

Deuteronomy

*The Dying Words of
the Prophet Moses*

by Robert J. Neral

A Study of Deuteronomy

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A STUDY OF DEUTERONOMY

By Robert J. Neral

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INTRODUCTION: THE FAREWELL OF MOSES

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There is a moment at the end of every great life when the one who has carried the weight of leadership must set it down. When the years of struggle and faithfulness are nearly complete and the only thing left to do is speak — clearly, honestly, urgently — to the people who will carry the work forward without you.

That moment, for Moses, is the book of Deuteronomy.

He is one hundred and twenty years old. The forty years of wilderness wandering are over. The generation that refused to enter the land at Kadesh Barnea — the generation that wept and complained and made the golden calf and provoked God to anger again and again — that generation has died in the wilderness, exactly as God said they would. A new generation stands on the plains of Moab, looking across the Jordan toward the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

They are ready. Moses is not going with them.

And so he speaks.

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WHAT IS DEUTERONOMY?

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The name Deuteronomy comes from the Greek — *deuteros nomos* — meaning "the second law." It is not a second law in the sense of a replacement. It is a restatement. A rehearsal. Moses taking everything

Israel had received at Sinai and saying it again — clearly, plainly, with the urgency of a man who knows he is running out of time.

The Hebrew name for this book is Devarim — "words." The book of words. The great final address of the greatest prophet who ever lived.

Deuteronomy is quoted more in the New Testament than almost any other book of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus quoted it three times when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Paul drew from it repeatedly. The author of Hebrews built his case for the new covenant on its foundations. If you want to understand the New Testament, you must understand Deuteronomy.

It consists largely of three great speeches by Moses, delivered to the assembled people of Israel in the final weeks before they crossed the Jordan. The first speech covers chapters 1 through 4 — a review of Israel's history from Sinai to the present moment. The second and longest speech covers chapters 5 through 28 — a renewal and expansion of the covenant, including the Ten Commandments, the Shema, and the great blessings and curses that would define Israel's future. The third speech covers chapters 29 and 30 — a final call to choose life.

And then, in the closing chapters, Moses writes a song, blesses the twelve tribes, climbs Mount Nebo, and sees the promised land from a distance before God takes him home.

This is the architecture of the book we are about to study together. And woven through every chapter of it is the same great heartbeat: love the LORD your God. Obey His voice. Do not forget what He has done. Choose life.

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THE MAN BEHIND THE WORDS

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Before we enter the text itself, we need to sit for a moment with the man who is speaking.

Moses is arguably the most significant human figure in the entire Old Testament. He was the instrument through which God delivered Israel from Egypt — ten plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea. He was the mediator at Sinai — the one who stood between the terrifying presence of God on the mountain and a terrified people at the bottom. He received the Torah. He built the Tabernacle. He led the people through forty years of wilderness — through their rebellion and their repentance, their faithlessness and their restoration.

He spoke to God face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

And yet Moses himself would not enter the promised land.

*"Deuteronomy 3:23–26 — Then I pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying: 'O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds? I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.' But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. The LORD said to me: 'Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter.'"*

One moment of disobedience at the waters of Meribah — striking the rock instead of speaking to it — had cost Moses the entrance into the land. He had carried the people for forty years. He had interceded for them when God threatened to destroy them. He had borne their complaints and their rebellion with extraordinary patience. And in one moment, under the pressure of their repeated provocation, he acted in his own anger rather than God's instruction.

And the consequence held.

This is not a small lesson. It is one of the most sobering passages in the entire Pentateuch. God takes obedience seriously. Not because He is arbitrary or harsh — but because Moses, of all people, understood what was at stake. The rock was Christ, as Paul later wrote. Striking it twice when God said to speak was misrepresenting the nature of the sacrifice that would one day be made once and for all. The teaching mattered. The accuracy mattered.

Moses accepted the verdict. He did not grow bitter. He did not undermine Joshua. He poured every ounce of his remaining strength into preparing the next generation to do what he could not. And the book of Deuteronomy is the record of that preparation.

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## THE HEART OF THE BOOK

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Every good teacher knows that the most important lesson is the one you repeat. Not because the student is slow — but because the thing being taught is so fundamental, so easily forgotten, so prone to erosion under the pressures of ordinary life, that it must be said again and again until it becomes part of the listener's very identity.

Moses had one lesson above all others that he needed this new generation to carry into the land:

*"Deuteronomy 6:4–5 — Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."*

The Shema. The great confession of Israel. These words were to be on their hearts and on their lips — spoken to their children in the morning and in the evening, written on their doorposts and on their gates, worn as a reminder on their hands and between their eyes.

This was not merely a doctrinal statement. It was a declaration of total allegiance. The LORD — not the gods of Canaan, not the Baals, not the gods of Egypt or Assyria or Babylon — the LORD is one. And the response to that oneness is wholehearted, soul-deep, every-fiber-of-your-being love.

When a lawyer asked Jesus which commandment was greatest, He quoted this verse. When He summarized the entire law in two commandments, this was the first. Everything Moses would say in all of Deuteronomy flows from and returns to this one central declaration.

Love the LORD your God. Everything else is commentary.

Let us now enter the text together, starting from the very beginning — and trace Moses' great farewell from its opening words to its final breath.

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SECTION ONE: THE REVIEW OF HISTORY — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTERS 1 THROUGH 4

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Moses does not begin with commandments. He begins with history.

This is significant. Before he tells the people what they must do, he tells them what God has done. Before obligation, gratitude. Before law, grace. The covenant at Sinai was not a transaction between equals — it was a response to a rescue. God had already delivered Israel before He gave them the law. The Ten Commandments do not begin with "you must obey Me so that I will save you." They begin with: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

Moses understood this architecture. And so he begins Deuteronomy the same way God began the Decalogue: with what God has already done.

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FROM HOREB TO THE PLAINS OF MOAB

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*"Deuteronomy 1:6–8 — The LORD our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: 'You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. Turn and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites, to all the neighboring places in the plain, in the mountains and in the lowland, in the*

*South and on the seacoast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the River Euphrates. See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to your fathers — to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — to give to them and their descendants after them."*

The journey began at Horeb — at Sinai — where God had given the law and the covenant. The people had dwelt at the mountain long enough. The time to move had come. God was pointing them toward a specific land — the land He had sworn to the patriarchs, the land of promise — and He was saying: go in and possess it.

This is the beginning of the story Moses is about to retell. Not because the people do not know it — they have lived it — but because remembering together is itself an act of faith. When we rehearse what God has done, we remind ourselves and each other of the nature of the God we serve. We are not walking into the unknown. We are following the God who has already proven Himself.

Moses then describes the organization of the judges and leaders — wise men appointed over thousands and hundreds and fifties and tens to help carry the burden of leadership. This structure had come from the counsel of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who saw that Moses was wearing himself out by trying to judge every case alone. It is a practical detail, but it teaches something important: God's design for His people always involves community and shared responsibility. The weight of leadership is too heavy for any one person to carry alone.

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## **THE GREAT FAILURE AT KADESH BARNEA**

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Moses then arrives at the moment that defined the wilderness generation: the refusal to enter the land at Kadesh Barnea.

The twelve spies had gone ahead to scout the land. They came back with a report that the land was everything God had promised — flowing with milk and honey, rich and beautiful. But ten of the twelve spies added a second report: the people there are too strong for us. The cities are fortified. We saw giants. We were like grasshoppers in our own sight.

And the people believed the second report instead of the first. They wept. They complained. They said it would have been better to die in Egypt or in the wilderness. They talked about appointing a new leader to take them back to Egypt.

*"Deuteronomy 1:32–33 — Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God, who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to camp, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show you the road by which you should go."*

You did not believe. That is the verdict. Not: you were disobedient. Not: you broke the law. The root issue was unbelief. They did not trust that the God who had parted the Red Sea and provided manna in the desert and led them with fire and cloud was capable of giving them the land He had promised.

The consequences were immediate and severe. God declared that none of the generation that had refused — none except Caleb and Joshua, who trusted God fully — would enter the land. They would wander in the wilderness until that generation was gone. Forty years. One year for each day the spies had spent in the land.

Moses notes that when the people heard the verdict, they suddenly changed their minds. They decided to go up and fight after all. But it was too late. The moment had passed. They went up anyway — without God's presence, without His sanction — and were routed by the Amorites.

The lesson is unmistakable: there is a time for obedience. When God opens a door and says go, the time to go is now. Delayed obedience is not obedience — it is negotiation. And there are moments when the negotiation closes and the opportunity is gone.

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## THE WILDERNESS YEARS

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Chapters two and three cover the wilderness years — the long journey through Edom, Moab, and Ammon, and then the first military victories east of the Jordan against the kings Sihon and Og. Moses narrates these events to show the people that God had been working consistently on their behalf, even during the forty years of wandering that resulted from their disobedience.

*"Deuteronomy 2:7 — For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing."*

Forty years in the wilderness. And through all forty years — through the discipline, through the wandering, through the dying of a generation — you have lacked nothing. God was not absent during the years of consequence. He was present and providing, even while the consequences of disobedience were being worked out.

This is one of the most grace-filled statements in the entire book. God does not abandon His people when they suffer the results of their own failures. He walks with them through the consequences, providing what they need, preparing them for what is coming on the other side.

The victories over Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan were the first signs of what was to come west of the Jordan. God was demonstrating to this new generation what He was capable of — giving

them victories to build their faith before they crossed over.

*"Deuteronomy 3:22 — You must not fear them, for the LORD your God Himself fights for you."*

The LORD your God Himself fights for you. That is the word that carries the whole military history of chapters 2 and 3. The victories were not the result of superior Israelite strategy or weaponry. They were the result of God fighting on behalf of His people. And what He had done for them east of the Jordan, He would do again and again west of it.

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## **THE UNIQUENESS OF ISRAEL'S GOD — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER FOUR**

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Chapter four is one of the most theologically rich chapters in all of Deuteronomy. Moses sets before the people the absolute uniqueness of their God — and the absolute uniqueness of what has happened to them.

He begins with a warning: do not add to what God has commanded, and do not subtract from it. The word of God is complete as given. Israel's history of disaster had always begun with the same first step — adding to or subtracting from what God had said. Adding human requirements that God had not required. Subtracting the parts of God's law that were inconvenient. Both are equally dangerous.

Then he makes the extraordinary argument from history:

*"Deuteronomy 4:32–34 — For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the*

*midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?"*

Has it ever happened? Has any nation in history heard God speaking from fire and lived? Has any God come down and taken a people out of another nation by mighty hand and stretched-out arm and great terror?

The answer is no. It has never happened — not before Israel, not after Israel. What God did in the Exodus was unique in the history of humanity. Unrepeatable. Unprecedented. And the people who experienced it were therefore accountable in a way that no other people in history had been.

But then Moses adds something that takes our breath away:

*"Deuteronomy 4:35 — To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him."*

There is none other besides Him. One God. Not a highest God among many. Not the best God among competitors. The only God. All the gods of Egypt — defeated by the ten plagues, one by one. All the gods of Canaan — soon to be shown as empty and worthless. The LORD alone is God.

And then the warning that would prove to be the most prophetically accurate statement in the entire book:

*"Deuteronomy 4:25–27 — When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the LORD your God to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from*

*the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples."*

Moses was predicting the exile — centuries before it happened. He was telling the people that if they broke the covenant, if they turned to idols, they would be scattered among the nations. And they were. First the northern kingdom to Assyria in 722 B.C. Then the southern kingdom to Babylon in 586 B.C.

But the prophecy did not end with the exile. It continued:

*"Deuteronomy 4:29–31 — But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them."*

From the exile, Israel would seek and find. In the latter days, when they turned to God, He would be there. He would not forsake them. He would not forget the covenant. The same God who brought them out of Egypt would not abandon them in the nations.

I encourage you to consider how much of this we have already seen in our own lifetime. The return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel after two thousand years of exile is one of the most remarkable fulfillments of biblical prophecy in all of history. The covenant has not been forgotten. God has not forsaken His people.

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## WHAT CHAPTER FOUR TEACHES US ABOUT KNOWING GOD

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Before we move into the heart of the law in chapter five and beyond, let us pause at the closing verses of chapter four. Because Moses ends this historical review with something that goes beyond law and covenant and prophecy. He ends with a question:

*"Deuteronomy 4:39 — Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."*

Know it. Consider it in your heart.

Moses is not satisfied with intellectual assent. He wants the people to know this the way you know something that has become part of who you are — the way you know your own name, your own family, your own history. He wants the truth of the one God to be not merely a theological proposition but a living reality in the hearts of the people who carry it.

This is what it means to know the LORD. Not to know facts about Him. Not to have attended the right ceremonies or memorized the right texts. To consider it in your heart — to sit with it, to let it reshape you from the inside, to allow the reality of the one God to become the foundation on which every other thing in your life rests.

That is where Deuteronomy begins. And it is the only place from which everything else in the book makes sense.

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# **SECTION TWO: THE COVENANT RENEWED — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTERS 5 THROUGH 11**

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We have heard Moses review the history. Now, in the great central section of Deuteronomy, he turns to the law itself — the heart of the covenant between God and Israel. He begins where God began at Sinai: with the Ten Commandments. But this time, Moses is not simply transmitting the law. He is interpreting it, expanding it, applying it to a generation about to enter a new and dangerous context.

Everything in chapters 5 through 11 is preparation. Before Moses gives the specific statutes and ordinances that will govern life in the land, he lays the foundation — the relationship with God that makes the law not a burden but a gift.

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## **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS REVISITED — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER FIVE**

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Moses calls the people together and says: hear the statutes and judgments which I speak to your ears today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them.

Then he repeats the Ten Commandments — almost word for word as they were given at Sinai in Exodus 20, with one notable difference. The commandment concerning the Sabbath.

In Exodus 20, the reason given for keeping the Sabbath is creation:

"For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

But in Deuteronomy 5, Moses gives a second reason — a reason that speaks directly to this generation:

"Deuteronomy 5:15 — And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."

Rest because God rested at creation. But also — rest because you were once a slave who never rested. You know what it means to have no rest, to be subject to the will of a master who drives you without mercy. The Sabbath is not just a law about time — it is a testimony about freedom. Every week, when Israel rested on the seventh day, they were proclaiming: we are not slaves. We are free people. Our God brought us out.

And the Sabbath applied not just to Israel but to their servants and animals and even to the stranger within their gates. The freedom God gave to Israel was to create a community where no one — not the servant, not the animal, not the foreigner — was driven without rest. The God who freed the slaves was building a society that did not produce new slaves.

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THE SHEMA — DEUTERONOMY 6:4–9

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After the Ten Commandments comes the most important single passage in the entire book. In Jewish tradition it is called the Shema — from the first word of the Hebrew: Shema Yisrael — Hear, O Israel.

*"Deuteronomy 6:4–9 — Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*

Every word of these verses is dense with meaning. Let us take them one by one.

The LORD our God, the LORD is one. This is the foundational statement of biblical monotheism. Not: the LORD is the greatest among the gods. Not: the LORD is our God while other nations have their gods. The LORD is one — meaning there is no other. The polytheism of every surrounding nation was not an acceptable alternative for Israel. The idols were not competitors to be respected — they were falsehoods to be rejected.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Notice the language: love. Not merely obey. Not merely fear. Love. The fundamental orientation of the human being toward God is meant to be love — the same self-giving, whole-being commitment that a husband gives to a wife, that a parent gives to a child. Not a transaction. Not a negotiation. Love.

And the love is to engage every dimension of the human person. Heart — the seat of the will and the center of the inner life. Soul — the full being, the breath of life that God breathed into Adam. Strength — every resource, every ability, every capacity for effort and action. Nothing held back. Nothing compartmentalized. The whole person, fully engaged.

These words shall be in your heart. Not just known — internalized. Not just recited — lived. The words are to move from the external text into the interior life until they become part of how you think and feel and decide.

You shall teach them diligently to your children. This is one of the most important sentences in the entire Old Testament. The knowledge of God is not maintained automatically. It is transmitted — person to person, generation to generation, parent to child. When you sit in your house. When you walk by the way. When you lie down and when you rise up. Every ordinary moment of every ordinary day is an opportunity to pass on what matters most.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. The physical home is to be marked as a place where the LORD is known and honored. The mezuzah — the small case containing the Shema that Jewish families affix to their doorposts — is still a visible testimony of this command today. Every entrance into a Jewish home is framed by the declaration: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.

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THE WARNING AGAINST FORGETTING — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTERS 6 AND 8

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Immediately after the great commandment to love, Moses turns to the most persistent danger Israel will face in the promised land: forgetting.

*"Deuteronomy 6:10–12 — So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant — when you have eaten and are full — then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."*

The danger is not primarily persecution. It is not primarily military defeat. The greatest danger to Israel's faith — the thing Moses warns about most persistently in this book — is prosperity. Comfort. Fullness.

When the wells were dug for them and the houses were already built and the vineyards were already planted and they had eaten and were full — that was the moment of maximum spiritual vulnerability. Because the memory of Egypt — the memory of slavery and the Passover and the parted sea and the manna — would begin to fade. The urgency that had driven them to prayer in the wilderness would soften. And the invisible God who had provided everything would slowly be replaced by visible things that seemed to provide for themselves.

Chapter 8 extends this warning with one of the most powerful passages in the book:

*"Deuteronomy 8:17–18 — Then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day."*

My power and the might of my hand. That is the voice of self-sufficiency — the voice that prosperity produces in the human heart when the memory

of dependence has faded. And Moses says: remember. It is He who gives you power to get wealth. The strength in your hands, the wisdom in your mind, the opportunity in your circumstances — all of it is His gift.

The wilderness years — those forty years of hardship and provision — were not simply punishment for Kadesh Barnea. They had a purpose:

*"Deuteronomy 8:2-3 — And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."*

Man shall not live by bread alone; but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness — when He was hungry after forty days of fasting — Jesus quoted this verse. He had been living in the wilderness, just as Israel had. And He was demonstrating what Israel had failed to demonstrate: that the word of God is more fundamental to human life than physical bread.

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LOVE AND OBEDIENCE — CHAPTERS 7, 9, 10, AND 11

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Throughout chapters 7 through 11, Moses weaves together two themes that are inseparable in Deuteronomy: love and obedience. They are not competing ideas. They are the two sides of the same coin.

Chapter 7 addresses the danger of the Canaanite nations. Israel was not to make treaties with them or intermarry with them. Not because God was teaching racial superiority — but because the gods of Canaan were specifically designed to pull Israel away from the one true God. Every intermarriage with a Canaanite was a door through which idolatry could enter the community. The command to separate was a command to protect the covenant.

*"Deuteronomy 7:6 — For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."*

A holy people. Set apart. Chosen. But notice the reason Moses immediately gives for why God chose Israel:

*"Deuteronomy 7:7–8 — The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers."*

Not because you were great. Not because you were numerous. Not because you were worthy. Because He loves you. And because He made a promise.

This is grace in its most distilled form. God's choice of Israel was not a reward for merit. It was an expression of unconditional love. And the proper response to unconditional love is not pride — it is gratitude, faithfulness, and love returned.

Chapter 9 makes this even more explicit. Moses reminds the people that the victories they are about to win over the Canaanites are not because of their own righteousness:

*"Deuteronomy 9:5–6 — It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go*

*in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people."*

A stiff-necked people. Moses does not soften it. He reminds them of the golden calf — made while he was on the mountain receiving the law, before the ink was even dry on the covenant tablets. The people who were receiving the most privileged relationship with the living God in human history had worshiped a golden statue at the first opportunity. Their righteousness was not the basis of God's faithfulness to them. His own promises were.

Then chapter 10 distills the entire covenant into its simplest form:

*"Deuteronomy 10:12–13 — And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?"*

What does God require? The question and its answer have an almost breathtaking simplicity. Fear. Walk. Love. Serve. Keep. Five responses to one God. And then — for your good. The law is not a burden imposed to limit Israel's freedom. It is a gift given for their flourishing. The God who requires these things does so because He knows that human beings thrive in obedience and wither in rebellion.

And then Moses adds the most expansive statement about God's character in the entire book:

*"Deuteronomy 10:17–19 — For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."*

The God of gods and Lord of lords — the great God who holds the universe — concerns Himself with the fatherless and the widow and the stranger. His greatness is not demonstrated by indifference to the vulnerable. It is demonstrated by His particular attention to them. And because He loves the stranger — because Israel themselves were strangers in Egypt — His people are to extend the same love.

Chapter 11 closes this section with a direct call to choose:

*"Deuteronomy 11:26–28 — Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known."*

A blessing and a curse. The choice is real. The consequences are real. God is not indifferent to how Israel responds. And Moses is not softening the stakes — he is clarifying them. Every generation of God's people stands before the same choice: obedience and blessing, or disobedience and its consequences.

The blessing and the curse would be declared formally when the people entered the land — half the tribes on Mount Gerizim, half on Mount Ebal. The whole covenant solemnly ratified in the geography of the promised land itself.

But before any of that could happen, the people needed to know exactly what God was asking of them. And that is what the next section of the book provides.

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# **SECTION THREE: THE STATUTES AND ORDINANCES — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTERS 12 THROUGH 18**

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The great speeches of Moses are not merely philosophical or devotional. They are intensely practical. After establishing the theological foundation — the one God, the Shema, the call to love and obedience — Moses turns to the specifics of how covenant life is to be lived in the land.

Chapters 12 through 18 form what scholars sometimes call the "Deuteronomic code" — a collection of laws governing worship, civil life, leadership, and the responsibilities of the community. These chapters are not a dry legal code. They are Moses translating the character of God into the shape of a community.

Let us walk through the key themes.

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## **THE CENTRALIZATION OF WORSHIP — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 12**

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The opening command of this section is one of the most significant in the entire book:

*"Deuteronomy 12:4-5 — You shall not worship the LORD
your God with such things. But you shall seek the place*

*where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes,
to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you
shall go."*

Israel was not to worship God in whatever place was convenient or appealing to them. God would choose the place where His name would dwell — and that is where the people were to come. This was not arbitrary restriction. It was protection. The multiple high places and local shrines that would spring up across the land were precisely the settings where syncretism — the mixing of true worship with pagan practice — would take root.

The centralization of worship at the chosen place (which would eventually be Jerusalem and the Temple) was a hedge against the corruption of Israel's faith. When worship is governed by convenience, it tends to conform itself to the surrounding culture. When it is governed by God's specific choice, it requires the discipline of coming to God on His terms rather than our own.

This principle has not changed. We come to God as He has prescribed — through His Son, in His name, with the sacrifice He provided. We do not invent our own approach to the holy.

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## **THE PROPHET LIKE MOSES — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 18**

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Chapter 18 contains one of the most important messianic prophecies in the entire Old Testament. After giving instructions about the Levitical priests and distinguishing Israel from the pagan practices of divination and sorcery, Moses speaks these extraordinary words:

"Deuteronomy 18:15 — The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear."

A Prophet like Moses. From your midst — from among the Jewish people. From your brethren — one of their own. Him you shall hear.

This was not referring to Joshua, though Joshua would succeed Moses as leader. Joshua was a military and administrative leader. The Prophet Moses was speaking of would be greater — a prophet who would speak the very words of God, in whom the word of God would find its fullest and most complete expression.

The apostle Peter, standing in the Temple after the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, quoted this prophecy directly and identified it with Jesus:

"Acts 3:22–23 — For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'"

Jesus was the Prophet Moses spoke of. He was Jewish — from among the brethren. He spoke the very words of God. He said: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." He was the fullest expression of everything Moses had taught — and more.

Moses gave the context of this prophecy:

"Deuteronomy 18:16–18 — According to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest

I die.' And the LORD said to me: 'What they have spoken is right. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.'"

At Sinai, the people had been terrified of the direct presence of God. The fire and the voice and the mountain shaking had been more than they could bear. They asked Moses to stand between them and God. And God agreed — and immediately promised that He would provide a Mediator. Not just Moses. One who would come after Moses. One in whom His words would dwell fully.

This is one of the most remarkable moments of grace in the entire Old Testament. The people's fear became the occasion for God's promise of the ultimate Mediator. Out of their inadequacy, God promised sufficiency.

And He kept the promise — in Bethlehem, in Galilee, in Jerusalem, at a cross, and at an empty tomb.

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LAWS ABOUT JUSTICE — CHAPTERS 15, 16, AND 17

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Woven through chapters 12 through 18 are laws that reflect God's character with extraordinary precision. Let us draw out several of the most significant.

Chapter 15 contains one of the most remarkable social provisions in the ancient world: the year of release.

"Deuteronomy 15:1–2 — At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his

neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the LORD's release."

Every seven years, debts were to be cancelled. Slaves who were Hebrew were to be released — with provisions for their new start, not empty-handed. The accumulation of permanent debt slavery was to be impossible in Israel. Why? Because the people of Israel knew what it meant to be slaves. And the God who freed them did not want His people to become the kind of society that produced perpetual bondage.

"Deuteronomy 15:11 — For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'"

The poor will never cease from the land. This is not pessimism — it is realism. And the response to that reality is not to build systems that punish poverty, but to open wide your hand. The generosity God commanded was not optional charity — it was covenant obligation. How Israel treated its poor was a direct expression of how Israel understood its own story: we were once poor and enslaved, and God opened His hand to us.

Chapter 16 governs the three great pilgrimage feasts — Passover, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths). These three times a year, all Israel's men were to appear before the LORD at the chosen place. And this instruction:

"Deuteronomy 16:16–17 — Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He

has given you."

Not empty-handed. Everyone gives according to what they have received. The one who has been blessed abundantly gives abundantly. The one who has received little gives what he can. But no one comes to God without bringing something — because to come to God acknowledging that He has given you nothing is a denial of the truth.

Chapter 17 addresses the laws governing kings — anticipating that Israel would one day want a king like the nations around them. And God gave very specific restrictions on the king:

"Deuteronomy 17:16–17 — But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.' Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself."

Horses represented military power and political alliance. Wives represented diplomatic treaties. Gold and silver represented personal wealth and economic domination. God was saying: the king of Israel is not to be like the kings of the nations. He is not to trust in military power or political alliance or personal accumulation. He is to rule as a servant of the covenant, not as a sovereign in his own right.

And then this instruction — the most important of all for a king:

"Deuteronomy 17:18–20 — Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside

from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel."

The king was to write a personal copy of the law. Not have a secretary do it. Not read a summary. Write it himself, with his own hand, and then read it all the days of his life. The law was not to be above the king's head — it was to be in his heart. It was to govern him, not simply to be invoked when convenient.

Every time a king of Israel multiplied horses or wives or gold — everyone reading the books of Kings and Chronicles could see the violation. The failure of Israel's kings was always the same failure: the law that was supposed to be in the king's heart had been set aside. And the consequences were always the same as well.

The word of God governs the life of the faithful. Not as an external constraint but as an internal compass. This is as true for a king as it is for a farmer or a father or a fisherman.

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## **CITIES OF REFUGE — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 19**

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Chapter 19 establishes the cities of refuge — six cities scattered throughout the land where someone who had accidentally killed another person could flee and find protection from the avenger of blood while their case was heard.

"Deuteronomy 19:4–6 — And this is the case of the manslayer who flees there, that he may live: Whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in time past — as when a man goes to the woods with his

neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies — he shall flee to one of these cities and live."

Accidental death was treated differently from intentional murder. The law was not merely punitive — it was just. It distinguished between intention and accident. And the cities of refuge were a built-in provision for mercy within a system that also required accountability.

But the cities of refuge point beyond themselves. Throughout Scripture, the concept of a refuge — a place of safety, a city of protection — is used to describe God Himself:

"Psalm 46:1 — God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

"Proverbs 18:10 — The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."

The one who has sinned — not out of malice, but out of the weakness and fallibility of human nature — has a place to run. Not to hide from justice, but to find a just hearing, protected from the rage of vengeance. That picture is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, who is the refuge of every soul that runs to Him.

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# **SECTION FOUR: THE GREAT BLESSINGS AND CURSES — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTERS 19 THROUGH 28**

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We have reached the center of gravity of Moses' second address — the section that would define Israel's experience in the land more than any other. Chapters 20 through 28 contain the laws of warfare, property, family, community life, and justice. They culminate in one of the most sobering and most hopeful passages in all of Scripture: the great blessings and curses of chapter 28.

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## **LAWS OF WARFARE — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTERS 20 AND 21**

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Chapter 20 opens with a word that cuts against every instinct of military strategy:

"Deuteronomy 20:1 — When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Do not be afraid. That is the first rule of Israel's warfare. Not a tactical instruction. Not a formation or a strategy. Do not be afraid — because the LORD your God is with you.

Then Moses gives one of the most unusual military recruitment policies in the ancient world. Before the battle, the officers were to ask: is there any man who has built a new house but not dedicated it? He may go home. Is there any man who has planted a vineyard but not enjoyed it? He may go home. Is there any man who is betrothed but has not married? He may go home. Is there any man who is afraid and faint-hearted?

"Deuteronomy 20:8 — Then the officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'What man is there who is fearful and faint-hearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.'"

Send home the faint-hearted. An army of the fearful is more dangerous to itself than to the enemy. This was not cruel — it was practical wisdom. And it was also a statement about the nature of this warfare. Israel's battles were not won by superior numbers or superior courage. They were won by the presence of God. And the presence of God required a people who trusted Him.

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## **LAWS OF COMMUNITY LIFE — CHAPTERS 22 THROUGH 25**

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Chapters 22 through 25 contain a remarkable range of laws governing daily life in the community. Some of them seem very practical; others point to principles that run much deeper than their surface application.

Chapter 22 opens with the law of the lost animal:

"Deuteronomy 22:1–2 — You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall certainly bring them back to your brother. And if your brother is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until your brother seeks it; then you shall restore it to him."

Do not hide yourself from your brother's need. That phrase — hide yourself — describes the choice to pretend not to see what is in front of you. To look away. To walk past. The law of the lost animal is a law against willful indifference. If you see your neighbor's ox wandering, you are responsible to do something about it. Not because you chose to be involved, but because you saw it.

This principle extends through the chapter to include the wandering donkey, the fallen animal, the bird's nest with eggs or young, the roof without a parapet. Every one of these laws is teaching the same thing: the people of the covenant are responsible to one another. Indifference is not neutrality — it is failure.

Chapter 24 governs the treatment of the poor and the vulnerable with extraordinary specificity:

"Deuteronomy 24:19–21 — When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow."

Do not harvest your field to the edges. Do not go back for the forgotten sheaf. Do not beat your olive trees a second time. Do not glean your vineyard bare. Leave something for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

This is the law that Ruth and Naomi depended on when they returned to Bethlehem. When Ruth went out to glean in the fields of Boaz, she was exercising a right that God had built into the agricultural economy of Israel. The harvest was not entirely the farmer's to keep. Part of it, by divine design, belonged to the vulnerable — to the ones who had no land and no means of producing their own.

The repeated phrase — the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow — is the specific triad of the most vulnerable in the ancient world. No husband, no land, no social standing. The law of the gleaning was God's provision for exactly these people.

And note the reason: "that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." The blessing of God on the harvest was connected to the treatment of the vulnerable in the harvest. This was not incidental. It was built into the covenant economy. A community that cared for the stranger and the fatherless and the widow would receive God's blessing on its work. A community that exploited or ignored them would not.

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## **THE GREAT BLESSINGS — DEUTERONOMY 28:1–14**

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Chapter 28 is the climax of the second speech. It is the chapter that spells out, in the most concrete and comprehensive terms, what obedience to the covenant would mean for Israel's life in the land — and what disobedience would mean.

Moses begins with the blessings. And they are extraordinary:

"Deuteronomy 28:1–2 — Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God."

The blessings overtake you. You do not have to chase them down or manufacture them. Obedience creates conditions in which God's blessing flows naturally. The blessings come upon you.

And what are the blessings?

"Deuteronomy 28:3–6 — Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out."

Every dimension of life is covered. City and country. Body and ground. Business and household. Coming in and going out. The blessing is not compartmentalized to one area — it permeates the whole of life. Because the God of Deuteronomy is not the God of one department of human existence. He is the God of the whole.

"Deuteronomy 28:7 — The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways."

"Deuteronomy 28:12–13 — The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them."

The head and not the tail. Above only and not beneath. This is a picture of a community living in the fullness of God's provision — productive, secure, respected, led and not driven, blessing and not beseeching.

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## **THE GREAT CURSES — DEUTERONOMY**

### **28:15–68**

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The curses that follow are among the most sobering passages in all of Scripture. And they are long — much longer than the blessings. Moses gives fourteen verses to the blessings and fifty-four verses to the curses. This is not because Moses was a pessimist. It is because he knew his people, and he knew that the warnings needed to be thorough.

"Deuteronomy 28:15 — But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you."

The curses are the mirror image of the blessings. Cursed in the city and in the country. Cursed in basket and kneading bowl. Cursed in coming in and going out. Every dimension of life that would have been blessed under obedience is now cursed under disobedience.

But the curses go far beyond the simple reversal of blessing. They escalate in severity — and they culminate in the most devastating prophecy in the book:

"Deuteronomy 28:64–65 — Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known — wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul."

The scattering. The exile. Scattered among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other. No rest. No resting place.

This prophecy was fulfilled — not once but twice. The Assyrian exile of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. The Babylonian exile in 586 B.C. The Roman dispersion in 70 A.D. For nearly two thousand years following the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome, the Jewish people were scattered across the earth, finding no permanent rest, living among nations that often treated them with hostility.

But this is not the whole story. Because even in the curses, there is embedded a promise.

Read Deuteronomy 28 alongside Deuteronomy 30 — the chapter that follows Moses' third speech — and you will see that the scattering was never meant to be the end:

"Deuteronomy 30:3–5 — That the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He

will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it."

From the farthest parts under heaven. That is not a qualified promise. That is not "most of you" or "some of you." From wherever you have been scattered — even from the farthest reaches of the earth — God will gather you back.

We are watching this happen in our lifetime. The Jewish people are returning to the land of Israel from the four corners of the earth — from Russia and Ethiopia and North America and South America and Europe and China and wherever the scattering took them. The God who scattered them is the God who is gathering them. The curses of chapter 28 and the restoration of chapter 30 are both being fulfilled, in sequence, exactly as Moses said.

The Word of God is sure. Every word of it.

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SECTION FIVE: THE FINAL COVENANT — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTERS 29 AND 30

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We have heard Moses' great historical review. We have received the Shema and its call to wholehearted love. We have walked through the statutes and ordinances that were to shape Israel's community life. We have stood under the shadow of the great blessings and curses of chapter 28.

Now we come to Moses' third and final address — and it is, perhaps, the most urgent of all. Moses is running out of time. He knows it. And everything he says in these two chapters carries the weight of a last chance to be heard.

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THE COVENANT OF THE PLAINS OF MOAB — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 29

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*"Deuteronomy 29:1 — These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb."*

Besides the covenant at Horeb. This is important. The covenant of Deuteronomy 29 is not a replacement for the Sinai covenant — it is a renewal and expansion of it. God is reestablishing His covenant with a new generation — people who were children or not yet born when the events of the Exodus occurred — and binding them as fully to its terms as if they had been there.

Moses begins by rehearsing the history one final time:

*"Deuteronomy 29:2-4 — Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: 'You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land — the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.'"*

This is one of the most honest and sobering statements in the entire Pentateuch. The people had seen everything. The ten plagues. The parting of the sea. The pillar of fire. The manna. The water from the rock. Forty years of miraculous provision. And yet — God had not given them a heart to perceive or eyes to see or ears to hear. To this very day.

What does this mean? Not that God was withholding something from them arbitrarily. But that the capacity to receive God's revelation goes deeper than witnessing miracles. You can see the miracle and remain unchanged. You can watch the sea part and still make a golden calf six weeks later. You can eat the manna every morning and still complain about it. Seeing is not the same as perceiving. Hearing is not the same as understanding.

Jesus said the same thing in a different way: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Not everyone who hears, hears. The heart must be opened. And the opening of the heart is God's work — not something human effort can manufacture.

Moses then describes the forty years of wandering with a detail that should not be passed over:

*"Deuteronomy 29:5–6 — And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet. You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or similar drink, that you might know that I am the LORD your God."*

Their clothes did not wear out. Their sandals did not wear out. Forty years of walking through the wilderness — and the same sandals they left Egypt in were still on their feet. This is not a metaphor. This is a miracle that unfolded every day for four decades and was so ordinary that the people could simply forget to notice it.

God fed them. God clothed them. God walked with them. And He did it all so that they might know — with the deep, experiential knowledge that cannot be talked out of a person — that He is the LORD their God.

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## **THE SECRET THINGS AND THE REVEALED THINGS — DEUTERONOMY 29:29**

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Chapter 29 contains one of the most quoted verses in the entire book — a verse that stands as a kind of summary of the relationship between divine mystery and human responsibility:

*"Deuteronomy 29:29 — The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."*

The secret things belong to God. There are aspects of His purposes, His timing, His ways that are simply not disclosed to us. We are not given the complete blueprint. We are not given the full explanation of why some things happen and others do not. There are secret things — hidden things — that remain in God's hand.

But those things which are revealed belong to us.

The revealed things — the law, the covenant, the statutes, the word of God — are ours. They have been given to us. They are our inheritance. And they have been given with a specific purpose: that we may do all the words of this law.

This is the balance that Deuteronomy holds throughout: acknowledge what you do not know, and faithfully obey what you do know. Do not be paralyzed by the mysteries. Do not use the hidden things as an excuse to neglect the revealed things. What God has told you is enough to live by. Walk in it.

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THE CALL TO RETURN — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 30

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Chapter 30 is one of the most breathtaking chapters in the entire Bible. After all the warnings of chapter 28 and the sobriety of chapter 29, Moses speaks with extraordinary clarity about what will happen after the exile — and what God will do when His people return.

*"Deuteronomy 30:1–3 — Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His*

*voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you."*

When all these things come upon you. Moses is not speaking conditionally here — he is speaking inevitably. Not if the exile comes. When. Moses knew his people. He knew the exile would come. And he was telling them what God would do when it did.

You call them to mind. The memory of the covenant — the memory of who God is and what He has done — will survive even the exile. Even scattered among the nations, even in the most hostile and foreign environments, there will be a remnant who remembers. Who calls it to mind. Who turns.

And when they return — with all their heart and with all their soul — God will gather them. From all the nations where He has scattered them. From the farthest parts of the earth.

Then comes the most remarkable promise:

*"Deuteronomy 30:6 — And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."*

The circumcision of the heart.

This is one of the clearest statements of the new covenant in the entire Old Testament — centuries before Jeremiah spoke of it, centuries before Ezekiel described the new heart. Moses was already seeing it. The problem with Israel's obedience was never the law — it was the heart. The law was given at Sinai and they made the golden calf. The law was written on stone

tablets and the stone tablets were shattered. What was needed was not a better law but a new heart — a heart that had been changed from the inside, a heart that wanted to obey rather than a heart that was being compelled to.

The circumcision of the heart is what produces the wholehearted love that the Shema calls for. It is not something Israel can accomplish by effort or determination. It is something God does. And He promised to do it.

The Apostle Paul understood this perfectly:

*"Romans 2:29 — But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."*

The outward sign points to the inward reality. And the inward reality is God's work, not ours.

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THE CHOICE THAT DEFINES EVERYTHING — DEUTERONOMY 30:11–20

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Moses closes the third speech with one of the most direct and personal appeals in all of Scripture. He wants there to be no ambiguity. No misunderstanding. No one who can claim they did not know what was being asked of them.

*"Deuteronomy 30:11–14 — For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near*

*you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."*

The word is not hidden. It is not inaccessible. You do not need a scholar to decode it or a mystic to retrieve it from some distant realm. It is very near you — in your mouth and in your heart. It has been given clearly. It can be understood and obeyed.

Paul quoted these same verses in Romans 10 when he was explaining the simplicity of faith in Christ:

*"Romans 10:8–9 — But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*

The nearness of the word that Moses described — the accessibility of covenant life — finds its ultimate fulfillment in the gospel. The righteousness that seemed distant and demanding is actually near, in the mouth and in the heart of those who believe.

And then the famous choice:

*"Deuteronomy 30:19–20 — I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."*

Choose life.

Moses does not merely present the choice. He tells them what to choose. He calls heaven and earth as witnesses — the entirety of creation is

summoned to observe this moment — and he says: choose life. Not because God is forcing them. But because only a fool would choose death when life is being offered.

And then the explanation of what it means to choose life: love the LORD your God. Obey His voice. Cling to Him.

Cling to Him — the word is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 2 when God says that a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife. It is the language of covenant intimacy. The relationship God is calling Israel into is not formal observance. It is the clinging love of a covenant bond — inseparable, committed, life-defining.

For He is your life and the length of your days. God is not offering something to enhance your life. He is your life. Apart from Him, there is no life worth having. In Him, life in its fullest sense is possible.

This is the word Moses needed the people to carry with them across the Jordan. Not a set of regulations. A relationship. Not a legal obligation. A love that chooses life every day.

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SECTION SIX: THE TRANSITION OF LEADERSHIP — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTERS 31 AND 34

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Moses has said everything that needed to be said. The law has been given. The covenant has been renewed. The blessings and curses have been declared. The people have been called to choose life. There is nothing left to say — except to prepare for what comes next.

Chapters 31 through 34 are the transition chapters of Deuteronomy. They tell the story of how Moses handed the work off — to Joshua, to the people, to the written word of God, and ultimately to God Himself.

It is one of the most moving sequences in all of Scripture.

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THE COMMISSIONING OF JOSHUA — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 31

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*"Deuteronomy 31:1–3 — Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them: 'I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the LORD has said to me, "You shall not cross over this Jordan." The LORD your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these*

*nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the LORD has said."*

I am one hundred and twenty years old. Moses names his age and his limitation without self-pity. He is not trying to hold on. He is not resentful of the transition. He is simply stating the facts: the time has come, God has spoken, and the work will continue without him.

And then — the most important thing he says before commissioning Joshua — he does not point to Joshua's qualities. He points to God:

*"The LORD your God Himself crosses over before you."*

Not Joshua. Not the army. Not Israel's military record from the victories east of the Jordan. The LORD your God Himself is going ahead. Joshua's role was not to replace God's leadership — it was to represent it. The people were not following a man. They were following the God who was going before them.

Moses then calls Joshua forward in front of all Israel:

*"Deuteronomy 31:7–8 — Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, 'Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, He is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.'"*

Be strong and of good courage. Moses said it to Joshua publicly — before all Israel — so that the people could hear who their next leader was and what quality of faith was being required of him. Not bravado. Not military confidence. The kind of courage that comes from knowing that the LORD goes before you and will not leave you or forsake you.

This commissioning had legal weight. Joshua's authority was not assumed — it was granted publicly, in front of the community, by the recognized leader. There was no question about succession. Moses had made it unmistakable.

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THE WRITING OF THE LAW — DEUTERONOMY 31:9–13

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Before Moses stepped down, he did something that would preserve the covenant across every future generation:

*"Deuteronomy 31:9 — So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel."*

He wrote it. He did not trust the oral tradition alone. He wrote down the law — the complete covenant, everything he had spoken — and placed it in the hands of the priests and elders. And then he gave specific instructions for its public reading:

*"Deuteronomy 31:10–12 — And Moses commanded them, saying: 'At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law.'"*

Every seven years — at the Feast of Tabernacles, the feast of dwelling in booths that commemorated the wilderness years — the entire law was to be read publicly. Not just to the educated. Not just to the leadership. To men and women and children and strangers. Everyone was to hear it.

This was not because Moses doubted the priests' teaching. It was because he understood human nature. The law that is not regularly rehearsed is the law that is forgotten. The covenant that is not regularly celebrated is the covenant that fades. Every seven years, the entire community — every person, from the oldest elder to the youngest child — was to sit together and hear the word of God read from beginning to end.

What would it look like for the people of God today to take this seriously? To regularly — not just privately but communally — read the word of God together, in its fullness, without shortcut?

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## THE SONG OF MOSES — DEUTERONOMY 32

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Chapter 32 is one of the most extraordinary pieces of poetry in the entire Bible. God commanded Moses to write this song and teach it to the children of Israel — to put it in their mouths — so that when the difficulties came, the song itself would serve as a witness.

*"Deuteronomy 31:19 — Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel."*

The song as a witness. Poetry is remembered when prose is forgotten. The rhythm and the imagery of this song were designed to lodge in the memory — to stay with the people when everything else had faded — so that in the darkest moments of Israel's future, the song would still be there. Still bearing witness to the faithfulness of God and the faithlessness of the

people.

The song opens with one of the most majestic invocations in Scripture:

*"Deuteronomy 32:1–4 — Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the LORD: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He."*

He is the Rock. This name for God runs through the song like a refrain. The Rock does not move. The Rock does not crumble. When everything else shifts and slides, the Rock remains. Moses was giving Israel a name for God that carried the weight of their entire history — a God who had been immovable through slavery and wilderness and rebellion and restoration.

He is the Rock. His work is perfect.

The song describes God's care for Israel with the most tender imagery:

*"Deuteronomy 32:10–12 — He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the LORD alone led him."*

The apple of His eye. The most protected, most valued, most carefully guarded thing. An eagle teaches her young to fly by stirring up the nest — making it uncomfortable, pushing them toward what they cannot yet imagine doing — and then spreading her wings beneath them when they fall.

That is how God led Israel through the wilderness. Making it uncomfortable enough to grow. And always — always — with outstretched wings beneath.

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THE TWELVE TRIBES IN THE SONG OF MOSES

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Chapter 32 also contains references to the twelve tribes within the broader poem. The list of tribes — and the specific blessings Moses would give to each tribe in chapter 33 — reflects the complete family of Israel. Every one of the twelve sons of Jacob had a tribe named after him, and each tribe carried its own character, its own role, its own history.

The list follows the order established in the tradition of Jacob's twelve sons:

Reuben — the firstborn, who lost his birthright through sin but was not cast out. Simeon and Levi — the instruments of vengeance at Shechem, whose tribes would be scattered in Israel but serve different purposes: Levi as the priestly tribe, scattered among the other tribes by design so that the priests would be present everywhere. Judah — the tribe through which the Messiah would come, the lion's whelp from whom the scepter would not depart. Zebulun and Issachar — the tribes of the coastland and the tribe that understood the times. Dan — the tribe of the judge. Gad, Asher, Naphtali — the northern tribes. Joseph, represented through his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh, the double portion of the favored son. Benjamin — the beloved youngest, the tribe of Saul and Paul.

Twelve tribes. One nation. One covenant. One God.

The song of chapter 32 and the blessings of chapter 33 together form Moses' final comprehensive picture of the community God had called into being — complete, structured, with every member having a place and a purpose.

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THE BLESSING OF THE TRIBES — DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 33

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Before Moses ascended the mountain to die, he blessed the tribes of Israel — each one individually. This is one of the great acts of prophetic vision in the Pentateuch. Moses was not simply offering good wishes. He was speaking the word of God over each tribe, often addressing their future history and character.

The blessing opens with a declaration of God's greatness:

*"Deuteronomy 33:26–27 — There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; He will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, 'Destroy!'"*

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

This is one of the most beloved and most comforting verses in all of Scripture. Whatever is falling — whatever is collapsing around you, whatever ground has given way beneath your feet — underneath are the everlasting arms. You cannot fall below the reach of God. His arms are beneath the lowest point you can reach.

Moses spoke this as a final blessing over all the tribes together. After all the individual blessings — after acknowledging the unique gifts and challenges of each tribe — he gathered them all into this single image. Whatever comes, the everlasting arms are there.

The blessing closes with a picture of Israel's destiny:

*"Deuteronomy 33:29 — Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help and the sword of your excellence! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places."*

Happy are you, O Israel. Not merely blessed — but happy. The happiness that comes from being a people saved by the LORD, a people whose shield is God Himself, a people who have been led through wilderness and judgment and exile and will be gathered back — a people whose story is not finished, whose covenant has not been revoked, whose God has not changed His mind about them.

This is how Moses ended the blessings. Not with a warning. Not with a list of requirements. With the happiness of a people who belong to the God who saves.

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SECTION SEVEN: THE DEATH OF MOSES — DEUTERONOMY

CHAPTER 34

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There is a strange and moving quality to the final chapter of Deuteronomy. We are reading the record of Moses' death — but Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. How can a man record his own death?

Jewish tradition holds that Joshua wrote the final verses. Some rabbinic commentary suggests that Moses wrote them prophetically. Either way, the text stands as it is — a quiet, dignified, achingly beautiful account of the end of the greatest life the Old Testament records.

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THE VIEW FROM NEBO

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*"Deuteronomy 34:1–4 — Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, "I will give it to your descendants." I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.'"*

Moses climbed the mountain alone. He stood on the top of Pisgah and looked across the Jordan. He could see the whole land — north to Dan, east to Gilead, west to the Mediterranean, south to the Negev and the Dead Sea plain. The land of the promise, spread before him in every direction.

And God said: you shall not cross over there.

I have caused you to see it with your eyes. God did not have to show him the land. Moses had accepted the verdict. He was not bargaining. But God — in an act of extraordinary grace — gave him the sight of it. Not the possession. The sight.

There is something deeply moving about this. Moses did not get what he wanted. His prayer to cross the Jordan had been denied. But God honored him by bringing him to the highest point from which the land could be seen, and by showing it to him in its entirety. It was a gift. A painful gift — but a gift.

I encourage you to consider what God sometimes does for us when He denies our specific requests. He does not always give us what we asked for. But He sometimes gives us something different — a sight of it, a glimpse of the goodness that our faithfulness has pointed toward — even when the full possession must wait.

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THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF MOSES

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*"Deuteronomy 34:5–6 — So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day."*

Moses the servant of the LORD. That is the title he carries at the end of his life. Not Moses the wonder-worker. Not Moses the lawgiver. Not Moses the great prophet. The servant. The one who spent his life in service to Another.

And God buried him. The text says it plainly: He buried him. God Himself attended to the burial of His servant. In a valley in Moab — and no one knows where, to this day.

The hiding of Moses' grave was not an accident. It was protection against idolatry. A people prone to worshipping at high places and under oak trees would certainly have made a shrine out of Moses' tomb. And so God hid it. Moses belonged to God, not to a religious cult or a pilgrimage industry. His life and death were God's, not the property of human commemoration.

*"Deuteronomy 34:7 — Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished."*

One hundred and twenty years old, with eyes undimmed and natural vigor undiminished. He had been fully present until the last moment. God did not let him linger — did not let the man who had been so fully alive fade slowly into diminishment. He died on the mountain, after seeing the land, with his full faculties intact.

There is mercy in that. A mercy we should notice.

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## **THE MOURNING OF ISRAEL AND THE RISING OF JOSHUA**

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*"Deuteronomy 34:8–9 — And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended. Now Joshua the*

*son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses."*

Thirty days of mourning. The same mourning period they had observed for Aaron. Moses was honored as he deserved to be — with the full communal expression of grief that his life merited.

But then the mourning ended. And the people heeded Joshua. The transition that Moses had prepared so carefully happened exactly as God had planned. The mantle passed. The community did not collapse. The covenant continued.

Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom. Not a different spirit — the spirit of wisdom that Moses had poured into him through years of apprenticeship and the laying on of hands. The leadership of Israel did not start over. It continued, through a man shaped by the man who had gone before him.

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THE FINAL TESTIMONY — DEUTERONOMY 34:10–12

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The book of Deuteronomy ends with a testimony about Moses that stands apart from anything else said about any human figure in the Old Testament:

*"Deuteronomy 34:10–12 — But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel."*

No prophet like Moses has arisen in Israel. Known face to face. Signs and wonders in Egypt. Mighty power and great terror.

This is the final assessment. Not from an admiring biographer. From the text of Scripture itself.

And yet — remember what Moses said in Deuteronomy 18:15. The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me. One who is coming after. One greater than Moses.

The closing verses of Deuteronomy acknowledge that no human prophet has matched Moses. And that acknowledgment points forward — to the One who would come and be not merely like Moses, but the One Moses had spent his life pointing toward.

Jesus was asked by the religious leaders: are you greater than our father Moses? The question was not a neutral one. They were testing whether He would make a claim that, if false, would be blasphemy.

He answered them — not directly, but in everything He said and did and was. He gave the Sermon on the Mount the way Moses gave the law from Sinai — but with this stunning difference: Moses said "the LORD has said." Jesus said "but I say to you." Moses transmitted God's word. Jesus was God's Word. Moses was the servant. Jesus was the Son.

The book that begins with the greatest servant of God in the Old Testament ends by pointing beyond itself — beyond Moses, beyond any human prophet — to the One who was coming.

The one Moses himself longed to see.

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# CONCLUSION: WHAT DEUTERONOMY TEACHES EVERY GENERATION

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We have walked through all thirty-four chapters of Deuteronomy together. Let us stand back and gather what we have seen.

We have seen that history matters. Before law, before obligation, before commandment — Moses told the story of what God had done. The covenant is always a response to grace, not a path to it. God rescued Israel before He gave Israel the law.

We have seen that love is the foundation. The Shema — Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one — is not a creed to be recited but a love to be lived. With all your heart. With all your soul. With all your strength. Nothing held back. Nothing compartmentalized.

We have seen that memory is a spiritual discipline. Do not forget. Teach your children. Write it on your doorposts. Read the law publicly every seven years. The knowledge of God is not maintained automatically — it is transmitted, deliberately, from one generation to the next.

We have seen that obedience and blessing are connected — not as a transaction, but as the natural outcome of a life aligned with the character of God. The blessings of chapter 28 are the fruit of a life lived in covenant faithfulness. And the curses are the inevitable result of covenant abandonment.

We have seen that God's word is near. Not distant. Not inaccessible. In your mouth and in your heart. The word of the covenant — and, as Paul

saw, the word of faith — is available to every person who reaches for it.

We have seen the circumcision of the heart. The deepest promise of Deuteronomy is not more land or more victories or more prosperity. It is that God will change the hearts of His people — will do from the inside what the outside law could never accomplish. This promise found its fulfillment in the new covenant, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, in the new birth that Jesus described to Nicodemus.

We have seen that the everlasting arms are underneath. Whatever falls — whatever gives way — the eternal God is your refuge and His arms are there. Moses said it as his final word to Israel. And it has been true for every generation since.

We have seen the servant who saw the land from a distance. And we have seen the one who will take His people all the way in.

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THE THREAD THAT RUNS THROUGH EVERYTHING

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I want to close with the thread that runs through Deuteronomy from first verse to last.

If people develop faith in the Word of God, the Word of God will lead them to Jesus.

Deuteronomy is not a book about the law. It is a book about a relationship. The law is the clothing — the structure that a relationship requires. But underneath the clothing is the heartbeat: love the LORD your God, with everything you have and everything you are. Cling to Him. For He is your life.

Moses lived that truth for one hundred and twenty years. He got it wrong sometimes — once, memorably, in a way that cost him the land. But he got it right enough, consistently enough, faithfully enough, that God buried him personally and eulogized him as the man He knew face to face.

And then He pointed forward. To the one who was coming. The Prophet like Moses. The one in whom the word of God would not merely be transmitted but embodied. The one who would not merely show the people the land from a mountain — but would take them in.

Choose life, Moses said.

The life he pointed to — the life that is God Himself — came in the fullness of time, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Happy are you, O Israel — and happy are all who trust in the God who saves.

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END OF A STUDY OF DEUTERONOMY

By Robert J. Neral

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