

# Deuteronomy

By Dr. Alan Cobb

## Background

The Hebrew title of this book is *'eleh had'barim* (אלה הדברים) which translates as “these are the words.” Our title comes from the Latin form of the Greek title found in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew. Deuteronomy means “second law.” That title may have come from a phrase in chapter 17 verse 18 where God commanded a future king “when he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law.” The Septuagint translators rendered the phrase “a copy of this law” as “this second law” which in Greek is *deuteronomium*. Thus the title in Latin became Deuteronomy. While the book is to a large extent a repetition of what is found in Exodus 20:23 through 23:23, it is not a direct quote.

## Date and Author

Moses is obviously the writer of the book even though he may have been using an aide such as Joshua for the actual penmanship. (See 1:5, 9; 5:1; 27:1, 8; 29:2; 31:1, 30; 33:1, 30; 31:9, 22, 24) Other Old Testament books referred to Moses as the author (1 Kings 2:3; 8:53; 2 Kings 14:6; 18:6, 12). Jesus attributes the authorship to Moses (Matt 19:7-8; Mark 10:3-5; 12:19; and John 5:46-47). Peter, Stephen, Paul and the author of Hebrews also gives the authorship to Moses (Acts 3:22; 7:37-38; Rom 10:19, 1 Cor 9:9, and Heb 10:28). It is also obvious that it was written while the Israelites camped on the plains of Moab on the eastern side of the Jordan River opposite of Jericho. Although some scholars don't think Moses wrote this book or any of the Torah (first five books) and therefore posit a seventh century BC or even a postexilic (after 538 BC) date, the internal references, New Testament writers, early church father Jerome (342 – 420 AD) and especially Jesus all give credit of authorship to Moses. That would put the date of writing on the plains of Moab at 1451 BC.

## Scope and Purpose

Deuteronomy is not a history book like Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers and doesn't give us a lot of new information about the history of the Israelite people. It is primarily Moses' teaching of the younger generation that grew up during the 38 years the people stayed at Kadesh after the older generation rebelled against God's will and did not enter the Promised land. Now, as this generation waits on the plains of Moab for God to give his “go ahead” to cross the Jordan River and enter the land, Moses teaches them the laws God has given for how they are to relate properly to God, to their fellow Israelites, and to aliens living among them.

## Chapters 1 through 3

In this first part of Moses' teaching he reviews what God has done for the people from the time he told them to leave Mount Sinai until they arrived at the plains of Moab and he enabled them to defeat and capture the land of the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og. This land was divided among the Reubenites, Gadites, and half of the tribe of Manasseh. Moses does include some information that he didn't record in Numbers and we looked at that when studying the parts of Numbers where it applied.

## Chapter 4

In this chapter Moses exhorts the people to faithfully obey God's decrees and laws that he is going to teach them. He reminds them that God spoke his law to their parents from Horeb (Mt. Sinai) even though they couldn't see him. Moses warns them not to make an image of anything in creation, not human, animal, nor sun, moon or stars and bow down to worship it because that is idolatry – worshipping something other than God. Moses tells them that if they do this after entering the land that God's anger will be raised against them so that

they will not live long in the land but be destroyed and scattered among the nations. This is exactly what happened to the ten northern tribes when the Assyrians defeated them and scattered them throughout their empire. And the two southern tribes were later taken into captivity by the Babylonians for 70 years before being allowed to return to the land. Many years later after Jesus had come as their Messiah and died on a cross so that their sin could be forgiven, they rejected him and the Romans destroyed the temple and Jerusalem and the people were scattered throughout the Roman empire. This has continued until 1948 AD when God made it possible for the Jews to return to the land again. Moses ends this chapter by identifying three cities of refuge east of the Jordan River in the land given to the two and one-half tribes and then says he is going to give them God's laws and decrees.

## **Chapter 5**

In this teaching, Moses tells his young audience the laws that God spoke to their parents from the cloud on top of Mount Sinai. He tells them that their parents were afraid to hear God's voice and requested that only Moses go talk with God and bring back his commands to them. God agreed with their request and had Moses come up on the mountain so he could explain the laws more fully and even wrote them on two stone tablets by his own finger so that Moses could take them back to the people. Then Moses repeats for the new generation the commands God spoke from the mountain and were written on the stone tablets that now were safely kept in the Ark of the Covenant. He concludes this chapter by warning this new generation to do all that God has commanded and be sure not to turn either right or left from them so that they may live long and prosper in the land that they will possess.

## **Chapter 6**

Now Moses starts to expound on each of the commandments so the people will better know how to apply them to their lives. In verse 4 he gives them what is known as the "shema" – "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." *Echad* is the Hebrew word translated "one" and can mean a unit (solitary) or unique. Then Moses gives them what Jesus later referred to as the "first and greatest commandment" – "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Matt 22:37-38; Mark 12:29-30) He exhorts them to love God, impress God's commands on their children, and not forget what God has done in the past for the Israelites. Remembering what God has done in the past helps the present generation love God and helps them impress God's commands on their children so that their children will do the same for their children.

## **Chapter 7**

Moses has reminded the people to obey God's commands and the first of the Ten Commandments is to have no other gods before God. So now he reminds them of God's command to totally destroy the nations of the lands which God gives into their hands and destroy all of their gods by burning in fire. If they don't do this, then they might be tempted to take some of the idols for the gold, silver, and jewels and thus desecrate themselves, their families, and their land. They are warned not to intermarry with those nations or those spouses will turn their children away from God, thus breaking the first commandment. Any compromising with the people of the nations in the land God was giving to them would lead them to disobey God and bring his angry judgment upon them.

## **Chapter 8**

When the people would enter the land, the Lord had promised to give them victory over the inhabitants so that they could destroy or drive those peoples from the land. They would only be able to do this with God's help but they could easily become over confident and start depending on their own power rather than trusting in God's promise of help. If the people became over confident in their own power they would stop trusting God and his word and begin worshipping other gods. And again they are warned that if they do this it will bring God's

angry judgment upon them. About 700 years later this will happen to the northern ten tribes and then about another 200 years later it will happen to the 2 southern tribes.

## **Chapter 9**

Moses warns the people not to think that God is giving this land to them because of their righteousness and uses their parents' unrighteousness in making a golden calf and their refusal at Kadesh to obey and enter the land as examples of their unrighteousness. Then Moses tells them about his time on the mountain with God and receiving God's commandments inscribed on the two stone tablets, how he broke the original tablets when he discovered the golden calf, and how he ground the golden calf into powder and made their parents drink it in their water. He tells them that he prayed for the Lord not to destroy the people because the nations would think he could not keep his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and because the people were his inheritance which he had brought out of Egypt.

## **Chapter 10**

Now Moses tells them how God told him to chisel out two new stone tablets and bring them up on the mountain and that God again wrote his commandments on the tablets which were brought down and put in the Ark. Then Moses calls on this generation to respond to God by asking: "What does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees ... for your own good." He encourages them to circumcise their hearts and not be stiff-necked any longer. He describes "the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing." Therefore, Moses says that "you are to love those who are aliens for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt." He ends by reminding them that they were 70 going into the Egypt (when Jacob went there in 1706 BC and now it is 255 years later) and God made them "as numerous as the stars in the sky." By the last census, there were 601,730 men who were twenty years old or older. When adding women and children, that number could easily be about 2.5 million. The male Levites 10 months old or older numbered 23,000. When adding wives and female children, that number could easily be 30,000. So, although we don't consider that number of people to be as numerous as the stars in the sky, those early Israelites would easily understand that they were numerous and that God had caused them to grow mightily from a small number.

## **Chapter 11**

Moses starts this section of his teaching by equating keeping God's requirements, decrees, laws and commands with loving God with which he began his teaching of the decrees, laws and commands in Chapter 6. If you love someone you want to please them and this would be done by obeying them. But, if they didn't love God they wouldn't obey, thereby disobeying God and bringing God's angry wrath upon them. Since he is teaching the younger generation which was under twenty years old when the Exodus, Mount Sinai, and refusal to enter the Promised Land occurred, he has to remind them that their children didn't see and experience all the miracles and judgments that they had experienced. Thus it is their responsibility to demonstrate their love of God by obeying him and therefore teach by example how to love God. He points out to them that the land they are entering isn't like the land of Egypt where they had to irrigate it so the land would produce crops. This land is cared for by God providing rain from heaven. So if they disobey God and provoke his anger, then the rain will not come to water the ground so it produces crops. The way to make sure this doesn't happen is to follow God's requirements, decrees, laws, and commands and teach them to their children during all their daily activities and to even write them on the door frames of their houses to help them remember. In this way their days in the land and that of their children would be long and prosperous as God helped them drive the nations out of the land. For the Lord, Moses set before them a blessing and a curse depending on whether they obeyed or disobeyed God. He even told them that when they enter the land they are to proclaim the blessings from Mount Gerizim and the curses from Mount Ebal. These two mountains are west of the Jordan River, near the

great trees of Moreh, in the vicinity of Gilgal. This Gilgal must not have been near Jericho but near (or even another name for) Shechem where God had appeared to him and promised Abram he would give the land to him and his offspring. (Gen 12:6-7)

From Chapter 6 to this point, Moses has been expounding on the first of the 10 Commandments: “You shall have no other gods before (or other than) me.”

## **Chapter 12**

Now Moses begins to expound on the second commandment not to make any image and worship it. He reminds them of the Lord’s command to destroy all of the places of worship and idols they encounter in the land. Instead of worshipping in the places and the ways of the inhabitants of the land, they are to seek the place where God will choose from among the tribes for them to worship him. There all the people are to bring all the offerings, sacrifices, tithes and special gifts to the Lord. They may still slaughter animals and eat them in the towns where they live as long as they drain out the blood and don’t eat it because the life is in the blood. But anything that is consecrated, dedicated, or vowed to be given to the Lord (burnt offerings, sin offerings, tithes, and such) must be taken to be presented at God’s altar in the place where they are to worship him. They must not worship in the ways of the nations of the land because they do detestable things like burning their sons and daughter as sacrifices to their gods.

## **Chapter 13**

Now Moses presents the idea that someone might come to them proclaiming to be a prophet and even doing miraculous signs and suggesting that they follow other gods. They are not to follow such persons but put them to death because they have preached rebellion against God. Even if that person is their own brother, son, daughter or closest friend, they are to show no pity but report it to the priests and be the first among all of the hands of the people to put that person to death. If it is reported that the people of one of the towns has gone astray to worship other gods, then the matter is to be carefully investigated and if it is true then the town and everyone and everything in it is to be destroyed and burned as a burnt offering to the Lord and the town is to remain a ruin from that time forward. As long as none of the condemned things of that town are ever part of their possessions, then the Lord’s anger will be turned away and he will show mercy and increase their numbers (offspring) because they have obeyed the Lord’s commands.

## **Chapter 14**

Moses continues to explain how they are to show their love for God by worshiping him by what they eat. He gives them specific instructions for determining what is considered clean and unclean so they will be able to show obedience by eating only the clean animals. Although some of the animals are ceremonially unclean as far as eating them, it is not forbidden to touch or use them as beast of burden. But some animals that are ceremonially unclean are not to even be touched (alive or dead) like the pig. Anything found already dead is not to be eaten but it can be given or sold to an alien living in their towns and they may eat it. The Israelites are to follow these rules about what they can and cannot eat because they are a people holy (set apart) to God.

Then Moses explains how they are to worship God with the tithe they are to give him. If possible, they are to take the tithe of the produce of their fields to the place to worship God, present it, and eat the portion they are allowed to eat in the Lord’s presence. But if their tithe is too great or they live too far away, then they are to exchange the tithe for silver and take that to the place to worship God and then purchase whatever they like to present to the Lord and eat their portion before him. But, in either case they are not to forget the Levites who live in their towns. Every three years they are to bring all the tithe of that year to those Levitical towns and store it there for the use of the Levites and to feed the aliens, fatherless, and widows. In doing this, God will be honored and will bless all the work of the people’s hands.

## **Chapter 15**

Now Moses proceeds to explain how worship of God involves taking care of their fellow Israelites. First, at the end of every seven years the debts of fellow Israelites should be cancelled. He says that there shouldn't be any poor people among the Israelites because God will bless them in the land they are about to enter if they follow his commands. Not only will he bless them but he will give them enough so that they will lend to other nations but borrow from none and will rule over many nations but be ruled over by none. Then he says if there is a poor Israelite among them they should not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward him but openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs even if the seven year time for canceling debts is near. Otherwise he might appeal to the Lord and those harboring ill will toward their needy brother will be found guilty of sin. Moses goes on to say that there will always be poor people in the land so they are commanded to be openhanded toward their brothers and toward the poor and needy.

The cancelling of debts every seven years was also to apply to freeing their fellow Israelites who had been sold in slavery to them. That slave was to be released and in addition to freedom was to be supplied liberally from the owner's flock, threshing floor (grains), and winepress (that would most likely include both wine and olive oil). Doing this should be a result of their love of God for freeing them from slavery in Egypt. But if the servant (slave) says they don't want to leave (be freed), then the master is to take an awl (a metal tool for punching a hole in leather) and push it through the individual's ear lobe. In this way the person will become a servant for their life.

Then Moses returns to his discussion about animals, and in particular, worshipping God through the firstborn of all the animals which the Lord has said are dedicated to him. The firstborn animal is not to be worked or shorn. It is to be eaten (therefore sacrificed) before the Lord (honoring him) in the place he will choose. But if the animal has a defect (lame, blind, or anything that would make it unworthy to be sacrificed to the Lord) it is to be eaten in the owner's town and may be eaten by those who are ceremonially clean or unclean alike.

## **Chapter 16**

Now Moses explains how observing the feasts of Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles is part of their worship of God according to the God's second of the Ten Commandments. Instructions for these have been given before but are given again here to impress upon the younger generation the importance of the feasts. He ends this presentation with the admonition that no man should appear before the Lord at these feasts emptyhanded, but bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord has blessed.

Then Moses tells this generation to appoint judges and officials of each tribe in their towns who will be sure the people are provided justice.

Now Moses returns to warning about worshipping other gods and this discussion continues into Chapter 17.

## **Chapter 17**

Moses commands the people not to set up any wooden Asherah pole (can be translated as do not plant a tree dedicated to Asherah) beside the altar you build to the Lord and do not erect a sacred stone because God hates these. They are to be careful not to sacrifice to God any animal with a defect because that would be detestable to the Lord. If anyone is caught breaking these commands and worshipping any other god they are to be put to death upon the testimony of at least two witnesses and those witnesses are to be the first in putting the person to death (stoning) and then all the people are to join in because the evil must be purged from among the people.

Now Moses begins to discuss obeying the fifth of the Ten Commandments – honor your father and mother – by giving examples of how that applies to respecting authority figures in the nation because they function as the parents of the nation as a family.

The law court in each town was to judge disputes and decide what was correct to be done according to God's commands. Any case that was too difficult for the local law court was to be taken to the place that God would choose (for the ark, his seat of judgment, to be housed – the tabernacle) and the priests ministering there, especially the high priest, would give a decision. Following that decision would show obedience to God's law and honor to the authority he has set in place. Anyone showing contempt for the judge (local) or for the priest who stands ministering to the Lord (the priest who is performing the duties in the tabernacle at that time) was to be put to death because he was disobeying God (trying to be god for himself, deciding what was right and wrong, just as Adam and Eve had done in the Garden of Eden).

At this time, as the Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land, they have no king and there has been no mention from God about them having one. The only previous indication of a ruler was given by Jacob as he blessed his sons before his death when he said "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his." (Gen 49:10) Now God is commanding them what to do when they want to be like the other nations around them and decide to have a king ruling over them. Whoever they choose to be king must be an Israelite and not a foreigner since he would be God's representative as he ruled over the people. He was not to acquire great numbers of horses for himself or go to Egypt to get more. This indicates not building up a large army which would lead him to rely on it rather than on God. He must not take many wives nor accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. God's plan from Genesis 2:24 was monogamy so many wives would lead the king's heart to be led astray from following God. He is to write a copy of the law from a scroll of the Levites and read it all the days of his life so he learns to revere the Lord and carefully follow all God's commands and not consider himself better than his brothers (the people over whom he rules). The king is to be a model of how the Israelites obey God's commands. Nowhere in this command or elsewhere in the Old Testament is Israel's king to make new laws for the people. He is only to carry out the laws that God, Israel's true King, has already made. Considering what we later learn about the kings of the Israelite people in the books of the kings and the chronicles of the kingdom, we see that most of them did not follow the commands that God has just given.

## **Chapter 18**

Moses now turns to discussing offerings for the priests and what happens if a Levite who is not a priest moves from his hometown to the place where God will direct his house (tabernacle) to be placed. The priests are to have a share of the people's sacrifices of bulls and sheep as well as the firstfruits brought to the Lord. A Levite moving to the tabernacle area is to be allowed to serve around the tabernacle like other Levites.

Then Moses commands the people not to imitate the detestable ways of the nations in the land they are entering and will possess. Those ways include sacrificing a son or daughter in fire, practicing divination or sorcery, interpreting omens, engaging in witchcraft, casting spells, acting as a medium or spiritist or consulting the dead. These are all practices which involve contacting or worshipping Satan and his fallen angels (demons).

After saying that the people are not to practice sorcery or divination, Moses explains that God will raise up another prophet for them like him to speak to them for God. He reminds them that this will be done because their fathers were afraid when they heard God's voice at Horeb (Mt. Sinai) and asked that he only speak to one person who will then tell them what he said. Moses says that God will put his words in the prophet's mouth and the prophet will tell the people everything God commands. If anyone doesn't listen to what the prophet says, God will call that person to account (because this would be disobeying God). But if someone identifies themselves as a prophet and presumes to speak in God's name, but it is not what God commanded and does not take place, then that person is to be put to death. The priesthood was a successive office beginning with Aaron. The royalty would be a successive office once God had given the people a king in the line of Judah as Jacob had indicated in his blessing of his sons. This command of God indicates that the office of God's prophet would not successive but under God's selection of the individual to speak for him. The people were not to try to discover knowledge of the future through any means but by God's speaking through the prophet he selected.

## **Chapter 19**

Moses now restates what had been previously stated about setting aside cities among those given to the Levites to be cities of refuge where someone accused of killing another person could flee and receive a fair trial by the priests. If found innocent of murder, although he might have accidentally killed the person he would be allowed to live in that city and the family of the killed person could not seek revenge upon him as long as he didn't leave the city. Upon the death of the High Priest the accused could leave the city and the family of the deceased would have no right to seek revenge. Moses also restates that there had to be two or three witnesses to a crime for an accused to be found guilty. Any witness that is found to have lied is to be put to death to purge evil from the community.

## **Chapter 20**

Moses tells the people that when they enter the land and start to go to war against a people greater than themselves, they should remember that God, who brought them up out of Egypt, will be with them. But the officers of the army are to find out if anyone has a reason they shouldn't go into battle and they should leave. The last reason he gives is if they are afraid because someone's fear could be contagious and infect the entire army so that it loses trust in God to provide for them. This is what happened when the spies returned from the Promised Land at Kadesh Barnea and their fearful report led the people to refuse to trust God and enter the land.

When the army marches up to a city, if the people there offer peace and open the gates to the army, they are to be allowed to live and made subject to forced labor. But if the city engages the army in battle, the army is to lay siege to the city and after the Lord delivers it into their hands, the men are to be killed and the women and children and everything in the city will become plunder that the army may take and use as their own. This is how the Israelites are to treat cities that are a distance from the land the Lord is giving them, but for the people in the cities of the land they are possessing, they are to be destroyed completely. When the army besieges a city for a long time, they are not to cut down any trees that produce fruit to build the siege works to attack the city. Those trees will be useful after the city is conquered.

## **Chapter 21**

Moses tells the people how to handle a death in an unsolved murder. The elders and judges of the people shall measure the distance to the nearest town and the elders of that town are to bring a heifer that has never been worked or worn a yoke to a valley that has never been plowed or planted and where there is a flowing stream. There, the neck of the heifer is to be broken and the elders of the town are to wash their hands over the heifer's neck and declare that they did not shed the individual's blood or see it done. They are then to ask the Lord to accept this atonement so they will be purged of the guilt of shedding innocent blood.

When a man finds a woman among the captives of a city and wants to take her as his wife, he must first take her into his home, have her shave her head, trim her nails, and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. Then she must live in the house for a full month while she mourns for her father and mother. Then the man can go in and be her husband. But if he is displeased with her, he must let her go wherever she wishes. He must not sell her or treat her as a slave because he has dishonored her (this would be a result of having sexual relations with her and then not keeping her as his wife).

Moses tells them that if any man has two wives and he loves one more than the other, he must give the firstborn rights to the first son born even if born to the wife he loves less. If a man has a son who does not obey his father and mother and rejects their discipline, they are to take him to the elders of the city at the city gates and announce that their son is stubborn, rebellious, will not obey and is profligate (wicked, immoral, shameless). That person is to be stoned to death by all the men of the city.

Then Moses begins to discuss various laws and the discussion continues into chapter 22.

This first of the various laws is about putting to death by hanging on a tree of someone guilty of a capital offense. They are told not to leave the body on the tree overnight but bury him that day (before night) because anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse and they must not desecrate the land God is giving them. The normal method of public execution was stoning and not hanging. Sometimes after execution by stoning, the body was impaled on a pole or hung from a tree for everyone to see with the intent that it would deter others from committing his crime. Hanging the body up for public viewing was not the cause of God's curse. It was the result of the individual's crime for which God had cursed the person. When Jesus was crucified on a tree for all to see, it demonstrated that God had cursed him at that time because he was bearing all sin as God's perfect substitute sacrificial lamb.

## **Chapter 22**

The next law is intended to show love (care or concern) for one's brother / neighbor by how you treat his things and help him. Remember Jesus' statement of the second greatest command: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Next, is about men or women wearing the other sex's clothing. Appearing in the opposite sex's clothing was sometimes part of pagan worship or a magical practice intending to cause harm to people, like making an opposing army as weak as women. Appearing in the opposite sex's clothing would also be associated with homosexuality which was forbidden by God and punishable by death (Lev 20:13).

This law about not taking a mother bird with its young shows God's care for the least of his creatures and indicates his people should do the same. Along with this, the law of building a parapet around the roof of a house so that nobody can fall would remind people that all life is valuable. Respect for other humans is important because all life belongs to God because he created it, but humans are particularly important since he created them in his own likeness with a physical existence (physical body), soul (mind, will and emotions), and a spiritual existence (spiritual body).

The next law arises out of the seventh commandment not to commit adultery. The cases presented are intended to protect a woman from being falsely accused of not being a virgin but being a harlot (promiscuous), to protect the sanctity of a couple's marriage, and what should be done to those who break the command.

## **Chapters 23 - 25**

Here Moses gives God's rules for allowing people who are not part of his covenant with Israel to become part of the assembly of God (the Israelite nation assembled in worship) and thus worship God along with them. No one who was a eunuch, or born of a forbidden marriage, nor an Ammonite or Moabite or Edomite would be allowed to assemble with the Israelites in worship of God. The rejection of these people from Israelite worship would not preclude them from believing in, trusting God, worshipping him on their own, and thus having a right relationship with God as the people did before God made his covenant with the descendants of Jacob (Israel). This also did not preclude a person from becoming part of the Israelite nation, such as Ruth did, but they would not be allowed the full privilege of worshipping God at the assembly of God which occurred at the Tabernacle.

Moses gave them God's instructions for keeping their encampment clean from impurities when they were camped against their enemies. Nocturnal emissions required the individual to admit what had happened and take himself outside of the camp until evening and perform his ritual cleansing. The daily relieving of bladder and bowels simply required a person to go to a designated spot outside of the camp, dig a hole to use when needed and cover it when finished. Moses says this is because the camp must be holy because God will be moving among them in the camp to protect them and he must not see anything indecent and therefore turn away from the army in the encampment.

Finally he gives them several commands (laws) which begin in verse 15 and continue through chapter 25. These deal with relationships with immediate family and relatives, fellow Israelites, and non-Israelites.



## **Chapter 26**

Moses now tells the people how they are to respond to God's goodness after they have taken possession of the land that the Lord said he would give them. Taking some of the firstfruits after they have taken the land and settled in it means this ceremony had to take place right after a Passover celebrating God's deliverance of their fathers from their slavery to the Egyptians. So, the instructions for celebrating Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits given to their fathers would also have to be done. This would be the first celebration of Firstfruits since it was not possible to celebrate it until they had entered the land. Now, in this first celebration, they are to recount what has brought them to this point of being able to celebrate the Firstfruits. When they say their father was a wandering Aramean, it is a reference to Jacob who lived for years in Paddan-aram where he married Leah and Rachel and became their father. Then, they are to recount that he went to Egypt with a few people (seventy family members according to Gen 46:27) and lived there, became numerous and powerful. But when the Egyptians mistreated them, God heard their cries and brought them out with his outstretched arm, and with miraculous signs and wonders. They are to take the firstfruits to the place God will designate as the dwelling spot for his name (the Tabernacle with the Ark). There they and the aliens living with them are to present their firstfruit offering and bow down in worship, rejoicing in the goodness of God.

Then "in the third year" would be the third time that they celebrate Firstfruits. During this celebration they are to bring their tithe and give it to the Levites. It was the Levites responsibility to give it to support the alien, fatherless, and widows in the land. They are to proclaim that they have given the sacred portion to the Levites, have not turned aside from the Lord's commands, have not eaten any of the sacred portion while mourning, nor removed it while unclean, nor offered any of it to the dead. They are to proclaim they have done everything God has commanded and ask him to bless the people and the land he has given them as promised on oath.

Now Moses proclaims that God commands them to obey all the laws and decrees and says that they have declared this day that the Lord is their God and they will obey him. And he says that the Lord has declared this day that they are his people, his treasured possession, and that they are to keep all his commands. Moses says the Lord has declared that he will set them in high praise, fame and honor, and high above all the nations he has made, and that they will be a people holy (set apart) to him as he has promised.

## **Chapter 27**

This chapter establishes that when the people enter the land they are to set up some large stones, covered with plaster, on Mount Ebal and write on them the words of the law. Then they are to divide all the people into two groups by tribe and pronounce curses and blessings on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali are to be on Mount Ebal and say "Amen" after each of the curses the Levites proclaim.

## **Chapter 28**

Moses says that if the people obey the Lord and follow his commands, then the blessings he proclaims will be theirs. They, the land, and everything they do will be blessed by the Lord and they will be a great nation. But if they don't obey the Lord and follow his commands, then the curses he proclaims will be theirs. The land will be plagued with wasting diseases, the Lord will cause them to be defeated by their enemies, their family relationship will be destroyed, nations from far away will come against them and overcome them, and they will be scattered among all the nations of the world and it will be like they have returned to Egypt and become slaves again.

## **Chapter 29**

Now Moses gives the terms of the covenant God is making with the people on the Plains of Moab. First he relates what God has done to bring them out of Egypt and to the present time so that Reuben, Gad and half of

Manasseh already have land promised to them and the remaining tribes are about to cross the Jordan River to possess the land God has promised to them. He says that they are standing in God's presence to enter into a covenant with him, not only for themselves but for all their descendants as well, that he will be their God as he promised by oath to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He warns the people that just because God had promised to bless them and make them a great nation that they should not think that means they can persist in doing their own thing because that way of living will bring all the disastrous curses upon them and the land. If that happens, then later generations and foreigners will see the calamities that have fallen on the land and say it is like the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim and ask why. The answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. .. In furious anger and in great wrath the Lord uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now."

This is exactly what happened almost 700 years later when God brought the Assyrians against the 10 northern tribes and then 100 years later brought the Babylonians against remaining southern tribes.

Moses says the secret things belong to God but the things revealed belong to us (the people) and our children (descendants) forever that we may follow all the words of this law (covenant).

### **Chapter 30**

Moses continues to tell the people that after all the blessings and curses come upon them that when they (their descendants) return to the Lord and obey him with all their heart and soul, then the Lord will restore their fortunes, have compassion on them, and gather them from the nations where he has scattered them, even if that is from the most distant lands under the heavens. Moses says God will bring them into the land that belongs to their fathers and make them more prosperous than their fathers. God will circumcise their hearts and the hearts of their descendants so that they may love him with all their heart and soul and live. Then the Lord will put all the curses on their enemies who hate and persecute you. This will happen if they obey the Lord's commands and decrees written in this Book of the Law and turn to the Lord with all their heart and soul.

This passage is similar to what later prophets will say happens to the descendants of the Israelites during the Tribulation and Millennium. See the following passages: Isaiah 11:11-12; 14:1-2; Jeremiah 23:3-8; Ezekiel 16:53-63; 20:33-44; 36:26-27; 37:21-28; Hosea 2:14-16; Joel 3:1-8; Amos 9:9-15; Zechariah 12:10-12; 13:8-9; Malachi 3:1-6; Matthew 24:29-31; 25:31-46; Acts 15:16-17; Romans 11:26-27. Believers who accept a dispensational theology understand that God has a future for Israel as a nation that is distinct from that for the Church and Gentiles (non-Jewish peoples). Believers who don't accept the dispensational theology think these promises will be fulfilled in the Church which they think is the "New Israel."

Moses tells the people that what he is commanding them to do is not too difficult or beyond their ability. No one has to go to heaven or cross the sea to discover it and proclaim it to them because it is in their heart and mouth so they may obey it. Moses says, "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess." But he goes on to say that if they are not obedient that they will certainly be destroyed. He calls heaven and earth as witnesses against the people that he has set before them life and death, blessings and curses and he encourages them to choose life so that they and their children may live, love the Lord, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him and the Lord will give them many years in the land he swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

### **Chapter 31**

Now, as Moses begins to end his instruction of this generation of people who were under the age of 20 when their father rebelled against the Lord at Kadesh Barnea and many had not even been alive when God first gave

them his Commandments from Mount Sinai, he reminds them that he is 120 years old, the oldest person among them, and that he is no longer able to lead them. He tells them that the Lord has told him that he shall not cross the Jordan River. He encourages them to be strong and courageous because the Lord will go with them and before them and will never leave them nor forsake them. Then he summons Joshua and before all the people commands him to be strong and courageous because he must go with these people and divide the land among the people as their inheritance. This established Joshua as the new leader of the Israelite people.

These teachings, as Moses wrote them or at least had them written, were given to the priests who carried the ark of the covenant and to all the elders of Israel. Moses commanded that every seven years, during the Feast of Tabernacles when everyone gathered at the place the Lord would choose as his dwelling place, this law (book of Deuteronomy) shall be read to the assembled people – men, women, children, and aliens living in the towns so they can listen and learn to fear (reverence) the Lord and follow carefully all the word of this law.

Up to this point Moses has been seen as a priest, responsible for standing between God and the people to seek God's direction for them and to give God's response, and to atone for the sin of the people as he did on Mount Sinai after they sinned by making and worshipping a golden calf. He has been seen representing God's authority to command the way the people must live (like future kings would do). Now in the next verses, he is seen as a prophet, foretelling by God's command what will happen to the people in the future. Moses is the only person besides Jesus to hold all three of these offices and therefore is a symbol (shadow) of Jesus, the Messiah, whom God foretold would come to restore mankind's relationship with him after Adam and Eve disobeyed his command in the Garden of Eden and brought sin into the world and upon the entire human race.

Since Moses' death is near, God commands him to bring Joshua and present themselves at the Tent of Meeting where he will commission Joshua to be the next leader. God appears to them in a pillar of cloud over the entrance to the tent and tells them that after Moses has gone to rest with his fathers the people will soon prostrate themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering and will forsake him and break the covenant he made with them. Then he will become angry with them and forsake them. He will hide his face from them and they will be destroyed (not complete eradication but brought down from the high esteem which they will attain as a nation). Many disasters and difficulties will come upon the people and they will ask if those have come upon them because God is not with them. They will not recognize that it is because of their wickedness and breaking of the covenant that those things come upon them in judgment, but think that it is because God is not upholding his promise to protect, defend, and bless them. Then God tells Moses to write a song, teach it to the people and have them sing it as a witness against them. So Moses writes the song he records for us in chapter 32. God commands Joshua to be strong and courageous and take the people into the land he has promised on oath to be theirs. Moses tells the Levites (priests who carry the ark of the covenant) to place the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy) beside the ark as a witness against the nation because he knows they are a stiff-necked, rebellious people who will rebel after he dies. Then he says to have all the elders and officials of the tribes to assemble before him so they can hear him speak the words to them and call heaven and earth to testify against them. He tells them that they are sure to become utterly corrupt, that disaster will fall on them because they will do evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord will be provoked to anger by what their hands have made. The song God told Moses to write is presented in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 32**

All songs are not just praise to God. Many are instruction in theology and or appropriate living according to God's commands. Even those that are praise will have instruction about the glory and character of God. This song gives praise to God but also describes God's chastening of Israel for apostasy and his vengeance against those who oppose him.

Verses 1 – 4. Moses calls on heaven and earth to listen to what is being sung. God's name is praised and his greatness is proclaimed. Here, for the first time, he is described as a Rock but that theme continues throughout

the rest of the Bible. His works are described as perfect and his ways as just. He is proclaimed as faithful, upright, and just.

Verses 5 – 6. Israel is described as corrupt, warped, and crooked. Because of their treatment of God, they are recognized as foolish and unwise.

Verses 7 – 14. Here Moses describes God's choice of Israel out of all the nations on earth as his people and how he, and not some foreign (alien / false) god, has cared for them.

Verses 15 – 18. Moses now speaks of Jeshurun which means "upright one," or "uprightness," or "righteous nation." He is using this as reference to Israel because that is what God wanted the nation to be and so it is her holy calling. But, although God blessed them, they did not act righteously but decided to follow foreign gods and forgot the Rock (Jesus) who fathered them.

Verses 19 – 25. Because God was rejected by his sons and daughters, their rejection of their covenant with him brought anger to God because he had to discipline them in accordance with the terms of the covenant. It meant God would bring calamities, wasting famine, pestilence, plague, wild beasts, snakes (vipers) upon them so that terror would reign in their homes.

Verses 26 – 38. Moses' song, that God gave him, says that God's plan will not be stopped by Israel's disobedience, even though it will bring discipline at the hands of other nations.

Verses 39 – 43. The song declares that God is the only one and he can put to death or bring to life. When he declares something it will happen because he lives forever. When he takes up his sword in judgment against his adversaries and repay those who hate him, it will happen. So nations should rejoice with his people (Israel) because he will avenge their blood that has been shed and make atonement for his land and people.

Verses 44 – 47. Moses came with Joshua and spoke all the words of the song in the hearing of the people and then encouraged them to take to heart (live) all the words so they may command their children to obey all the words because the words are not just idle but are their life and by them they will live long in the land they are crossing the Jordan to possess.

Verses 48 – 52. On the day Moses spoke the song to the people, God told him to go up on Mount Nebo in the Abarim Range of mountains. There he will be able to view the land that God has promised to the Israelites as their possession. God says Moses will die there and be gathered to his people just as his brother, Aaron, died on Mount Hor. The reason for their deaths is because they broke faith with God and did not uphold his holiness among the Israelites at the water of Meribah Kadesh. He disobeyed God's command to speak to the rock and God will bring forth water, and instead, in his anger with the people, Moses (with Aaron alongside) struck the rock and said to the people "must we bring you water out of this rock." Therefore Moses will be able to see but not enter the land promised to the Israelites.

## **Chapter 33**

Before Moses goes up the mountain to die, he pronounces the following blessing on the Israelite people. Remember in Genesis 49 that before Jacob died he had his children brought before him so he could pronounce a blessing on them. This apparently was a common thing for the leader of the family to do, and since Moses is the leader of God's family on earth at this time it is his privilege to do this. His blessing upon each of the tribes, like Jacob's blessing, is a prophetic pronouncement about the future of the tribe and God's interaction with them. They are blessed not according to their birth order but according to some other reason determined by God. Moses begins the blessing by presenting God as the source of all blessings. The "holy ones" are probably angels who we learn were with God when he gave the 10 Commandments from Mount Sinai. Moses says those "holy ones" bow at God's feet and receive instruction from him. Moses mentions Reuben, Judah, Levi,

Benjamin, Joseph, Zebulun, Issachar, Gad, Dan, Naphtali, and Asher. Simeon is the only tribe not mentioned and that may be because Jacob's blessing (Gen 49:7) prophesied that Simeon would be scattered among the nation (other tribes). When Joshua divides the Promised Land (Joshua 19), the inheritance of Simeon was 17 towns scattered amid the territory assigned to Judah. After mentioning the tribes, Moses returns to talking about God as the nation's help and refuge who will drive out their enemies before them so that they will live in safety in a land of grain, new wine, where the heavens drop dew. Moses ends by saying they are a blessed people, saved by the Lord (covenant name YHWH) who is their shield, helper, and glorious sword so that their enemies will cower before them and they will trample down the high places (worship sites) of their enemies.

### Chapter 34

After giving God's prophetic blessing on the tribes and the nation as a whole, Moses proceeds to climb Mt. Nebo as God instructed him. There the Lord directs his attention from where he is standing on Mt. Nebo to look at what the Israelite tribes have already captured and will capture after they enter the Promised Land. The map at the right

(from [www.biblicalarchaeologygraves.blogspot.com](http://www.biblicalarchaeologygraves.blogspot.com)) shows the area as God directs him to see. Remember that this is not all the land promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:18 but only the land that the people would possess if they trusted and obeyed God and drove the Canaanites from the land. Shown on the map is the outline of the areas that the different tribes would be given.

After Moses has seen the Promised Land as God said he would allow him to do, Moses dies there on the mountain at the age of 120 and God buried him somewhere in the valley opposite Beth Peor. The location of Moses' grave is unknown and I'm certain God buried him so no one would know the location or else they might have tried to carry his body (or later his bones) into the Promised Land or at the least they would have established a "holy site" where people would come to worship him rather than God. The Israelites mourned for Moses for 30 days. This appears to have become the typical time of mourning for a great / important person like how Aaron was mourned for 30 days in Numbers 20:29.



The following obviously had to be written by Joshua to close the book of Deuteronomy and perhaps he actually scribed the rest of it as Moses spoke to the people or as Moses dictated it to him. Joshua indicates he was filled by the spirit of wisdom (Holy Spirit) because Moses had laid hands on him (at God's direction to set him apart to become the leader of the Israelites after Moses). Joshua states that "since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt. ... For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of the Lord." Joshua says that the people listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses. At this time, Joshua is 86 years old and his friend Caleb is 79 years old.