-238)

## Deut 11:13-17 ~ The Rains Down in Canaan

**13 “It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, 14 that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil. 15 “He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. 16 “Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them. 17 “Or the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you.**

* The obedience of the people to the commandments which Moses is giving will certainly result in blessing. Specifically Moses focuses on the Shema, and its outworking in daily life. **To love God and serve Him with the whole heart and soul** would bring the blessing of God on the people and the land.
  + - “Moses begins by defining the passing grade, the correct response to the test (vv. 13–15). His exhortation involves themes we have heard before. The Israelites are to listen carefully to the commands and demonstrate their covenant commitment (“love”) as well as their unreserved vassaldom to Yahweh (“serve”). As elsewhere, by adding “today” Moses creates a sense of urgency. His injunctions are not for the distant future but are to be applied immediately. The Israelites must commit themselves today, even before they cross the Jordan, and in the perpetual present once they have crossed.”[[239]](#footnote-239)
* The blessing of God would be via **rain** with would come **in its season**. For an agrarian society, rain was the very basis of all life. If the rain didn’t fall, the people and livestock died. But if too much or ill-timed rain fell, it would also spell disaster. Therefore, the promise of rain in the proper season was a promise of abundance and blessing.
  + - “Contrary to common belief, the amount of rainfall in agricultural areas in … Israel is no less than in agricultural countries in the temperate zones. The difference lies not in the annual amount of rain, but in the number of rainy days and in the intensity of rain per hour or per day. In … Israel the entire annual amount falls in 40 to 60 days in a season of seven to eight months. In temperate climates precipitation occurs on 180 days spread over 12 months.”[[240]](#footnote-240)
* The rains are divided into two seasons - early and late, or autumn and spring.
  + - “In Israel, the first showers, known as the *yoreh*, fall intermittently in October and November. They soften the soil, which is hardened and cracked from the summer, and permit farmers to begin plowing and sowing. The rain increases from December through February, with about seventy percent of the year’s rain normally falling in these months. The final showers, or *malkosh* (“late rain”), come in April or early May, right before the final burst of growth of the grain and are crucial for its maturation. If the early or late rains come too soon or are delayed, this can unduly lengthen or shorten the growing season and stunt the growth of the grain, impede the harvest, or cause it to rot. The talmudic treatise *Taʿanit* prescribes fasting if the rain is delayed, and it observes that rain falling after the normal rainy season was considered a curse.”[[241]](#footnote-241)
* The rains would not only grow crops, but **grass** lands for the **cattle** and livestock so that the people would be abundantly fed. In all of this, the people would be fed and would be **satisfied**.
* On the contrary, vv. 16-17 tells us that should they fail to love and serve and obey God, the opposite would occur.
* The sin that would incur God’s judgment was a violation of the first commandment - a service to some other god besides YHWH. This would, of course, also lead to a violation of the second command.
* Should this occur, Moses says that God will **shut up the heavens** so that the rain will stop and the ground will no longer be fertile. This promise of future judgment regarding the rains is specifically repeated by Solomon at the commissioning of the temple (1 Kings 8:35), and then again as the sign of God’s judgment at the time of Elijah (1 Kings 17-18). The promise to the nation after her restoration is that God will send the early and late rains again (Joel 2:23).
* If the rain stops, Moses says that the nation will **perish quickly from the land**. God’s provision, and the blessing of the land, is therefore contingent on their loving Him.

## Deut 11:18-32 ~ The Blessing and the Curse

**18 “You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 19 “You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. 20 “You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as blong as the heavens *remain* above the earth. 22 “For if you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him, 23 then the Lord will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you. 24 “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; your border will be from the wilderness to Lebanon, *and* from the river, the river Euphrates, as far as the western sea. 25 “No man will be able to stand before you; the Lord your God will lay the dread of you and the fear of you on all the land on which you set foot, as He has spoken to you.**

**26 “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known.**

**29 “It shall come about, when the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. 30 “Are they not across the Jordan, west of the way toward the sunset, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oaks of Moreh? 31 “For you are about to cross the Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall possess it and live in it, 32 and you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the judgments which I am setting before you today.**

* Vv. 18-21 are almost an exact repetition of 6:6-9. Moses has led them on a lengthy discussion about their unfaithfulness and God’s faithfulness to prove to them that the Lord loves them and has chosen them. This should have inspired the nation to turn to Him in love, and therefore to obey Him. History would prove that no amount of God’s kindness to the nation would change their hearts, thus leading to the statements of the New Covenant in Jer. 31:31 and Ezek. 36.
* Fascinatingly, the final phrase of this repetition is added. Moses says that their obedience would ensure that the nation would have the land **as long as the heavens are above the earth**. This phrase indicates that the fixed order of creation would be the timetable for Israel’s blessing, should she obey. The same concept is repeated in Jer. 31:35-37 for God’s faithfulness to Israel and His care over her.
* In v. 22, Moses repeats the Shema, but with the addition of the outworking of it - that the people would **love** God, and would **walk** in all His ways, and **hold fast** to Him. Love and obedience are called for, and a heart that clings to God in these things.
* In vv. 23-25, Moses repeats the promise of God’s blessing on the nation that he has already spelled out. The repetition of the land borders in v. 24 (see 1:7-8) and the promise of God’s hand to make the nations dread them (see 2:25 and 7:23-24) are both repetitions from the previous sections.
* Moses says that everywhere their foot treads would be theirs. The picture is one of domination.
  + - “To tread on the land (*dārak*) was to assert dominion as many instances of the use of this verb attest. For example, Caleb’s land grant was that property on which he trod in faith (Deut 1:36), and in the blessing of Moses on the tribes he equated victory over Israel’s enemies with treading upon their “high places” (33:29). Isaiah is especially rich in this idiom. The prophet spoke of the returning exiles as treading a previously unknown path in triumph (42:16) and of the Lord himself treading victoriously over his fallen foes (62:1–3). The imagery here is of a wine vat in which the grapes are crushed underfoot until their “blood” (i.e., their juice) spatters the robe of the wine maker. The same picture appears elsewhere in Isaiah (22:5; 26:6; 28:3) and in the Book of Revelation, where Jesus Christ, as conquering King, rules the nations with an iron scepter and treads recalcitrant sinners under his feet like grapes in a winepress (Rev 19:11–16).”[[242]](#footnote-242)
* In sum, these verses represent the summary of all that has come before. Moses has made his case. The nation is rebellion and unfaithful. God is faithful, and has chosen the nation to be His people. They must trust in that love, and then serve Him with their whole heart and life. If they will do this, the Lord will fulfill the unconditional promises made to Abraham on them through the Mosaic covenant.
* vv. 26-28 summarize Moses’ entire point, and represent the conclusion to the covenant foundations. This statement is expanded into two chapters as Moses closes the book. In this way, the center of the covenant - the Shema - as a fulfillment of the first commandment becomes the center of the rest of the book.
* Additionally, the statements of 26-28 are expanded into a full explanation of the blessings and cursing attached to covenant loyalty in chapter 27-28. These are material blessings as a result of spiritual loyalty to YHWH. A structural outline is:

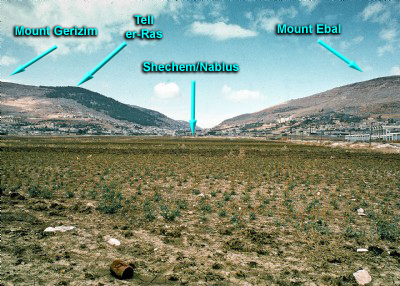
(a) The blessing and curse in the *present* renewal of the covenant (11:26–28).

(b) The blessing and curse in the *future* renewal of the covenant (11:29–32).

(c) The specific legislation (12:1–26:19).

(d) The blessing and curse in the *future* renewal of the covenant (27:1–26).

(e) The blessing and curse in the *present* renewal of the covenant (28:1–29:1).[[243]](#footnote-243)

* The mark of obedience or disobedience is to **listen** or **not listen** to the commands of God. Those who listen will obey, so long as their hearts are loving God and obeying the first commandment.
* On the contrary, those who do not listen are those who turn aside from the way in order to follow other gods, thereby violating the first commandment.
* The explanation of the law to follow was a reflection of Moses’ pastoral heart for them. His great desire was to see them blessed rather than cursed. His commentary is therefore an appeal to obedience unto a better and more full life, lived, not so much in the land, but in the fullness of the blessing of YHWH.

*(Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal, with Shechem in the middle)*

* Vv. 29-32 give specific direction regarding what the people should do when they cross the Jordan. Moses says that they should place the blessing on Mt. Gerizim, and the curse on Mt. Ebal. This is later described in more detail in 27:12-14.
  + - “The two mountains mentioned were selected for this act, no doubt because they were opposite to one another, and stood, each about 2500 feet high, in the very centre of the land not only from west to east, but also from north to south. Ebal stands upon the north side, Gerizim upon the south; between the two is *Sichem*, the present *Nabulus*, in a tolerably elevated valley, fertile, attractive, and watered by many springs, which runs from the south-east to the north-west from the foot of Gerizim to that of Ebal, and is about 1600 feet in breadth.”[[244]](#footnote-244)
* The practice of this would be to divide the nation into two groups by tribes, six on each mountain. For the blessing on Gerizim, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin, and for the curse on Ebal, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.
* The Levites would then call out all the words of the Law so that everyone in the nation could hear it.
* The language of Moses is certainly recorded explicitly here, as he asks the rhetorical question regarding the specific geographic location, including details of cities.
  + - “It is across the Jordan, beyond the road that leads west from the Jordan River to Shechem, between Gerizim and Ebal, in the land of the Canaanites, who live in the Arabah opposite Gilgal north of Jericho, next to the great trees of Moreh.”[[245]](#footnote-245)
* The only other time the oaks of Moreh are mentioned is in Gen. 12:6-7, which gives a key to why the location of Shechem. This was the location where Abraham was first given the promise of the land. It is therefore the first place where the nation would covenant with YHWH in the actual land.
* This makes Shechem a location of deep covenant importance. It is the location where Joseph’s bones were buried (Josh. 24:32). It is also the place where Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, foolishly divides the kingdom (1 Kings 12:1ff). Jeroboam I built a shrine in the location as a way to keep the people of Israel from traveling to Jerusalem for worship.
* Moses concludes with the confident statement that the nation will certainly **go over and possess the land and live in it**. As if almost begging, Moses concludes pastorally with the appeal that the people obey commands of God which he is explaining to them.

Deut. 12-13 ~ Laws Concerning Worship

* Having concluded the detailed discussion of the first and second commandments and their relation to the Shema, and the nation’s requirement to love the Lord and to have no other gods before Him, Moses now turns to the specific laws related to worship and the sanctuary in chapter 12, and then a warning against idolatry in chapter 13.
* This section will continue through the end of chapter 26, after which Moses will turn to the issue of blessing and cursing.
* While this entire section is legal, it is nonetheless pastoral, and bears strong resemblance to what has come before in chapters 6-11. Each section of laws is accompanied by the corresponding appeals for covenant loyalty.

## Deut. 12:1-7 ~ Location Matters

**1 “These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth. 2 “You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. 3 “You shall tear down their altars and smash their *sacred* pillars and burn their Asherim with fire, and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods and obliterate their name from that place. 4 “You shall not act like this toward the Lord your God. 5 “But you shall seek *the Lord* at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. 6 “There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. 7 “There also you and your households shall eat before the Lord your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you.**

* While this entire section is legal, it is nonetheless pastoral, and bears strong resemblance to what has come before in chapters 6-11. Each section of laws is accompanied by the pastoral appeals made by Moses.
* V. 1 is an introduction, both to the chapter and to the entire next section. The **statutes and judgments** that Moses refers to are all those that follow until the close of this section. The repetition of this phrase from 11:32 makes it clear that this is a wholly new section of the text.
* Moses intends that the people **carefully observe** these commands in the **land** into which they are entering.
  + - “Deuteronomy 12:1 marks the transition from the exposition of the Supreme Command (chaps. 5–11), to the exposition of the stipulations of the covenant in chapters 12–26. As elsewhere (4:45; 5:1; 26:16–17), “the decrees and laws” represent the covenantal obligations that Yahweh revealed at Sinai.”[[246]](#footnote-246)
* The first issue that Moses tackles is the location and stipulations for worship. Immediately upon entering the land, the people were to be careful to tear down and **destroy** any vestiges of pagan worship. The description is reminiscent of the destruction that Moses had already described in 7:2-5.
* This would keep the people in succeeding generations from seeking locations for worship apart from the location God had decreed. The ancient pagan religions believed climbing a mountain or hill would bring them closer to the gods. The shady places under certain types of trees were considered locations for fertility cult worship. All of these must be destroyed.
  + - “The foreign sanctuaries, which were to be destroyed, were located in places believed by the Canaanites to have particular religious significance. Some shrines were located on *high mountains* and *hills*; the mountain or hill was sometimes thought to be the home of a god, and by ascending the mountain, the worshipper was in some symbolic sense closer to the deity.4 There were also shrines located *under every luxuriant tree*; certain trees were considered to be sacred and symbolized fertility, a dominant theme in Canaanite religion.”[[247]](#footnote-247)
* V. 3 almost directly repeats the previous injunctions for destroying the accoutrements of the pagan worship services (**pillars, Asherim, images**) in order to completely **obliterate their name** from the location.
* Under no circumstances should the nation **act this way** toward the Lord - they must not sin by conducting acts of worship in these locations. Sadly, the history of Israel records very few times when the high places were not removed.
* Rather than the places where pagan worship had occurred, Moses demands that the nation **seek the Lord at the place that he would choose**. This phrase in some form occurs 21 times in the book and is sometimes referred to as ‘the place formula’.
* The demand for a centralized place of worship has led some to conjecture that Deuteronomy was composed after the beginning of the time of the kings. However, a number of details preclude this as a possible view.
  + - “It is also worth noting that if Deuteronomy was composed late in the monarchy period, it is incredible that it makes no mention of monarchy as an existing institution. There is not the slightest hint that the Davidic dynasty existed, nor is there even vague reference to Jerusalem as its capital or as the religious center prescribed by Deuteronomy.”[[248]](#footnote-248)
* According to v. 5, the place will be characterized by four things -
  + 1. God will **choose** the place. This will be made clear to them when they enter the land.
  + 2. From **all your tribes**. The place will be centralized for all 12 tribes. There will not be different places for different peoples.
  + 3. To establish **His name for His dwelling**. The place will be for the name and dwelling of YHWH - it will be the seat of His worship on earth.
  + 4. **There you should come**. The place will be the destination for all of Israel’s holy pilgrimages.
* This place would change through the course of the conquest - from Shechem to Shiloh to Bethel, and ultimately to Jerusalem. After this time, the city of Jerusalem was the location forever (note esp. Dan 6:10). However, the issue is not necessarily the statement regarding any one place, but that the Lord had the freedom to choose the place that He desired.
* When the Samaritan woman spoke to Christ in John 4, her statements regarding Jerusalem as the place of worship would have been reflective of these principles laid out in Deuteronomy. However, Christ’s answer in vv. 23-24 indicates that the closing of the covenant obligations under Moses is at hand.
* Vv. 6-7 describe what would happen as the nation gathered together at the designated place.
  + - “The offerings are summed up in four pairs of terms that represent, respectively, animal sacrifices, taxes on agricultural products, voluntary offerings, and firstlings of cattle. Subsequent verses in the chapter refer back to parts of this list. The text does not say when these offerings are to be brought to the sanctuary. In most cases, the regular pilgrimage festivals were probably the most convenient occasion, but farmers probably made private pilgrimages at other times as well, as did Elkanah in the first chapter of 1 Samuel.”[[249]](#footnote-249)
* The nature of these gatherings is made clear in v. 7 - they were times of happy celebration. The people would **rejoice** as they worshipped God and enjoyed the blessings of the land and the blessings of being God’s people. Of particular note is the phrase ‘**before God**’ which indicates that the feasting and joy are in His presence - the King watching with delight as His people enjoy the blessings He has provided.

## Deut 12:8-14 ~ Obedience and Blessing in ‘The Place’

**8** “You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man *doing* whatever is right in his own eyes; 9 for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you. 10 “When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around *you* so that you live in security, 11 then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the Lord. 12 “And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. **13** “Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every *cultic* place you see, 14 but in the place which the Lord chooses in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.

* Moses proceeds to provide corrective commentary on the nation and their current situation, saying that when they enter the land, they ought not to do **whatever is right in their own eyes**. (Judg. 17:6; 21:25) This phrase suggests that the practice of worship had become somewhat diffuse in the time before entering the land.
* However, given the specific rules for the sanctuary already stipulated (Lev. 17:1-9), this is a shallow reading. Rather, it seems better to understand that this phrase reflects the lack of a stationary place of worship. Because the tabernacle moved with the people, they were able to essentially practice their acts of worship in the location that they were in, and at the various times that seemed good to them.
  + For example, when the people moved the tabernacle would not have been set up, which would have made the daily sacrifice difficult, thereby providing an excuse that couldn’t be answered.
* In the promised land, a central location would mean that rather than allowing for a perpetual sacrificial system, one that would leave no flexibility in terms of obedience.
* That this is what is intended is made clear in v. 9, as Moses says that they **had not come to the resting place and their inheritance**. These terms indicate a reference to the Abrahamic covenant - the stipulation being that when the nation did reach that resting place, the diverse practices should coalesce into a single, united worship of the nation.
* In vv. 10-12, Moses foresees a future where the nation is dwelling in peace and safety. As the nation became stable, God’s desire was for the practices of worship to stabilize as well.
  + - “The legislation given in Moses’ address provided the foundation for that anticipated future life, and would be applicable when the people received from God the promised *rest* and *inheritance* (see v. 9). Hence v.10 is a further word of encouragement to persevere in faithfulness to God in the events lying ahead. Following that perseverance, they would settle in the land and assume what would become a normative religious life; then they would bring their sacrifices and offerings to God’s sanctuary (v. 11) and would rejoice in God’s presence (v. 12).”[[250]](#footnote-250)
    - “When the Israelites had crossed over the Jordan, and dwelt peaceably in Canaan, secured against their enemies round about, these irregularities were not to occur any more; but all the sacrifices were to be offered at the place chosen by the Lord for the dwelling-place of His name, and there the sacrificial meals were to be held with joy before the Lord.”[[251]](#footnote-251)
* The conditions that had to be met for Israel to have this type of centralized worship were that God had **given them rest from their enemies** and they were dwelling in relative **security**. This occurs at the end of the first wave of the conquest under Joshua. (Josh. 21:42ff) This is not to say that all the other nations around them were completely vanquished, but the time of war had ceased, by and large. At that time, Shiloh was the location that was chosen (see 1 Sam. 1:3).
* According to v. 11, at that time, all the worship events would occur in that centralized place, and Moses makes a detailed list of the events and sacrifices that should be accomplished there.
* Again, the focus of these times of worship was **joy**, and Moses makes it clear in v. 12 that this should be for all the people of the nation, adults, children, slaves, and the priests as well. (more about the Levitical order in 18:1-8) This inclusion of the Levites provides additional support to an as yet unknown central location, since otherwise the Levites could have practiced their worship in their own towns and cities.
* This joy should, again, be **before the Lord**. The phrase indicates God’s happy presence as the people enjoy the bounties He has provided for them.
* vv. 13-14 effectively repeat the same injunction - the people must be careful to never offer sacrifices in any place other than the one that God had established, to put His name there. This location would be, of course, in one of the tribes’ lands.

## Deut. 12:15-27 ~ The Sanctity of Blood

**15** “However, you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your gates, whatever you desire, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, as of the gazelle and the deer. 16 “Only you shall not eat the blood; you are to pour it out on the ground like water. 17 “You are not allowed to eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or new wine or oil, or the firstborn of your herd or flock, or any of your votive offerings which you vow, or your freewill offerings, or the contribution of your hand. 18 “But you shall eat them before the Lord your God in the place which the Lord your God will choose, you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all your undertakings. 19 “Be careful that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land. **20** “When the Lord your God extends your border as He has promised you, and you say, ‘I will eat meat,’ because you desire to eat meat, *then* you may eat meat, whatever you desire. 21 “If the place which the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter of your herd and flock which the Lord has given you, as I have commanded you; and you may eat within your gates whatever you desire. 22 “Just as a gazelle or a deer is eaten, so you will eat it; the unclean and the clean alike may eat of it. 23 “Only be sure not to eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. 24 “You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out on the ground like water. 25 “You shall not eat it, so that it may be well with you and your sons after you, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the Lord. 26 “Only your holy things which you may have and your votive offerings, you shall take and go to the place which the Lord chooses. 27 “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 you shall eat the flesh. 28 “Be careful to listen to all these words which I command you, so that it may be well with you and your sons after you forever, for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God.

* While the nation was forced to centralize all worship related to sacrifice, the people were completely free to slaughter and eat wherever they wanted. In v. 15, Moses tells them that they are free to **slaughter in their cities** throughout the land. The killing and eating of the meat was according to whatever their soul might desire - they were completely free.
* This law applied to those who were ceremonially **clean or unclean**. The ceremonially unclean were not permitted to eat of the sacrifices, but secularly slaughtered animals could be eaten. The mention of **deer and gazelle** makes it clear that consuming even wild meat was permissible.
* This freedom to eat and enjoy (obviously within the limits of the dietary restrictions of the covenant) was to be seen as part of the **blessing of the Lord**. The people were freed up to enjoy God’s blessing, so long as they were able to afford it.
* The Rabbis believed that prior to this time, the people were unable to slaughter and eat, unless they came to the temple. This hinges on an interpretation of Lev. 17:2-4, which appears to communicate that all butchering had to take place in front of the tent of meeting in order to allow for the priestly handling of the blood. However, a further reading (particularly v. 8ff) seems to indicate that these stipulations were solely regarding the sacrificial acts carried out by the people.
* In this reading the commands in 15ff are intended, not as new legal information, but as a supplement to the already established practices.
* However, v. 16, as in Lev. 17, makes clear that the **blood** is forbidden. Whether for sacrifice or simply for meat, blood is to be dealt with in a particular way. More to follow in vv. 23-25.
* Vv. 17-18 repeat the injunction regarding offering sacrifices anywhere besides the place that the Lord would establish. The centralization principle was designed to unite the people around YHWH, and to bring them into the times of rejoicing (particularly of the tithe offerings and freewill contributions, which were to be offered, and then either sold or consumed). The end of these things was joy in the presence of the Lord. These events could not have been attended by those who were ceremonially unclean.
* V. 19 adds, almost as an afterthought, that they **should not forget the Levite**. However, in the context of enjoying the fruits of their land, it would have been critical for the people to support the Levite by giving gifts to the temple. Rather than simply enjoying, Moses calls them to enjoy, and also to support and give, since the land is the gift of God, whom they serve.
* The reasoning for this command is clear in v. 21-22 - the people are allowed to kill and eat, wherever they are living, since the temple may be too far from their homes for them to go there to slaughter the animal, as they might desire. This was not only for wild animals like **deer and gazelle**, but also for animals that were considered to be potential sacrifice victims.
  + - “Verse 21 makes it clear that mutton and beef were included in the provision; in v. 15, the gazelle and hart had been mentioned. The latter could never be used sacrificially, but the former could be; thus the provision makes clear that beef and mutton, though employed sacrificially, could quite legitimately be eaten secularly in the local settlements.”[[252]](#footnote-252)
    - “The text does not define what “too far” means. It may mean to leave this to the discretion of each individual (cf. 14:24). The Temple Scroll, as noted above, defines the distance as three days’ journey. Rabbinic halakhah permits secular slaughter anywhere outside the Temple Court. Verse 15, which permits secular slaughter “in any of your settlements,” is favorable to the latter view.”[[253]](#footnote-253)
* In vv. 23-25, Moses again repeats the stipulation regarding blood - it should not be eaten in the meat, but must be poured out and drained after the animal is killed. The basis for this rule is that the life (can be translated soul as well *-* נָּ֑פֶשׁ) is in the blood. It must not, therefore, be eaten with the meat. The first prohibition of this kind is after the flood in Gen. 9:4, and is repeated again in Lev. 17:10ff.
  + God’s prohibition against drinking blood or eating meat with the blood still in it is important for understanding the sacrificial system. God communicates that the life of any living thing is in its blood. This was written far before any medical or scientific professional understood how critical blood is for life.
  + Because blood is life, the sacrificial process requires the shedding of blood.
* This command regarding the pouring out of blood is serious enough to illicit Moses’ warning again that they must obey God and do what is **right in the sight of the Lord** in v. 25, if they are going to continue in the land.
* The offerings, however, must always be offered only on the altar at the place the Lord would choose. Vv. 26-27 repeat this same injunction with the added stipulation that the blood of any sacrifice must be **poured on the altar**, and then the people could eat the meat of the animal. This is different than the burnt offerings, which were burned completely as a gift to the Lord.
* In all these things, Moses reminds them in v. 28 that obedience to these stipulations is the means of remaining in the land and enjoying the blessing of God.

## Deut 12:29-32 ~ Flee Idolatry

* In v. 29 Moses considers the future again, when the Lord has given the nation victory over their enemies. This flows from the concept of removal of pagan shrines, and the establishment of the central place of worship.
  + - “As noted also, this exposition of the commandment follows that of the notion of the central sanctuary because it logically and theologically makes sense that the exclusive worship of the Lord could not be a practical reality until the pagan shrines had been eliminated and the place where the Lord chose to place his name had been set up in their stead.”[[254]](#footnote-254)
* The warning in v. 30 is in relation to those nations who have been removed from the land. Moses conceives of a temptation in the hearts of the people - they could **be ensnared,** or lured, by the ways of the nations whom they had destroyed.
* Ironically, even the fact that YHWH gave Israel dominance over these nations would not lessen the temptation to seek out these other deities.
* Such a curiosity could lead the people into gross idolatry - they would be tempted to consider these other gods and how they could be worshipped.
  + - “This warning (v. 30b) is more specific, cautioning the people against fascination with the gods of the nations in Canaan. He concretizes their potential curiosity by introducing an interlocutor who asks, “How do these nations serve their gods?” and then declares his determination: “I will do the same.”[[255]](#footnote-255)
* Moses says in v. 31 that **they should not act this way toward the Lord**, a clear repetition of v. 4. All of these pagan practices are **abominations** to the Lord which He **hates,** and would lead the nation away from Him, and the blessings He provides.
* The unrighteousness of the Canaanites is so great that they offered their children to the gods as sacrifices.
  + - “Archaeological evidence for this practice comes from special precincts in Phoenician colonies, such as Carthage, where hundreds of urns have been found containing charred bones of young children and, in some cases, of animals. These precincts are not normal cemeteries for people who died a natural death, as shown by the facts that some of the burials are of animals and that the human burials are limited to children. Moreover, many of the urns, from the eighth to second centuries b.c.e. are buried beneath steles inscribed with dedications to the gods, thanking them for answering the offerers’ prayers. Reliefs from ca. 500 b.c.e., found at Pozo Moro, Spain, show a two-headed monster receiving offerings of small people in bowls. Since some of the cultural influences identified at the site are Phoenician, these reliefs may also reflect Canaanite practice.Underlying child sacrifice was the belief that for the most earnestly desired benefactions from the gods, the most precious gifts had to be offered. The biblical reverence for human life made the Bible view this as the most outrageous of the Canaanites’ abominations.[[256]](#footnote-256)
* In the Hebrew bible, v. 32 is the first verse of chapter 13 - Moses calls the nation to obey all the things that he will command them.

## Deut 13:1-5 ~ Don’t Listen to False Prophets

**1 “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them, 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 “You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. 5 “But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.**

* All of chapter 13 is effectively a prohibition against any other worship of any god besides YHWH, and a command to destroy anyone who would cause them to follow after those gods. The section is divided into prophets (1ff), family (6ff), and city revolutionaries (13ff).
* Again in v. 1, Moses conceives of a future situation where **a prophet or a dreamer of dreams would arise** among the people (that is, a Jew) and would provide a **sign** or **wonder**. The person involved is claiming to have a word from the gods - whether through direct revelation or a dream.
  + - “A “sign” (*ʾōt*) or “wonder” (*môpēt*) was any kind of supernatural deed or act that was done to authenticate its performer as a representative of deity. The most familiar instance of their use is that of the exodus plagues that the Lord allowed Moses to inflict upon Egypt as a witness to his God-given ministry as leader and prophet (cf. Exod 4:8, 21; 7:3; 11:9–10; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8). But such displays of power could also be performed by false prophets, thereby making it impossible to rely upon these alone as criteria for determining truth. This is why the sign or wonder had to be tested against the message of the prophet, for only when the message was consistent with the whole range of divine revelation could the accompanying miracles be given credibility.”[[257]](#footnote-257)
* In v. 2 Moses says that the sign might actually even **come true**! It could be that the event would actually take place in the same way that the prophet would have suggested.
* However, the sign that he performs is linked together with his teaching, in this case, a specific appeal to ‘**go after other gods and serve them**’. The phrase in parentheses (whom you have not known) may or may not be part of the prophet’s tempting words. Either way, the answer would be the same - detailed in v. 3-5.
* Moses provides three things that must be done in this case:
  + 1. You **shall NOT listen** to them - in fact, in God’s sovereign providence, Moses says that God is testing them by that sign or wonder in order to determine if they truly love Him. The claim that the sign is truly from the false god is actually a proof that God is in control and is putting this in front of the nation.
    - “The temptation would test the true disposition of the hearts of the Israelites, and while the temptation was genuinely dangerous, the overcoming of that temptation would strengthen the people in their love of God and obedience to his commandments.”[[258]](#footnote-258)
  + 2. You **shall follow** the Lord your God - rather than following other gods, the people are called here to follow YHWH alone. This command indicates that, regardless of the power or glory of any sign, if the prophet didn’t line up with the revealed truth in the text of Scripture, he was a false prophet.
  + 3. The prophet should be **put to death** - there should be no consideration or thought of pity. A person who would seek to pull the people away from the true God would drag their souls to hell - eternal death. Further, this false prophet would pull the people away from the covenant God who loved and chose them. For this reason, it is important that they **purge the evil** from among them.
    - “His call for the death penalty for one who encourages spiritual defection from Yahweh may seem harsh, but the final clause declares Moses’ fundamental concern: to “purge the evil from among you.” Whereas in verse 5a Moses had used the passive, “and be put to death,” without specifying the agent, here he places responsibility for the purging the evil on the people themselves. He recognizes that the sin of sedition is like a virus whose influence in Israel can only be stopped by exterminating those infected with it.”[[259]](#footnote-259)

## Deut 13:6-11 ~ Idolatry in the Family

**6 “If your brother, your mother’s son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’ (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, 7 of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end), 8 you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. 9 “But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. 10 “So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 11 “Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you.**

* The second category of people that could cause them to sin would be family members, handled in vv. 6-11.
* The temptation could potentially come from any of the closest relationships. Moses lists four potential sources:
  + - “The clause, “son of thy mother,” is not intended to describe the brother as a step-brother, but simply to bring out the closeness of the fraternal relation; like the description of the wife as the wife of thy bosom, who lies in thy bosom, rests upon thy breast (as in Deut. 28:54; Micah 7:5), and of the friend as “thy friend which is as thine own soul,” i.e., whom thou lovest as much as thy life (cf. 1 Sam. 18:1, 3).”[[260]](#footnote-260)
* The categories are not intended to be a comprehensive list. Moses is simply giving four examples of some of the closest relationships that people can have. These are the deepest sources of love between people.
* The danger of this temptation is that it would be made privately and secretively. The tempter would obviously have known the potential for punishment and would therefore have been inclined to secretively come with the idolatry.
* The temptation is to serve other gods. The parenthetic remark is expanded to include any possible god from any other foreign religion from anywhere from **one end of the earth to the other**, rather than just within the borders of Canaan.
* Their response to this man is clear:
  + 1. Do not **yield** to him or **listen** to him - v. 3 has only listen. The addition of the second verb is likely due to the nature of family relationships.
  + 2. Don’t **pity**, **spare**, or **conceal** him - The tendency of the human heart to defend the person we love is seen here. However, there should be no pity - they must carry out the appropriate punishment. They must not spare them - that is, to be keep them from facing justice. And they must not conceal them - that is, hide them from the authorities.
* Instead, in v. 9, they are called to **put them to death**. However, this is not a statement on summary execution. The stipulations regarding two witnesses, and thorough investigation remain. However, the one who has heard the temptation must report them.
  + - “According to 17:6, at least two witnesses are required to convict a person of worshiping another god. The present law gives the impression that, in the case of secret instigation, the testimony of the person approached by the instigator would suffice. Conceivably instigation to idolatry was regarded as so serious a threat to public safety that normal judicial safeguards had to be set aside. It may be, however, that the text is elliptical, since, as noted, it focuses on the duty of the person approached by the instigator and not on judicial procedure.”[[261]](#footnote-261)
* The loved one must be the first to raise the stone in execution. This is a stark reality of the profound danger of false teaching. The person who has witnessed the idolatry, in spite of human relationships, must kill the offending party. This is reflected in Christ’s words in Matthew 10:37.
  + - “As painful as it might be, that loved one must be stoned by his own near kinsman first of all (presumably because he was first to hear of the treacherous invitation; cf. 17:7), and then by the community (v. 9). The seriousness of the punishment fits the seriousness of the crime, a boldfaced act of rebellion against the sovereign who had brought his people out from other lordship and bondage in order to make them his own treasured possession (v. 10).”[[262]](#footnote-262)
* The act of citing the first stone was an act of solemn witness against the offending party. The individual was, in effect, taking personal responsibility for the execution.
* This act was required because of the danger of being **seduced away** from God Himself (v. 10). It was also corrective for the entire nation. Moses says that a single execution would also result in **all Israel** hearing and being afraid and never doing such a wicked thing again.

## Deut 13:12-18 ~ Idolatry in the Nation

**12 “If you hear in one of your cities, which the Lord your God is giving you to live in, *anyone* saying *that* 13 some worthless men have gone out from among you and have seduced the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’ (whom you have not known), 14 then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly. If it is true *and* the matter established that this abomination has been done among you, 15 you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword. 16 “Then you shall gather all its booty into the middle of its open square and burn the city and all its booty with fire as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God; and it shall be a bruin forever. It shall never be rebuilt. 17 “Nothing from that which is put under the ban shall cling to your hand, in order that the Lord may turn from His burning anger and show mercy to you, and have compassion on you and make you increase, just as He has sworn to your fathers, 18 if you will listen to the voice of the Lord your God, keeping all His commandments which I am commanding you today, and doing what is right in the sight of the Lord your God.**

* The prohibition against idolatry extends beyond prophets and family to entire cities. Moses envisions a situation where the people hear of one of the cities of Israel as having committed apostasy and turned away from the Lord.
* The cause of this mass defection is some **worthless men** (lit. ‘sons of Belial’- בְּנֵֽי־בְלִיַּ֙עַל֙ ) who have gone and **seduced the inhabitants of the city** to follow after other gods. The term is used in the NT for Satan (2 Cor. 6:5). Again, Moses adds the parenthesis **whom you have not known**.
  + - “The last phrase translates literally as “sons of worthlessness,” that is, men without honor. The moral sense of the idiom is reflected by the kinds of people so characterized: murderers, rapists, false witnesses, corrupt priests, drunks, boors, ungrateful and selfish folk, rebels, and those who do not know Yahweh.”[[263]](#footnote-263)
* The rumor should not be enough cause to destroy the city, and so the people are called to **investigate**, **search out**, and **inquire** thoroughly. The point of this is that the sort of wholesale destruction that will take place would require absolute certainty that the city in question was guilty of the idolatry.
  + - “The use of three verbs for investigating, instead of one as elsewhere (17:4; 19:18), and three phrases to indicate that the charge is confirmed, indicates the need for extreme care in the investigation and absolute certainty in the verdict.”[[264]](#footnote-264)
* If it is apparently true that this sort of mass apostasy has taken place, the solution is harsh in the extreme.
* In v. 15, Moses says that every living thing in the city should be destroyed with the sword. While there may be some who were ostensibly innocent in the city, the nature of idolatry and the public nature of the offense reveals that those who were still members of the city but were unwilling to turn in their fellow city inhabitants had violated the first and second stipulations in the chapter, and were therefore just as guilty of idolatry as those who were actually practicing it.
  + - “Once it is established that the rumors are true, the punishment of the town is to be decisive and comprehensive. (1) Moses calls for the indiscriminate slaughter with the sword of all living things in the town (v. 15). By adding “Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock,” Moses declares that if Israelites go after the gods of the peoples they were to dispossess, they were themselves to be utterly devoted to destruction.”[[265]](#footnote-265)
* In v. 16, everything that is in the city - it’s **booty** in the NASB - should be gathered together into the open square of the city and should all be burned together as an offering to the Lord. This heap of ashes should then be left as a testimony to the whole nation - the city can **never** be **rebuilt** again.
  + - “This no doubt was because Israel would have sinned against greater light and therefore was held to a higher standard and a more severe judgment. An illustration of that may be seen in the experience of Achan, who stole items from Jericho that had been placed under *ḥērem* (Josh 7:10–21). As a member of the covenant community he should have known better, so his punishment was the loss of his life along with that of his family and livestock and the utter destruction of all his goods. This outcome was even more severe than that affecting Jericho itself, the place from which he had obtained the illicit objects (cf. Josh 6:24).”
* The statement **whole burnt offering** is reminiscent of Lev. 6:5 and other texts. The city would be sanctified to the Lord by being completely destroyed. It’s elimination from the land would purify the land, and bring it back into covenant union with God.
* Moses clarifies this point in vv. 17-18, saying that nothing from the city will ‘**cling to your hand**’. Absolutely nothing in the city should be kept out of the fire, because everything in the city would have fallen under the ban. To keep anything out would be to continue to incite the righteous anger of God.
* Moses concludes with the restatement of the Abrahamic covenant, God would continue to bless the nation, so long as they remained faithful to the Mosaic covenant, and particularly the stipulations of the first and second commandments.

Deut. 14 ~ Laws for Food and Tithe

* Moses concludes the section on idolatry, and then moves on to the topic of dietary restrictions. The section is comprised of a series of lists of animals that cannot be consumed. It then concludes with commentary on the tithe portions that are to be given to the Lord.
* In the flow of thought, Moses has begun w/ the temple, moved to idolatry, and is not dealing with the purity of the nation as compared to the nations around them.
* Structurally, ch’s 12-14 are arranged chiastically:

A Eating in the Presence of Yahweh (12:5–14)

B Eating in your Towns (12:15–28)

C Remaining True to Yahweh (13:1–18[2–19])

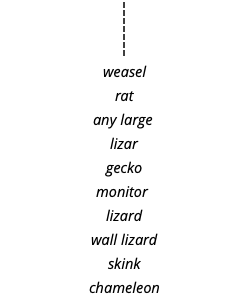
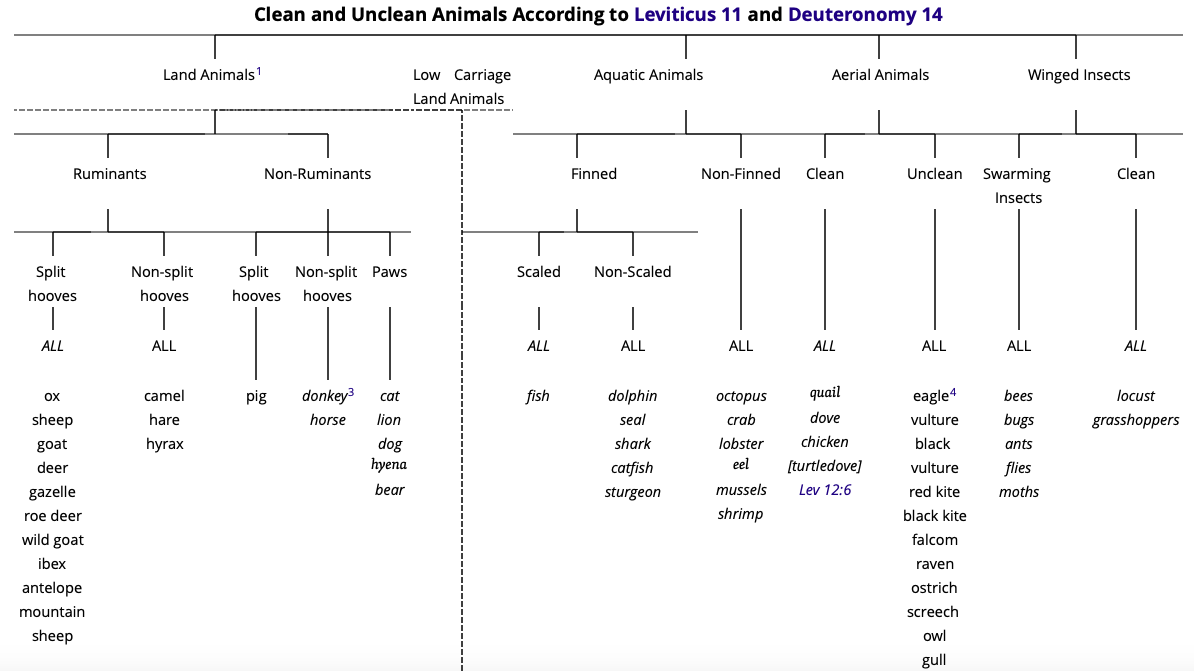
B′ Eating in your Towns (14:1–21)

A′ Eating in the Presence of Yahweh (14:22–29)[[266]](#footnote-266)

* As the nation enters the land, restrictions for eating will protect them from entering into various idolatrous practices.

## Deut 14:1-21 ~ Separation Through Diet

* The section begins with a statement on Israel’s position as **sons of God** which serves as an introduction to the dietary laws. This is a stark contrast to the general ANE suzerain-vassal treaties. Rather than servants, God moves the nation into the position of sons, and from that vantage point, calls them to holiness. (1 Peter 2:15) This idea has been hinted at earlier in the book (1:31, 8:5) but is crystalized here.
* This prohibition that follows relates to self-mutilation and shaving of the head in regard to the dead.
  + The self-mutilation practices of the Canaanite peoples is well attested. The practices included cutting oneself in order to let blood flow, thereby attracting the attention of the gods. This action is expressly seen in 1 Kings 17 with the prophets of Baal seeking to ‘wake him up’.
  + Whether this is also in relation to mourning for the dead or not is not of great importance, though it is referenced for that purpose elsewhere. (see for ex. Jer. 16:6) The principle applies regardless of the purpose of self-mutilation. It was a pagan practice and should not be done by sons of the true God.
  + Shaving for the dead is also widely practiced throughout the world. The oldest child in any family is obligated to shave his head for the dead in India. The action indicates a heart of sorrow, and the hair is burned as an offering to the gods for the blessing of the soul.
    - “Some scholars think that they were believed to have an effect on the ghost of the dead person, either as offerings of blood and hair to strengthen the ghost in the nether world or to assuage the ghost’s jealousy of the living by showing it how grief-stricken they are.”[[267]](#footnote-267)
* Such activities are clearly offensive to the true God, who does not need to be woken up, and is not appeased for a soul that has died already. The root evil of these is the comparison of YHWH to the false idols of the pagan nations.
* This is made clear in v. 2, where God expressly states that the people are a **holy people** to Him, and that He has chosen them to be **His possession**. The verse is identical to 7:6 (see commentary there for details).
* Conceptually, the nation should turn from idolatrous pagan practices because they are an abomination to the Lord, He has chosen them as sons, and they should be separate and holy for this reason.
* V. 3 introduces the lengthy section which follows. This section is a parallel of Lev. 11 and the stipulations made there, but v. 3 does not appear in the Leviticus text. The use of the word detestable (abhorrent - *toʿevah*) elevates the sin to the same level as idolatry.
  + - “By adding it as a heading, Deuteronomy places forbidden foods in the same category of abhorrence as idolatrous and immoral actions that would defile Israel’s holiness.”[[268]](#footnote-268)
* The reasons for the dietary restrictions have been hotly debated. Doctors over the past century have sought to link this up to issues of health, toxicity, etc. However, no single rule for any of the prohibitions can be identified for why the restriction exists. It is therefore likely that these are far less health-related, and far more idolatry-related. Nevertheless, a conclusion is not readily available.
  + - “In both those passages, the word indicates an association with foreign religions. In 7:25, for example, silver and gold were to be discarded because of their association with the images of foreign gods; simply as substances, however, silver and gold were not unclean or evil. Thus, on the basis of v. 3, it seems clear that at least part of the reason for the prohibition against eating certain types of meat was the association existing between those animals (birds, etc.) and foreign religions.”[[269]](#footnote-269)
    - “In the end we admit that the Old Testament never spells out the reasons for the boundaries. They may seem arbitrary to modern readers, but Yahweh’s covenant with Israel is a suzerainty covenant—the terms are not negotiated and need not even make sense to the vassal. They are simply to be accepted because they represent the will of the divine Lord. This does not mean that they are burdensome impositions. On the contrary, the mere fact of knowing the boundaries is an enviable grace (cf. 4:8). Furthermore, both Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 provide ample incentive to accept willingly these dietary boundaries; because the Israelites are the objects of Yahweh’s gracious redemption, election, and exceptional favor, obedience to all he required should be a delight.”[[270]](#footnote-270)
* Vv. 4-5 provide a category for clean animals. A helpful chart that unites the two chapters into a single taxonomy (courtesy of Daniel Block) is below:



* The chart indicates the various forms of classification that were needed to determine the cleanness of a specific meat.
  + For land animals, a divided hoof AND chewing the cud was enough.
  + For aquatic animals, anything with fins AND scales. This would exclude all crustaceans, and sea mammals
  + For birds, anything that eats carrion is excluded.
  + For insects, only locust and grasshoppers are ok, and anything with ‘hopping ability’.
* V. 21 provides an additional prohibition . Nothing that dies on its own can be eaten. It can be given to others for food, but cannot be consumed by Jews. This also protects their holiness, but because dead things are unclean (Lev. 17:15).
* The final prohibition is against boiling a kid in its mother’s milk. This stipulation is likely reflective of a common pagan practice at the time of giving thanks for the harvest in the fall. Boiling meat in milk was common, but this act indicates a rebirth cycle - the baby boiled in the milk of its own mother - which would have been a form of pagan worship, and therefore would be considered unrighteous.

## Deut. 14:22-29 ~ Rules Regarding Tithe Offerings

* This section begins a longer portion (through 16:17) regarding the annual, semiannual, triennial, and septennial requirements. These are distributed throughout the section.
* The annual **tithe** was required by the Lord for everything that **grew out of the ground**. The ‘tithe’ just means one tenth. This tenth was to be a tribute to the Lord, as King.
  + - “A major responsibility of any king in vassalage to a Hittite ruler was the periodic presentation of tribute to him, tokens of his submission and loyalty (cf. 12:6–14). This was no less true of Israel, which, in line with the sovereign-vassal nature of the Sinaitic covenant, must bear appropriate offerings to the Lord on stated occasions. This was part and parcel of true worship, a vital aspect of what it meant to give recognition to the Lord as the only God and to respond to him accordingly. Thus tribute is an expression of obedience to the fourth commandment, that which celebrates redemption from the bondage of Egyptian slavery to the happy service of the Great King, the Lord (5:12–15).”[[271]](#footnote-271)
* This act was also designed, along with the following sections on slavery and charity, to loosen the grip of the nation on their possessions. Each of the rules are designed to bring the nation to remembrance of their dependence on God alone for all that they need.
* All of these things should be brought to **the place** where God would choose to place His name. This includes anything that grows out of the ground, as well as the first of the herds and flocks. Elsewhere, the firstborn of the flocks and herds are to be consumed if they are not part of the tithe (15:19-20). All of this tithe should be brought and **eaten** before the Lord as a mark of covenant renewal and appreciation for the generous King.
* This annual pilgrimage would serve to remind the nation that all blessings come from God, and as such, he was to be **reverenced** (feared).
  + - “By returning a tithe to God regularly, the people would *learn to fear the Lord* (v. 23) and know that their prosperity did not depend on irrigation or advanced agricultural techniques, but on the beneficence and provision of their God.”[[272]](#footnote-272)
* Moses then addresses the issue of a person who lives too far away from the site of worship. Such a person was not required to bring all the produce, since transportation would be complex.
* Instead, the goods should be **sold for money** (literally silver, with value determined by the standardized weight, the shekel, from *shakal*, to weigh) and that money should then be brought to the place where God chooses, so that the rule for feasting and rejoicing may be kept.
  + - “For this reason, he makes it easy for all citizens to participate and redundantly invites not only the heads of families but entire households to eat anything that their hearts desire at the festival. Remarkably, the text omits any reference to the most common foods (cf. v. 23). Apparently meat was always desirable fare for a banquet.”[[273]](#footnote-273)
* The Lord says that they should **bind the money** in the hand - that is, wrap it up, so that none of it is spent in the journey. The whole sum should be brought to the centralized place.
* Moses allows them to purchase whatever they may like - **for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires** - with the stipulation that it is consumed there in the presence of God. This celebratory event was designed to lift their hearts in joyful praise to the King who had blessed them.
* V. 27 indicates that the **Levites** were supposed to join the people on their annual pilgrimages. The notion of the people bringing the Levite along with their families in order to all worship the Lord together would have galvanized the community around worship of God. The basis for this was that he had no **portion** of land or an **inheritance** to pass to his children.
* According to vv. 28-30, on the third and sixth year of each seven year tithe cycle, the people were to bring their tithes, not to the central location, but to **deposit** it in storage facilities in their home **town**. These storage facilities were then used for the care of the poor and the Levites.
* The poor or non-landed (**orphans, widows, and aliens**, as well as **Levites**) were to come and eat their fill on a daily basis from these tithe storehouses in each town (literally, in the gates). The implication was that these places were the ‘soup kitchens’ of the day, using the stored goods to be able to provide food for the needy and helpless through the course of the year.
  + - “The system of tithes described in these two verses enabled both groups to learn and understand their continual dependence upon God. The people with produce and income gave a portion back to God, who had made provision in the first place; year by year, they learned to know and remember that the source of their sustenance was God, and every third year they remembered particularly that not all others were blessed as they were. Those without regular means of subsistence, such as aliens, widows, and orphans, were thrown onto God, the Lord of the community, for provision. In receiving it from the tithe, which properly belonged to God, their needs were met.”[[274]](#footnote-274)

## Deut. 15:1-11 ~ Sabbath Year Debt Release

* This section details a number of measures within the nation that should have offered protection to the poor, had they been followed. As such, the flow directly from the triennial yearly tithes from chapter 14.
* These measures occur every seventh year, a significant number in biblical texts, and linked with the sabbath day.
* V. 1 begins this explanation. It states that every **seventh** **year**, all **debts** would be forgiven. The literal word used is ‘released’ (שְׁמִטָּֽה׃-*shəmiṭṭāh*), which is used of the command for the land to be ‘released’ from having to bear food (Ex. 23:10-11). This practice was also for the sake of the poor, who could glean from the untended fields.
* The timing of the debt release is not made clear, though it appears from 31:10 that it corresponded to the Feast of Booths.
  + - “The required action is specified literally as “to practice/enact release” (NIV “cancel debts”). Whereas earlier regulations on the sabbatical year focused on rest for the land,5 with characteristic humanitarian concern this text focuses on the institution’s implications for the people, particularly the poor.” [[275]](#footnote-275)
* The creditor is called upon to release whatever is owed by his brother/kinsman. These two words eventually are referred to just as ‘kinsman’. The idea is that any Jew should not be kept under the burden of the debt.
* The ancient practice of lending could also refer to the collateral that was held, meaning that the ‘release’ spoken of here was the return of the collateralized item to the borrower without repayment. This would allow for the debt to continue, but without collateral. However, this view doesn’t make sense in light of the warning of v. 9.
* The release is proclaimed as being **the Lord’s** - he has announced the forgiveness of debt.
  + - “This seems to be the equivalent of the formula in the Mesopotamian *misharum* decrees explaining that debts may not be collected “because the king has established a remission for the land.” Here it is God—Israel’s divine king—who establishes the remission.”[[276]](#footnote-276)
* The foreigner among the people would not have been a participant in the release. Because he was not a citizen of Israel, he would not have been under the same sort of kingly grace and mercy. While able to enjoy the benefits of the covenant blessings on the nation, the actual participation would have been impossible.
* V. 4 could either mean that there would be no poor at all, or that there *should*  be no poor, should the people choose to obey. The latter interpretation makes better sense in light of v. 11 later.
* The statement that there would be no poor is based on their obedience, as v. 5 makes clear. Should the nation truly keep the stipulations of the covenant, v. 6 states that the promises made to the patriarchs would be fulfilled completely, and the nation would rule over the nations around her.
  + - “The tension between the two statements is indicative of the gulf that exists between the ideal and actual, what could be the case were God’s purposes carried out and what inevitably occurs when they are not. This is the import of v. 5, which plainly states that full compliance with covenant requirements was the precondition to Israel’s prosperity in the land. When this was achieved, not only would Israel be blessed but, in line with the ancient patriarchal promises, they would be the means of blessing the whole world and having dominion over the nations.”[[277]](#footnote-277)
* Having presented what would be the ideal situation, in vv. 7-9, Moses conceives of what would likely be the reality - a situation where a poor person, a Jew (the word ‘brother’ strikingly occurs 4 times before v. 11), would be in the land, and would have some type of need.
* Moses condemns two attitudes - first, a **hard-heartedness** that would refuse the brother, and second, having a **closed hand** from that poor brother. On the contrary, the people are called to **open their hands** and **generously** lend to the person who is in need.
* Moses then proceeds to describe three things that would be associated with such a hard heart in vv. 9-11.
  + 1. **A base or evil thoug**h that calculates the time before the sabbatical year. Such a heart would be unwilling to lend, knowing that the loan would never be repaid (The seventh year, the year of remission, is near). A heart that is calculating the time difference is not loving God, or his brother, but loving money. This would ultimately violate the first command.
    - “The thinking is, the closer the year of release, the less the creditor has to gain from the debtor’s indebtedness. The antidote to such twisted thinking is a generous heart concerned about the well-being of the poor rather than one’s own advantage. Loans were to be granted freely for the benefit of the poor, not the creditor, who has no need to capitalize on the plight of his brother.”[[278]](#footnote-278)
  + 2. **A hostile ey**e - This attitude would flow from the previous one. A person who’s heart is evil would then be inclined to anger and hostility toward his brother, which would make him refuse to lend, but to **give him nothing**. Again, such an attitude is not honoring to the Lord, but would be sin. The poor man might **cry to the Lord** in his suffering, reflecting the sin that is being committed against him.
  + 3. A **sad heart** - Moses adds that the people should give generously, and that their hearts should not be grieved. The picture is vivid. The year for debt forgiveness is close. To offer the loan would be to essentially give the money away. No wonder sadness might enter the heart.
* However, quite to the contrary, Moses promises that the **Lord would bless** them in all their work and labors. This concept is repeated elsewhere (Psalm 41:1, Prov 22:9, Acts 20:35).
* V. 11 states that there will always be poor in the land. This would imply that the people would never obey the commands perfectly. For this reason, Moses commands them to reflect the heart of God in gladly and generously open their hand to their brothers who are poor.
  + This statement is quoted by Jesus in three of the gospels as a response to Judas, who condemned Mary for anointing His feet. Christ’s words are not intended to denigrate the practice of giving to the poor, but to exalt Mary for her worship of Christ that reflected her heart of love for Him. Such a heart of love for God was the same root that would make a person freely give to the poor. It was Judas who loved money, and was therefore unable to understand the glory of Mary’s action.

## Deut. 15:12-18 ~ Sabbath Year Servant Release

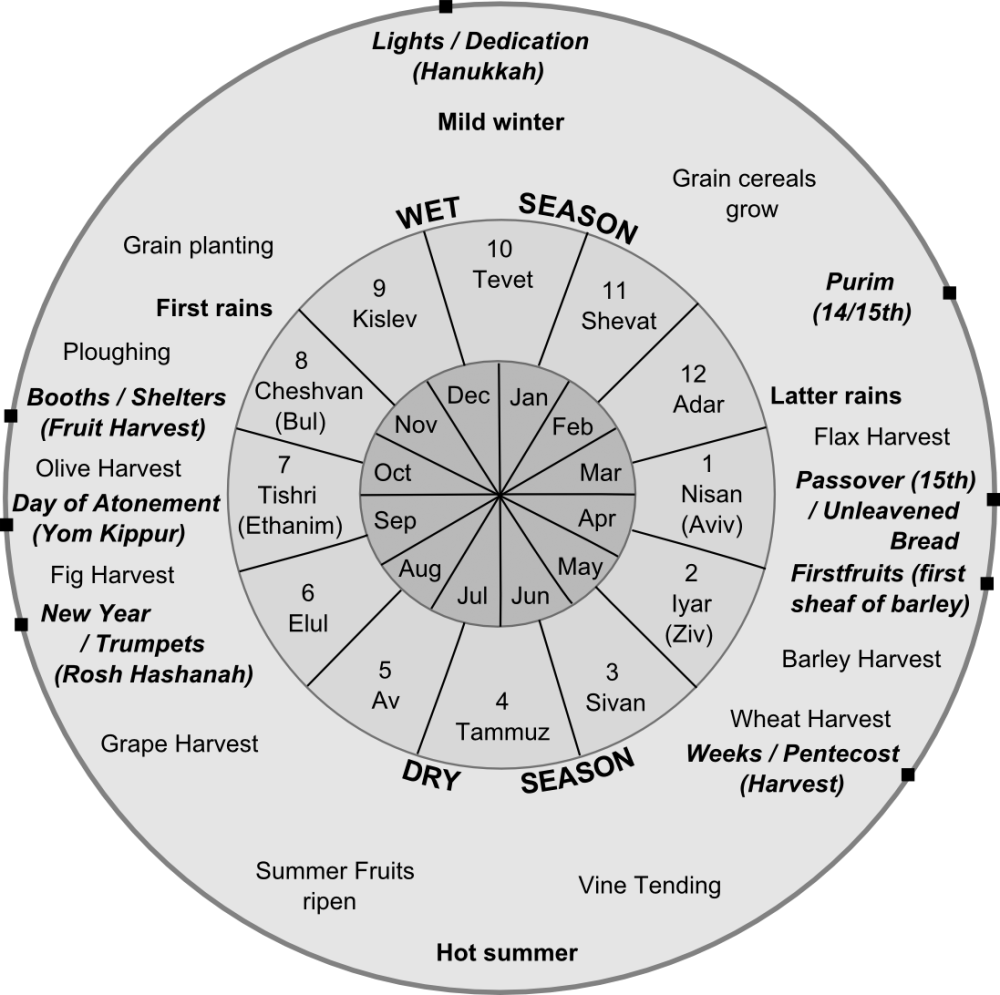
* The next category of release was indentured servants. These people may have been sold into this situation because of the inability to pay a debt, and so this section follows logically from what has come before.
* The law relates only to a **brother** Moses includes **man or woman** as a descriptive caveat - either could be sold). The Lord permitted the owning of slaves from the nations around, and even that those slaves be bequeathed to future generations. (Lev. 25:44-46)
* The servant has been sold into this status, likely because of an inability to support him or herself.
  + - “In the former case, it might refer to the sale of a son or daughter by an indigent father or of a thief by the court. If it means “sells himself/herself,” it would refer to self-sale by an indigent person for support of himself/herself and his/her family. If debt servitude is permitted, the aim in either case would be to satisfy a debt or raise the funds to do so.”[[279]](#footnote-279)
* The servant must work for **six years**, after which he should be set **free**.
  + - “*Then he shall serve you six years*—these are not the six years of the sabbatical cycle, but six years following the sale, with freedom being declared in the seventh year.”[[280]](#footnote-280)
* This code is stated earlier (Ex 21:2), but is made more clear here. Not only should the slave be released, but he should be blessed by the owner at the time of his release. This would include a liberal gift from among the flocks, herds, produce, and wine. These gifts would ensure that the man or woman would not go out, simply to be indentured again because of perpetual poverty.
* This was to be because **God had blessed** them materially in the land. They were the recipients of divine blessing and care, and as such, should show the same care and generosity toward those who are under them.
* Further, Moses explains that they should **remember** that they were **slaves** in the land of Egypt but had been **redeemed** and **blessed** from the house of slavery. By doing this, they would not only reflect the heart of God, but would be only doing what was appropriate as recipients of diving grace.
  + - “The rationale for this was the comparable situation in which Israel had found itself in Egypt. There they had been pressed into slavery, cruelly mistreated, but at last delivered by the redemptive grace and power of God. But even the Egyptians had sent them away with provisions to tide them over until they could stand on their own feet (cf. Exod 12:35–36). If this mighty act of redemption was carried out by the Lord on Israel’s behalf, how much more should the beneficiaries of that goodness be quick to exercise it on behalf of their financially oppressed brothers and sisters (Deut 15:14b–15).”[[281]](#footnote-281)
* Vv. 16-17 provide indication regarding what to do should a servant request to remain in the house of his master. The motives for this choice of life-long service could be either a bond of affection (**he loves you and your household**) and/or financial stability (**he fares well with you**).
* The master would then press an awl through the ear of the servant and into the door of the house, indicating the servant’s desire to remain within the house for life.
  + - “Should this be the case, the relationship had to be formalized by the legal procedure of public declaration of intent, a procedure that, in such cases as these, consisted of the piercing of the ear of the man or woman with an awl pressed against the door (v. 17). This clearly was the door of the master, and the act speaks of the identification of the servant with his or her lord for life.”[[282]](#footnote-282)
    - “According to halakhic exegesis, “perpetuity” means for the rest of the master’s life, unless a Jubilee year (as prescribed in Leviticus 25) comes first. Even if the servant chooses to remain with the master, he is not passed on to the master’s heirs and does not remain beyond the Jubilee.”[[283]](#footnote-283)
* V 18 concludes the section, but deals with the inner feelings of the master. He should not simply set the man free, and provide blessings for him, but he must do so without **hard** feelings or the thought of being **aggrieved**.
  + This is based on the fact that his service was worth **double the work** of a hired man. The principle apparently was that a man who worked as an indentured servant would have worked twice as hard as a hired man, since he could work longer days, and even nights, depending on the season.
  + The other option would be that the wages of a hired man would be saved for the six years, meaning that the master was able to keep those funds and use them for his benefit, and perhaps to hire another servant, thereby providing two workers for the price of one.
  + Either option is a potential, but the first seems more likely.

## Deut. 15:19-23 ~ Consecration of the Firstborn

* V 19 indicates that all the firstborn males of the flocks and herds were consecrated to the Lord. This is a continuation of the discussion in 14:23.
  + - “The command, which the Lord had given when first they came out of Egypt (Ex. 13:2, 12), that all the first-born of the herd and flock should be sanctified to Him, is repeated here by Moses, with the express injunction that they were not to work with the first-born of cattle (by yoking them to the plough or wagon), and not to shear the first-born of sheep; that is to say, they were not to use the first-born animals which were sanctified to the Lord for their own earthly purposes, but to offer them year by year as sacrifices to the Lord, and consume them in sacrificial meals.”[[284]](#footnote-284)
* The consecration of the firstborn males was based on the Passover events (note Ex. 13:2,12 as above, and Num 3:13) and set apart those males to the Lord (see also Ex. 22:29-30).
* The firstborn sons were also considered holy to the Lord. For the firstborn sons, a sacrifice was required to redeem the child from the Lord (Jesus is redeemed with the offering of the poor - two turtledoves, Luke 2:23-24).
* These firstborn males of the flock were to be brought to the central place before the Lord, and were to be offered and then consumed by their owners. This would have been an explicit act of worship to the Lord, since the people were thereby acknowledging that the Lord was the one who had provided for the birth.
* The law here, however, limits the number of animals only to those who were perfect specimens. Those that had defects - blemishes, lameness, blindness, etc - were released from the law of sacrifice before the Lord at the central place.
  + - “Since no more than about 15 percent of firstborn animals will have been sacrificed, the economic consequences of the law of the firstborn was minimal. Furthermore, the animals were not to be simply disposed of or sacrificed as whole burnt offerings; rather, their meat was eaten in celebration at the central sanctuary (v. 20).”[[285]](#footnote-285)
* Nevertheless, they had to be eaten within the gates - that is, at home at the settlements - so that they were still consecrated to the Lord but were not brought into His presence.
  + - “Verse 20 invites the head and the entire household to a banquet in the presence of Yahweh when the firstborn are consecrated. Although Yahweh himself does not eat the meat, as divine host he invites his family to partake of food that has been dedicated to him.”[[286]](#footnote-286)
* The final words of the chapter speak to the process of removing the blood and consuming the food, either by clean or unclean people.

Deut. 16:1-17 ~ Pilgrimage Festivals

* Moses has provided detailed rules on the killing and eating of meat within villages, and on the tithe offerings. Now he explains the three festivals which required the people to come into the central location in order to be kept.
* These three festivals are Passover, Weeks, and Booths, and each has a significant correlation to the future.
* Passover and Weeks were both spring festivals, specifically related to the beginning of harvest before the hot summer months. Booths was an autumn festival, and occurred after the complete harvest of all types of food items was brought in before the next rainy season.



## Deut 16:1-8 ~ Passover

* The first feast that Moses provides direction for is Passover (or Pesach, פֶּ֛סַח). While English readers have generally been consistent in using the phrase ‘to pass over’ as the basis for the festival from Ex. 12:23, the word used here is not strictly synonymous. It means ‘to offer protection for’ someone or something. Thus, the commemoration is not simply that God passed over the homes of the Israelites, but that He protected them.
* The feast is not a harvest festival, and is still celebrated in Israel to this day.
  + - “Since the Feast of *Pesaḥ* and Unleavened Bread commemorates the Exodus, it is known today as *zeman ḥerutenu*, “the time of our freedom.” Although some think of it as a harvest festival, it actually falls before the harvest and does not celebrate God’s bounty as do the other two feasts.”[[287]](#footnote-287)
* According to v. 1, the nation was to **observe the month of Abib**. This is another name for the post-exilic month of Nisan, which fell during March and April, and literally meant ‘new ears of grain’ in reference to the new green heads of grain on the stalks. Passover fell on the 14th of the month (Num. 28:16).
* The command to observe the month was probably a statement that the people were to observe the festivals of that month.
  + - “Because everyone was aware that Passover was to be celebrated on Abib/Nisan 14, there was no need to specify the date here. Abib was the first month of the year,10 which may suggest that this celebration also functioned as a New Year Festival. The command to observe a month seems odd and probably refers to all the ceremonies scheduled for that month (cf. Ex. 12:3; Lev. 23:9–14).”[[288]](#footnote-288)
* The Passover was to commemorate the freedom that the Lord had provided for the nation by bringing them out of Egypt. By keeping the feast, the nation would be reminded year after year of their servitude in Egypt, and their new service of freedom to God.
* The reference to night indicates that God’s victory over Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt was the marking point for the freedom of the nation. Even though they didn’t leave Egypt until the next morning, the victory was won.
* V. 2 indicates that the Passover could be sacrificed from the **flocks and the herds**, a statement which would include sheep, goats, and cattle. This is in variation from the text in Exodus 12:23ff, which indicates only sheep or goat lambs could be used. A simple resolution would be that the lamb of the festival had to be from the flocks, but the people could choose to sacrifice additional freewill offerings to the Lord. This is exemplified by Josiah in 2 Chron 35:7-13.
* This sacrifice had to take place in the central location that God would identify for the nation. The entire nation (all males, v. 16) would come to the location in order to sacrifice the Passover animal, and to observe the feast.
* The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 13:6) is attached to the Passover, and is detailed as part of the feast in vv. 3-7. Together they make up a week-long festival designed to remind the nation of their freedom from Egypt and their subsequent suffering in the wilderness. This is accomplished through specific deprivations.
* First, the people could not eat bread with leaven. Matsah (מַצּ֖וֹת) is the only bread that can be eaten for the full week. This is referred to as the **bread of affliction**, because the people were forced to **leave Egypt in haste**, not allowing time for the bread to rise.
  + - “*For seven days* (15th-21st Abib) *you shall eat unleavened bread*—the unleavened bread perhaps symbolized the hurried nature of the flight from Egypt, for unlike leavened bread it could be made quickly."[[289]](#footnote-289)
* The ultimate purpose of the feast is spelled out in v. 3 - the people were to **remember the day they came out of Egypt** throughout their lives.
* V. 4 indicates that the prohibition against leavened bread was not simply for those participating in the festival, but for the entire nation. No one within the borders of Israel was to make leavened bread during this week.
* Additionally, none of the **meat of the initial sacrifice** was to remain until **morning**. It had to all be consumed in full. This was reflective of their coming out of Egypt as well (Ex. 12:8).
* Vv. 5-6 also indicate that the sacrifice must occur at the central location of worship, and not in the individual towns/cities that the Lord would give them.
* The sacrifice must occur on or before the evening of the 14th - the statement **at sunset** indicates the fixed time, although the sheer number of sacrifices would have made specific fulfillment of this impossible. This would have linked directly to the exodus beginning, and the protection that the Lord had provided for the nation through the slain lamb.
* After the people had killed and eaten the lamb, they were to return to their tents. This would have been late into the evening, since the time from sacrifice to meal would have been lengthy. This was not to say they should go home, but return to whatever dwelling they were in because of the pilgrimage.
* V. 8 explains that the feast of unleavened bread would continue for seven days, after which the people would observe a **solemn assembly** ( מִֽקְרָא קֹ֙דֶשׁ֙ - miqrāʾ qōdeš in Lev. 23:21) to the Lord. This was effectively a closing ceremony for the time, marking a special sabbath without work, in order for the people to reflect on all they had remembered from the Passover and time of unleavened bread.
  + - “Subsequent records indicate that hereafter the Festival of Passover was more honored in the breach than in the observance. The Chronicler observes that in the wake of Solomon’s construction of the temple, he led the people in the celebration of all the holy days in Israel’s religious calendar, including the three mandatory pilgrimage festivals: Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Booths (2 Chron. 8:13). In light of the close association of Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread in Deuteronomy 16:1–8, we may assume the observance of the Festival of Unleavened Bread began with the Passover celebrations. Except for a late retrospective reference to Samuel (2 Chron. 35:18), the narratives are silent on the Passover until the time of Hezekiah, who led Judah in the celebration and even attempted to engage Israelites in what was by then the Assyrian province of Samaria (2 Chron. 30). However, the Chronicler adds that the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were celebrated one month late because the priests had not been adequately prepared (30:2–3, 13). This observance seems to have stirred the conscience of the people, precipitating a nationwide campaign against pagan and syncretistic forms of worship (31:1). But this revival was short-lived. Under Manasseh, the festivals devoted to Yahweh were suppressed and displaced by pagan rituals. Finally, toward the end of the seventh century BC, as part of the reforms of Josiah, Manasseh’s grandson, the Passover was celebrated one more time. Both the deuteronomistic historian (2 Kings 23:22) and the Chronicler (2 Chron. 35:17–19) observe that the Passover had not been celebrated like this since before the founding of the monarchy. This event provides a terminal bookend to match Joshua’s in Joshua 5:10–11, but it was too little, too late. Because of their infidelity to Yahweh as prescribed by Moses in the book of the Torah, the doom of Judah had already been sealed (2 Kings 22:15–20).”[[290]](#footnote-290)

## NT Significance of the Passover

* The Passover has perhaps the greatest significance for NT believers of the feast days for a significant number of reasons.
* First, Christ inaugurates the New Covenant during the Passover feast. The bread and cup (one of four in modern liturgy) are both integral parts of the Passover meal. Many modern Christians place heavy emphasis on this fact, but many of the modern Jewish liturgies may not have been in place at the time of Christ.
* Second, the significance of Christ’s death on the day of the Passover is clear as well. This was made possible by the lengthy preparatory time required. Christ ate the feast on the 14th of Nisan, and was crucified on the 15th of Nisan, the day of preparation for the Sabbath to begin the seven days of unleavened bread (John 19:31).
* Third, Paul specifically identifies Christ as ‘our Passover’ in 1 Cor. 5:6-8. This section compares sin with leaven, calling the people to ‘clean out the leaven’ that had grown in the church in order to be a ‘new lump’ of dough, since they were, in fact unleavened, because of the sacrifice of Christ.
* The imagery identifies the freedom that the nation celebrated at Passover with the freedom purchased through Christ’s death. The cleaning out of sin was the expected response to those who had been set free from the bondage to that sin through the sacrifice of Christ. This would indicate that the blessings of the Passover would be experienced daily by those who were in Christ.
* Finally, though less explicitly, Psalm 118 concludes the ‘Hallel’ (Psalms 113-118) which would have been recited by the priests during the sacrifice of the lambs. Remarkably, 118:22-24 are quoted extensively by Christ and the apostles as the statement of nation rejection of Him as Messiah.

## Deut 16:9-12 ~ Feast of Weeks

* The feast of weeks (*Shavuot*) causes the most confusion among scholars. There is no date fixed for the feast in any text, and it seems clear that God’s intention is to have the festival begin on the day of the beginning of the harvest (Lev. 23:11) - from the time of **putting the sickle into the standing grain**. From this date, seven sabbaths are to be counted, after which the feast would begin.
* Scholars indicate that seven weeks was a customary length of time for a full harvest, and so this fixes a time for the harvest to draw to a conclusion.
* The festival, though not with a fixed date, was customarily celebrated starting the day after the first sabbath of the Passover, and the count would begin at that time. This first day was called the ‘First Fruits’ (Num 28:26), and begins the counting toward the conclusion of the Feast of Weeks. The First Fruits would include a wave offering presented to the Lord for bringing in the first of the harvest.
  + - “There was controversy among various Jewish sects as to whether a Sabbath within the Feast of Unleavened Bread was meant or one following it. The Pharisees held that “the day after the Sabbath” does not mean a Sunday at all, but the day after a Sabbath-like holiday, namely the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This became the basis of the halakhic ruling that the first sheaf is brought, and the counting begins, on the second day of the feast, the sixteenth of Nisan, and that the Feast of Weeks falls on the sixth of Sivan (May–June).[[291]](#footnote-291)
* According to v. 10, the festival would be celebrated by a **tribute of a freewill offering** based on the amount that the **Lord has blessed** you during the course of the year. This offering was presented before the Lord as a wave offering.
* This would be a **time of rejoicing** for all the people, from every segment of society (**your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst**). All of them would come together and rejoice before the Lord as a sign of His great blessing to them. It was a call to rejoice and worship the Lord. Moses concludes by linking this event to the departure from Egypt. Obedience of these events was based on the status of the people as redeemed by the Lord.
* In the history of Israel in the Old Testament, the Feast of Weeks is largely unspoken of. The feast is mentioned in 2 Chron 8:13 as being celebrated during the time of Solomon, and was therefore likely kept during the time of David and Saul before him. During the intertestamental period, the feast was revived and kept faithfully by some groups. At the time of Christ, the Greek word ‘Pentecost’, meaning fifty days, had become a common term for Jews in reference to the festival.

## NT Significance of the Feast of Weeks

* The feast was observed during the life of Christ. Based on the counting from Passover, Christ was raised on the first day of the Feast of Weeks, the Sunday after Passover. Paul specifically refers to Christ as the ‘firstfruits’ of the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:20, and indicates that this is the firstfruits of the resurrection that will occur for believers in the future (15:23).
* Pentecost was the time of rejoicing as the people enjoyed the new harvest. This appears to have been fulfilled in the giving of the Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks, the “firstfruits” of the church were gathered by Christ as some 3,000 people heard Peter present the gospel after the Holy Spirit had empowered and indwelt the disciples as promised. With the promised indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the gathering of God’s spiritual harvest under the New Covenant began. The harvest season would last through the summer into the fall.
* Paul says that we have the firstfruits of the Spirit in us, as we anxiously await our full inheritance (Rom 8:23).
* This same idea of the Spiritual firstfruits is indicated in 1 Thess. 2:13, and in James 1:18.

## Deut 16:13-17 ~ Feast of Booths

* The last feast of the year was the Feast of Booths (*Sukkot*), is celebrated as a time of great rejoicing over the fulness of the harvest gathered in. It requires participants to spend an entire week in Jerusalem, the longest stay of any festival, and possible only because the harvest would have been complete, both from the **threshing floor and from the wine vat**.
* According to Lev. 23:39, the festival would begin on exactly the 15th day of the seventh month - Tishri, which falls between September and October. The first and last days of the feast are holy sabbaths to the Lord.
  + - “This is the most joyous of the festivals, for which reason it has come to be called *zeman simḥatenu*, “the time of our rejoicing.” It is often called simply “the Feast,” meaning “the festival *par excellence*,” and its sacrifices are are most numerous of all the festivals.” [[292]](#footnote-292)
* Each day included offerings, and the last day was the most substantial.
* Again, all the people should appear before the Lord to celebrate the feast. This included every segment of society. However, according to v. 16, only the males were required to appear. All the rest could choose to come.
* According to v. 15, the celebration would occur for seven days and the people would rejoice throughout that time. This would be an indication of the blessing of God upon them so that they would be **altogether joyful**. The promises are complete - **all your produce…all your work…altogether joyful**.
* The event was marked by the cutting of branches from trees for the construction of ‘booths’ or tabernacles which would be lived in during the week of the feast. This, according to Lev. 23:41-43, was a perpetual reminder that the people lived in tents while in the wilderness.
* Vv. 16-17 are a summary of the stipulations - the males were required to appear at all these feasts yearly. They would **not appear empty handed**, but would bring some of what they had received as a free will offering to the Lord.

## NT Significance of the Feast of Booths

* The only reference to the feast in the NT is in John 7:20, where John calls it the ‘feast of the Jews’. Some have taken this as an epithet regarding the feast. However, it seems more likely that John is making the statement as a point of reference.
* However, additional references appear to be made by Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration. His statement that he would make booths for Christ, Moses and Elijah indicates a Messianic flavor to the festival, Matt 17:1-5. The Father’s response, to listen to Christ, would indicate that the timing that Peter believed regarding the full revelation of Jesus was actually off, as we know well.
* This Messianic promise is also indicated in Zech. 14:16-19 where apparently the Lord will demand that the yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem will be required for all families of the earth. The kingship of God at that time will be unquestioned over the whole earth, and the worship of the Lord in Jerusalem would be required.

Deut. 16:18-17 ~ Justice and Laws for the King

* Having reviewed the pilgrimage feasts, Moses turns his attention to laws about justice within Israel, as well as issues related to the kingship. All of these details stipulate the officers for the nation.
* These inclusions are interesting insofar as the option of having a king was not really offered to the nation until the time of Samuel. However, the Lord made rules for the king, in spite of the fact that He later denounces the timing of the pursuit of a king by the nation. More to follow.

## Deut. 16:18-22 ~ Local Judges and Officers

* The stipulations for the appointment of local judges are not extremely detailed. The qualifications are limited to just what has already been stated earlier in 1:13 - wise, discerning, and experienced.
* The text does not give any distinction between the two offices of judge and officer. However, they are likely of the same function, though perhaps some authority hierarchy existed.
  + - “That was clearly the case here; in fact, even the “officials” mentioned may have been judges, taking the construction as a hendiadys to be construed as “judging officials” or the like. This finds support in the fact that the only function described here is judging (vv. 18–20)."[[293]](#footnote-293)
* The command is given directly to the people (**appoint for yourself**). These men should be chosen, at least implicitly, because they would render **righteous judgment** over the people. The very nature of the statement implies that the people would desire to see righteous and fair people in place over them.
* Later appointments were made by leaders (Samuel in 1 Sam. 8:1-3, King Jehoshaphat in 2 Chron. 19:5-11). Though Jehoshaphat admonished the judges to be fair and impartial, he nevertheless does not follow the Mosaic principle. This lends credence to the fact that Deuteronomy predates the monarchic period, since textual updaters would have changed this language to match the monarchic practice.[[294]](#footnote-294)
* V. 19 provides three standards for judicial righteousness - first, to not **distort justice**, second, to **not be partial** (literally, ‘not recognize faces’, a Hebrew idiom used in 1:7, 17), and third, to **not take a bribe**. The distortion of justice and partiality are mentioned in the appointments in chapter 1. Bribery is aded here, and therefore receives additional attention (though it is covered elsewhere prior to Deuteronomy, Ex. 23:8, which has similar wording).
  + - “A bribe disrupted the true course of justice by appealing to the baser side of human nature. Justice would no longer be a “right” of all men; what was called justice would become in effect a hypocritical system serving only those who were wealthy enough to manipulate it. Because “God does not take a bribe” (10:17), the action was wrong and fell under the curse of a righteous God (27:25).”[[295]](#footnote-295)
* A bribe, according to the text **blinds the eyes of the wise, and perverts the words of the righteous**. The first illustration is just that - the eyes that should see justice are blinded, but the issue is the corruptness of heart (Eccl. 7:7). Perverted words would be perverted judgments - the bribe would literally turn the words of the judge into perversion.
* V. 20 emphatically points the people to justice and righteousness, rather than to perversion. Since God is just, His people and His judges should be just. Anything else is an abomination.
  + - “He ends this statement by stressing the importance of pursuing “righteousness, only righteousness.” It is a prerequisite to the achievement of Yahweh’s goal for his people: life and possession of the land that Yahweh is giving to them.”[[296]](#footnote-296)

## Deut. 16:21-17:1 ~ Two Examples of Unrighteousness

* The next three verses provide examples of unrighteousness.
* V. 21-22 is a prohibition of **planting an Asherah** of any kind of tree next to the altar of God.
* Moses does not give this item any significance. However, it was a symbol of the Canaanite pagan fertility cults, built in homage to the goddess Asherah, the consort of El.
* The term ‘sacred pillar’ is used in v. 22 to describe the same or a similar object, though perhaps bare and uncarved. Nevertheless, it would have been used in pagan worship practices.
  + - “This broad definition of a sacred post prevents anyone from claiming that the prohibition covers only certain objects of this type and that others are legitimate. Such a distinction could lead to confusion that can only be prevented by a comprehensive ban.”[[297]](#footnote-297)
* However, the people ought not to seek to worship YHWH in conjunction with these sinful practices. This would distort righteousness - God hates such things.
  + - “*Which the Lord your God hates* (see also 12:30–31)—to set up an *asherah* or pillar would be indicative of syncretism with Canaanite religion and would therefore be repulsive to God.”[[298]](#footnote-298)
* The future would bear out that the nation did exactly this throughout her history (1 Kings 14:23, 2 Kings 17:10, Jer. 17:2).
* The second prohibition in 17:1 is against offering any sacrifice with a blemish to God. This has already been made clear in 15:21 with the firstlings, but it is repeated here for all animal sacrifices.
* The stipulation is made because offering of the defective animals was nothing more than external formality used to cover a heart of greed. One who truly sought to worship God would desire to give of the very best of things, rather than the worst or least valuable. This type of sacrifice was nothing but covenant disloyalty at its worst.
* Malachi 1:6-8 spells out God’s response to such offerings. He suggests offering the defective animals to the governor…this would not please him. In the same way, defective animals were not pleasing to God.
* However, unlike the governor, defective offerings to the Lord were **detestable** (an abomination) to Him, not because of the sacrifices themselves, but because they reflected this heart of greed. This puts them in the same category as expressly pagan worship (12:31). God’s desire was for the hearts of the people, rather than their animals or grain.

## Deut. 17:2-7 ~ Administering Justice for Unrighteousness

* In v. 2, Moses posits a potential future situation. In one of the towns (lit. gates, which would imply potential judgment) in the future, a person is found who has **done what is evil** in the sight of God and has **transgressed the covenant**.
* The phrase transgressed the covenant (*ʿăbōr habbĕrît*) is commonly used to refer to idolatry. This is made explicitly clear in v. 3, but the phrase is important for later points of rebuke (Josh 23:16, 2 Chr 24:17–20).
* According to v. 3, the potential future transgressor has violated the covenant stipulations related to the first and second commandment by worshipping other gods. Moses offers some potential options, which he has already laid out in detail in 4:15-24.
* In v. 4, Moses gives specific instruction of what to do in such a case. He says that **you shall inquire thoroughly**, the ‘you’ being singular in the context. The entire community, upon hearing such a rumor, must thoroughly inquire about whether it is true or not. No one is excluded from the protection of the purity of the nation.
* Moses twice emphasizes that the accusation is t**rue and certain**. This is to be expected, since a rumor could begin at any time, and a witch hunt could potentially occur.
* That man or woman should be **stoned to death** in the most public place - the gates of the city, according to v. 5. The infraction of the covenant in worshipping other deities could not be tolerated. As such, the people must eliminate the evil from among them via death.
* V. 6 provides a stipulation, again, to prevent a witch hunt or a personal vendetta. The requirement was for two or more witnesses to establish a fact.
  + - “There had to be at least two valid witnesses against the accused person in order for a case to be established and the death penalty to be put into effect. One witness was not sufficient in a case of this severity, for in the last resort, the evidence would consist merely in one man’s word against that of another fellow Israelite.”[[299]](#footnote-299)
* This concept of witnesses is applied broadly in the NT, and generally under the same principles - that two or three witnesses must establish a fact. (ex. Matt 18:16, 1 Tim. 5:9) Paul interestingly uses his own letters as two separate witnesses in 2 Cor. 13:1.
* In the same way as with the family member caught in idolatry (13:11), the witnesses must be the first to cast the stones in the execution. The people would join in so that the act of execution was communal. Not only was this a sign of the reality of the event, but would also serve to destroy any falsely laid plans of deceit. Further, false witnesses were therefore guilty of murder.
  + - “The gravity of what they were called upon to do would be so great that it was likely that the collusion would unravel either in the judicial process itself or subsequent to the miscarriage of justice. Parties to such a cover-up knew all too well the potential for blackmail that existed in these circumstances.”[[300]](#footnote-300)
    - “This requirement would impress on the witnesses that by their testimony they are in effect executing the accused; if their testimony is incorrect, initiating the stoning would make them murderers. The Mishnah seeks to make the same impression by requiring that witnesses in capital cases be warned.”[[301]](#footnote-301)
* The final purpose of this act is stated explicitly in 7:7 - it would **purge the evil from their midst**. The purpose of the execution is not simply punishment, but for the purity of the nation.
  + - “Although the judicial process ends with execution, the purpose of the procedure is not merely to give criminals their due. The concluding declaration summarizes the goal: to “purge the evil” from the midst of Israel. Moses’ concern for communal health leaves no room for sentimentality or prejudice.”[[302]](#footnote-302)
* Interestingly, Paul uses this phrase in the statement regarding eliminating sin in the church in 1 Cor. 5:13. The context there is the Passover. Moses effectively links the concept of the Passover and the ritual purity it required with sins of idolatry which were detestable to God. Paul picks up on the link and applies God’s character of holiness to the church.

## Deut. 17:8-13 ~ Difficult Cases

* Moses also envisions a future time when cases would come before the judges that would be too complex to adjudicate in the local setting. He provides three different examples, homicide, lawsuits, and assault.
  + The literal translation of these is ‘blood to blood’, ‘judgment to judgment’, and ‘stroke to stroke’. These phrases are not explicitly clear - but the principle is intact. Difficult cases required an appellate court, of sorts.
    - “Between one kind of death and another—although the general principle of the law was clear, it might not be clear in a particular case whether death had been caused deliberately or accidentally, and therefore whether the crime was homicide or manslaughter. The different types of plea perhaps involved cases in which, for example, it was difficult to distinguish whether the offense resulted from intention or negligence. Assault perhaps has primary reference to crimes involving bodily injury, where it was important to distinguish between cases of deliberate assault, accidental injury, or criminal negligence.”[[303]](#footnote-303)
* Apparently in these cases there was a potential for **dispute in the gates**. The public forum for justice was the gates of the city, and the matter was not plainly apparent to the local judges.
* This would result in the case being taken to the central location for adjudication.
* V. 9 says that there will be either a Levitical priest or a judge who is in charge at the central location who will then consider the case and make a final ruling. The text is not particularly clear on who would have sat on the court, or the details of the number of judges.
  + - “Because of ambiguities in the Hebrew, it is not clear whether the high court has one lay judge or more; whether it must always include both priests and lay judges; and whether or not all cases are heard by both types of judge acting together. Jehoshaphat’s court included lay judges, priests, and Levites. It was chaired by either a layman or a priest, depending on whether the case concerned secular or ritual law.”[[304]](#footnote-304)
* The judge at the time would enter a verdict which would be binding on the people. There would be no further appeal, since the highest court would have heard the case at that time.
* Vv. 10-13 describe the carrying out of the binding verdict. The people must carry it out with specificity. Moses makes clear in vv. 10-11 that they should do **all that they teach** them to do.
* Interestingly, however, this is not arbitrary. Rather, the ruling would be based on the **terms of the law** which they would teach. Thus, the court was truly under the control of God, and verdicts would thereby come from Him, through the law, and to the people.
* For this reason, a failure to obey the verdict would be a rejection of God’s authority, and therefore worthy of death, according to v. 12. Such a rejection of the highest court was an act of presumption (literally insolence, rebellion, pride - זָד֗וֹן see also, Prov. 11:2).
* Again, by killing that proud and rebellious one, the people would be removing impurity from Israel.
  + - “His instructions here conclude with a stern warning: failure to execute the judgment as prescribed is the height of presumption and defiance against God (v. 12a–b). Refusal to listen to the priest who stands in the service of Yahweh, or to the judge who declares Yahweh’s verdict, is as reprehensible as idolatry itself (cf. 17:5–7a) and deserves the death penalty.”[[305]](#footnote-305)
* V. 13 repeats the same final conclusion as 13:11 - when justice is executed properly, it should instill fear in the hearts of the people. This is not a terror of God without hope, since Israel was still His chosen people. However, the seriousness of such violations should be made clear to the people, so that they would know not to sin against the Lord in this way.
  + - “The reason for such harsh measures was to preclude any similar contempt for law in the future (v. 13). Behind it all, of course, was the inextricable linkage between law and covenant. It was absolutely incumbent on the kingdom citizen to demonstrate loyalty and obedience to the Great King, evidence of which, among other things, was strict adherence to theocratic law and its application.”[[306]](#footnote-306)

## Deut. 17:14-20 ~ Laws of the King

* The section at hand is used as a proof of the later date of the writing of Deuteronomy. The fact that a king is mentioned, and that the king bears many of the marks of Solomon’s reign, suggests that a later redactor either composed the entire book, or added this section. The motive would have been to show the negative implications of kingship, and to essentially vilify Solomon.
* There are a number of reasons this view is poorly reasoned. First, the section is not as negative about kingship as these scholars would suggest. In fact, quite the opposite, seeking only to restrain the activities of the king that might run to excess. Second, kingship in Israel is mentioned as early as the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:6) and the prophecies concerning Judah (Gen. 49). These mentions would require a later redactor to have added all such references positively, only to reject them later, a complex and inverted argument at best. Finally, God never specifically rejects the request for a king in 1 Samuel, but just the timing for it.[[307]](#footnote-307)
* V. 14-15 speak about a future time when the nation desires a king. While there are a number of opinions about whether God through Moses is in favor of a king, the structural parallel of these verses with 12:20 regarding meat, as well as the emphatic opening phrase in v. 15, both seem to indicate that a king would be a positive thing.
  + - “That all of this came to pass does not by any means prove that the Deuteronomy text was composed after the event; nor, in fact, does it mean that it is predictive prophecy. It is simply a statement of profound insight into the human condition, one that understands the pride and predilections of those who would rule in ignorance or defiance of divine mandate.”[[308]](#footnote-308)
* The basis for the king is found in v. 14, at least from the perspective of the people. They say, “**I will set a king over me like all the nations around me.”** The statement is almost exactly what the people say in 1 Sam. 8:10, when they appeal to Samuel for a king. However, in v. 11, it is clear that the request displeased the Lord. A seeming contradiction exists.
  + The solution is to understand that God’s leadership was intended to be king-like. The request of a king in Deuteronomy was for a king who was like the kings of the other nations, that is, in his office of king. In this way, the people could have a personal leader while God still retained the kingship over the nation.
  + A rejection of that system was, in a sense, a rejection of God as their king. This is seen in what they request after Samuel argues with the people in 1 Sam. 8.
  + In v. 20, the three statements of the people are all a rejection of God. That they would **be like the nations** (rather than having a *king* who was like other kings) around them was expressly against what God desired (Deut. 14:1-2). That he would **judge** them was expressly against what God had told them should be the proper order of judgment (Deut 16:18-20). That he would **go before them** and fight their battles is an express replacement of God as their leader (Deut. 31:3).
  + The concept of a king was never forbidden, but a king who would replace God was. Even the choice of Saul, for his external appearance rather than his heart, reflects this attitude of the people.
* There are a number of limiting factors for the king, however. First, Moses makes it clear that the man must be a Jew. Anyone else would effectively be a dictator. At later times, foreign rulers did have control over the nation, either directly, as during the intertestamental period, or indirectly, as with the puppet kings in Judah before the exile.
* Second, the king would not be allowed to multiply horses for himself or to send people to Egypt to gain horses. This is directly disobeyed by Solomon in 1 Kings 10:28. Horses represented military prowess - something which the kings of Israel would not need, since the God of the universe was for them (Psalm 20:8).
* Moses states that the Lord has told the people of Israel to never go back to Egypt. However, this exact phrase in not found in the Pentateuch.
  + - “The specific warning is missing in previous narratives, but Moses seems to allude to a warning that has not been preserved in the biblical record. He recalls it here to emphasize that a return to Egypt would in effect annul the people’s redemption and cancel their covenant relationship with Yahweh.”[[309]](#footnote-309)
* The third prohibition is for the multiplication of women for the king. The basis for this stipulation is that his heart would turn away. Solomon not only exemplifies this sin (1 Kings 11:7), but also warned against it (Prov. 31:3).
  + - “A large harem would distract the king from God’s teachings and from performing his responsibilities. Solomon and Ahab tolerated and even indulged in idolatry to please the foreign wives they married to cement political alliances. However, the text does not limit the prohibition to foreign wives or to straying from God, and it must have in mind other types of dereliction in addition to idolatry.”[[310]](#footnote-310)
    - “And implicit in the procedure of a political marriage alliance is a deviation from the one and only true treaty of the Israelite state, namely, the treaty that finds its expression in the covenant with the Lord.”[[311]](#footnote-311)
* Interestingly, later Jewish law held that this number would be no more than 18. However, the more conservative Qumranic Temple scroll limited the number to one.
* The fourth prohibition is against wealth. The only means of increasing wealth would be through the excessive taxation of the people. This would mean that the people would suffer under the king, and he would no longer display the heart of God over them. This is exactly what happened under Solomon, and the basis for the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam. (1 Kings 12:1ff)
* Instead, the king should sit with the priests and should write the whole law out for himself. He should have this copy with him for the rest of his life (with him is literally ‘wear’) - he should never depart from it. The statement is remarkable. Rather than being a law giver, the Jewish king was to be the preeminent law keeper.
* There are three reasons why this should occur.
  + First, so that his heart would not grow proud over his people. Again, the hubris of a king is a great danger. By reading the law and understanding his own sin, and God’s gracious mercy, he would remind himself daily that he was like his people, and not above them.
  + Second, continual reading of the law would keep him within its prohibitions, and keep him from sinning against the true King of Israel.
  + Third, such obedient behavior would guarantee continuity in the land for his sons after him.
* Again, Solomon’s massive failures are all essentially spelled out here. This does not mean this text is prophetic, but that the sins of the heart were all so radically evident in Solomon’s life. The writer of 1 Kings is clearly referencing this text as proof for why Solomon’s dynasty did not endure.

Deuteronomy 18 ~ Priests and Prophets

* Moses has dealt with the judges and kings and their authority in chapter 17. He now turns to the other two offices within Israel - the priests and prophets.
* The chapter begins with the inheritance of the Levites and then deals with spiritism. However, in the middle of the text, Moses predicts a coming Prophet who will speak to the people for God Himself.

## Deut. 18:1-8 ~ Laws Relating to the Levites

* There is some debate as to the roles of the priests vs. the role of the Levites generally, and who had authority to act as a priest. The debate falls into two camps.
  + *View 1* - All Levites could be priests. This view holds that the entire tribe of Levi could be priests. This view is against the clear reading in Numbers 3:5ff which indicates that the Levites could serve in the tabernacle, but were not priests in the truest sense of the word.
  + *View 2* - Moses assumes the division between priests and ministering Levites, choosing to focus on their livelihood rather than their divisions. (Num. 3:1-10, 20:25)
  + While a simple reading of v. 1 may indicate homogeny, it seems more clear that Moses is speaking generally of the whole tribe, choosing not to focus on the distinctions made earlier. Therefore view 2 is best.
    - “Moses takes the distinction for granted but does not repeat it because it would be superfluous and because here he is not addressing the clergy, to whom the distinctions were most important, but the public as a whole.”[[312]](#footnote-312)
* The statement at the beginning of v. 1 is therefore a cumulative legal statement for all Levites, including the Aaronic priestly order.
* Moses says that they may **have no portion or inheritance from among the sons of Israel**. The word translated inheritance (*naḥalâ* - נַחֲלָ֖ה) is repeated in all four of the first lines in vv. 1-2. Throughout the book, the word indicates the promised land. The lack of inheritance was the work of God Himself, according to Num. 18:20ff.
* The Lord’s intention was for the Levites to not receive a portion of physical land, but to have Himself as their portion and inheritance. The two statements in v. 1 and v. 2 - t**hat they would eat the Lord’s offerings, and that the Lord was their inheritance** - link the Levites to God inextricably.
  + - “In effect, Yahweh invites them to eat from his own table; that which the people present to him, he passes on to them. “As he [Yahweh] promised them” (v. 2) reassures the Levites of their security in him, though the following statement obligates the Israelites to provide for them.”[[313]](#footnote-313)
* This was in accordance with the promise that He had made to them regarding their portion in Israel (see v. 5). Interestingly, this same reality is intact in the millennial kingdom (Ezek 44:28).
* According the vv. 3-4, the Levites were to receive the very best of the best from the nation. For those who would **offer a sacrifice of either a sheep or ox**, the Levites were to receive the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach - all of which were considered delicacies.
  + - “Halakhic exegesis defines these as the upper part of the right foreleg (from the shoulder to the knee), the jowls (including the tongue), and the maw (the fourth stomach). The maw was a favored dish at Athens, and large numbers of right forelegs of sacrificial animals have been found in a sanctuary at an ancient village in Israel and elsewhere.”[[314]](#footnote-314)
* Additionally, the first fruits of all the completed harvests (grain, new wine, oil, and shearings) were to be given freely to the Levites. These would include the tithe portions which were brought yearly during the sabbatic yearly cycle. Not all of the offering had to be given (it should be consumed by the people during the tithe feasts), but the Levite was to be remembered during the times of celebration (see 14:27). Jewish practice required that 1/60th of all firstfruits had to be given to the Levites. This is not from any text. Rather, the Lord commands that the people give according to the freewill offering of their hand, from their hearts.
* According to v. 5, God’s promise was that the Levites would minister before Him and serve Him forever (Ex. 29:9). This promise is fulfilled in Ezek. 40-48, as the Levites continue serving the Lord in the millennial kingdom. They would function as the courtiers for the king, in a sense, ministering to God and serving Him.
  + - “This is official court language, authorizing them to enter the Sovereign’s presence to minister to him or to receive a commission from him (cf. Dan. 1:4). The reference to “their descendants” highlights the hereditary nature of the priesthood.”[[315]](#footnote-315)
* While it is clear that the Levites had no perpetual inheritance of land, they were given small portions to farm around the various cities of Israel. In this way they were able to sustain themselves year by year, on top of the gifts from the people that they are promised.
* In vv. 6-7, Moses conceives of a situation where a Levite who does not reside in Jerusalem has a desire to worship to the Lord, and therefore travels to Jerusalem. When he does so, there should be no competition or hierarchy among the Levites who are there. They should all be allowed to minister to the Lord there at the sanctuary.
* This is not to be the work of the high priest or the temple priests, which was reserved for Aaron and his sons (Num. 18), but would have included other duties in the temple, of which there were many. As they ministered, they should also receive equal portions with the other Levites who were there, without distinction.
  + - “The whole passage reflects a condition in which Levites moved freely from place to place, especially from a local shrine to the central sanctuary, with no hint of necessity or coercion or restriction one way or the other.”[[316]](#footnote-316)
* V. 8 is not particularly clear, but seems to indicate that all the Levites should receive equal portions, regardless of what they have received as inheritance from their fathers. The inheritance may include wealth or property, and if the Levite sold the property in order to move to the central location, such wealth was not to change the overall balance of portions received.
* The living for each Levite should have been equal, regardless of their previous holdings and inheritances.

## Deut. 18:9-14 ~ Spiritism Forbidden

* Of course, the people understood that the priests were of the highest plane in terms of service to God, and the Levites were there to minister for God and to care for the spiritual lives of the people. But, among the nation, the potential for evil spiritual practices to rise up over against the true worship of God was great. Moses provides a response to those sinful practices here in 18:9-14.
* The contrast in the section is between the abominations of all the nations, and the righteousness that God expects from the people who are His (v.13).
* Moses begins in v. 9, telling the nation that they should **not learn to imitate** the nations that will be dispossessed by Israel. The temptation might be to return to some of the pagan deities that they believed had ‘blessed’ the land prior to the conquest. This was the worst form of disobedience.
* The practices in v. 10 were all related to divination - that is, seeking the leading or direction of the gods through some type of sacrifice.
  + Of course the highest sacrifice was something most special - a child. Therefore Moses leads with prohibiting child sacrifice. This practice is specifically mentioned as being for divining later (2 Kings 17:17, 21:6), and was practiced by the nation at various points. This activity was in worship to the idol Molech (Jer. 32:35).
    - “The Molech connection would suggest that the rite was originally indigenous to an Ammonite cult with which Israel came in contact very early on (cf. Judg 10:6). Exactly how human sacrifice entered into the realm of divination is not at all clear.”[[317]](#footnote-317)
  + The next phrase prohibits **divination** specifically, as well as **witchcraft**. These would have been means of seeking divine revelation through pagan ritual. Again, specifics are hard to come by, apart from the mentions of such activities later in the OT. It is clear that seeking knowledge or warding off evil through spells was commonplace (Isa. 47:12).
  + The next items - omens, sorcerers, and spell-casters all fall into a similar genre of people claiming to work for God, either through specific incantations, or by reading into a variety of events to discern God’s will (1 Kings 20:32).
  + Finally, mediums, spiritists, and those who call up the dead are addressed. Again, little is known of these activities in specific. All three refer to some form of necromancy - communication with the dead - for the purpose of understanding the future (1 Sam 28:3, 9, Isa. 8:19). These were all pagan practices (Isa. 19:3).
    - “Its etymology is uncertain. One current view derives it from a term referring to a hole in the ground through which offerings are made to entice the dead to communicate with the living. *Yideʿoni*, “familiar spirit,” probably refers to the ghost as knowing hidden things; it always appears following *ʾov*, never alone, and it may function simply as an adjective to the first term.”[[318]](#footnote-318)
* According to v. 12, these are detestable things to God, who is currently driving out the nations for these very practices. This divine hatred stemmed from the usurpation of God’s right to reveal the truth of the future in the hearts of the people. Rather than trusting in divine providence, these pagan workers were seeking knowledge from things that God had made, none of which could reveal truth. It was all a lie, done, whether through demons or through trickery, for money. Even when Samuel appeared to the witch at Endor in God’s providence, she was shocked at his presence.
* The statement in v. 13 that the people would be blameless has always been God’s requirement of the nation, even from Abraham (Gen. 17:1). This very important statement is linked to God’s own character, and is therefore required of those who are His people (Deut. 32:4).
* According to v. 14, the nations being removed may do these things, but Israel may not. And, what’s more, the diviners didn’t help those nations against the God of Israel, and so such practices were not only wicked, but dumb. The Lord has not allowed them to do these things.
  + - “Moses seems to rein in an earlier comment—that Yahweh allotted the astral objects to all the peoples—as authorization for their worship. Moses rejects any appeal to divine revelation to justify pagan forms of communication with Yahweh.”[[319]](#footnote-319)

## Deut. 18:15-19 ~ The Coming Prophet Like Moses

* This text is of particular importance, in that it not only describes the work of a true prophet of God, but also prophesies itself about the coming of Jesus.
* According to v. 15, a time would come when the Lord would again bring a prophet to Israel who would be Jewish (a **countryman**), and who would function **like Moses** and speak for God. Moses’ functional distinction was that God spoke with him face to face, rather than in dark sayings (Num. 12:8). Even Moses himself, at the end of his life, identifies the special place that he had in speaking to God directly (34:10-11).
* However, this coming one would have the same relationship with God, and, Moses says, the people will **listen to him**.
* Many would argue that this role is fulfilled by any of the prophets prior to Christ. In one sense, this is true, since at any time, God could speak to a prophet, who would then communicate to the people. However, all of these were just shadows of the coming Prophet, the Messiah.
  + Evidence for the singular understanding of this text at the time of Christ is found in John 1:21, 25.
  + Further, events in the life of Christ point to this same conclusion.
    - “In the words, “hear ye Him” which were uttered from the cloud at the transfiguration of Jesus (Matt. 17:5), the expression in v. 15, “unto Him shall ye hearken,” is used *verbatim* with reference to Christ. Even the Samaritans founded their expectation of the Messiah (John 4:25) upon these words of Moses.”[[320]](#footnote-320)
  + Even Christ’s own words reveal that He understood that He was the last in a long line of prophets who had come to Israel. (Luke 20:9-18)
  + After Christ’s life, this text was used as evidence for His Messiahship. (Acts 3:22-24, 7:37)
* It is best, therefore, to understand that this role was prefigured by all the true prophets of Israel, but is best understood as being ultimately about Christ Himself.
* In v. 16, Moses states that this coming prophet would be in line with the request of the people. They were unable to bear the direct presence of God in His glory, and so a mediator had to be provided. This was the very role of the Messiah (1 Tim. 2:5).
  + - “The reason for a prophetic voice like that of Moses was (as Moses himself said) that the awesomeness of Yahweh in his epiphanic glory at Horeb terrified the people (v. 16). They could not bear to look upon his radiant presence, nor could they listen to his words because of their transcendent quality.”[[321]](#footnote-321)
* God’s response to their request in v. 16 is positive in v. 17 - it was good that they had spoken as they had (5:28).
* Interestingly, Moses’ accounting of the rest of the dialogue is not precisely what he had communicated in 5:31. On the contrary, there Moses is told that God’s words would be in *his* mouth. Here in v. 18, Moses suggests that God also prophetically revealed One who would come and would have the same role as Moses.
* There are at least four things that are explicitly true about this coming Prophet:
  + **I will raise up** - All true prophets are identified and witnessed to by God Himself. This was certainly true of Christ, who received the witness of the Father personally. (Matt. 17:5)
  + **Countrymen** - This coming prophet must be a Jew.
  + **Words in the mouth** - God would divinely inspire this Prophet with the words that were His (John 17:8). God is said to have spoken ‘through His Son’ (Heb 1:1).
  + **He shall speak** - The words that God would give would be spoken and commanded by this coming Prophet. (John 4:25; 8:28; 12:49, 50)
* Again, the numerous NT references to Jesus identify this Prophet as the Messiah, a role which Jesus fulfilled perfectly.
* Remarkably, all the pagan attempts at understanding the divine mind, and all the various rituals for divination were useless. The only need for the people to know the mind of God would be to listen to His prophets, and ultimately, to the greatest Prophet, the Messiah.
* Moses continues in V. 19 by addressing the response of the people. They must listen to this One who would come. If anyone were to not listen, God would require it of him - that is, God would punish those who would not listen to the Prophet.
  + Again, this statement is referenced directly to Christ Himself by Peter in Acts 3:23. Those who did not heed the message of the Messiah would be cut off from the people. (see also Heb. 12:25 where the same concept is made clear)
* Clearly, while many prophets prefigured His coming, Jesus Himself is the great Prophet who Moses promised to the people. He would take the words of God and disclose them to the people, acting as a mediator between God and the nation, and revealing the nature and character of God to them. If they would not listen to Him, they would be cut off.
* The text concludes with the marks of a false prophet, one who would not be sent from God.
  + First, such a prophet would speak **presumptuously**, and **not what God had commanded him to speak**. The scenario would be a false prophet who spoke in the name of YHWH, but who was not sent by YHWH. Many examples exist in the OT, such as those who Michaiah addresses in 1 Kings 22:5-28.
  + Second, and less cunning, a prophet could prophesy in the name **of another god**. This was an immediate giveaway that the prophet was a liar. The most prolific false prophets were those of Baal, especially after the reign of Jezebel in the northern kingdom (1 Kings 17ff).
* Regardless, either of those false prophets must die, according to Moses. Anyone who would move the people away from trusting and submitting to God would put their souls at risk - a capital offense like none other.

## Deut. 18:20-22 ~ Discerning the prophetic word

* Vv. 21-22 indicate the test of determining if a prophet was true or false. The test comes as an answer to the question of the people regarding how to determine whether a prophet was truly speaking the **word of the Lord**.
* The answer is simple—if the word comes to pass, he is a true prophet of God. If it does not, he is a liar, and is presuming to speak for God, and the people are not to be afraid of him. (Jer 28:9)
* Of course there are many caveats to this command. For example, distant prophecies could not be verified within the timeframe of the prophet’s life. And contingent prophecies, like those calling for repentance, or suggesting blessing for obedience, could not be verified without the submission of the people. It is best therefore, to take the command to be one of character, over time, as well as of singular instances. Again, Michaiah’s words in 1 Kings 22:28 are instructive.
  + - “If a prophecy concerns the distant future, the veracity of a statement and the proof of a genuine prophet will be delayed and the prophet may not live to witness his vindication. Moses does not answer this dilemma but concludes this discussion with counsel regarding the proper disposition toward prophets whose words do not come true. The words of false prophets are powerless, and by executing them the people will be standing up for righteousness.”[[322]](#footnote-322)
    - “It would probably be wrong to take these criteria as rules to be applied rigidly every time a prophet opened his mouth. When a prophet announced God’s coming judgment and called for repentance, it would clearly be pointless to wait first to see if the judgment actually came to pass, and then to repent (too late!). Rather the criteria represent the means by which a prophet gained his reputation as a true prophet and spokesman of the Lord. Over the course of a prophet’s ministry, in matters important and less significant, the character of a prophet as a true spokesman of God would begin to emerge clearly. And equally, false prophets would be discredited and then dealt with under the law.”[[323]](#footnote-323)

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