**Deuteronomy Commentary**

**Deuteronomy Chapter 1**

Deu 1:6

**“Horeb.”** This is another name for Sinai. Moses is referring to where the Ten Commandments were given.

Deu 1:7

**“the Shephelah.”** The Shephelah is the region of low rolling hills between the flat and narrow coastal plain and the inner hill country of Judah and Ephraim (see commentary on Josh. 9:1).

Deu 1:28

**“the sons of the Anakim there.”** Anak was a “Fallen One,” one of the Nephilim. His father was Arba (Josh. 15:13), and his descendants were the Anakim. The term “Anakim” comes from Anak, the son of Arba, and Deuteronomy 1:28 is the first use of “Anakim” in the Bible (cf. Deut. 2:10, 11, 21; 9:2; Josh. 11:21, 22; 14:12, 15).

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

**Deuteronomy Chapter 2**

Deu 2:1

**“circled around.”** This is the literal Hebrew, and it refers to the fact that the Israelites traveled around the area of Edom.

**“Seir.”** This is Edom.

Deu 2:4

**“your brothers.”** The Edomites were distant relatives of the Israelites. Both Esau (Edom) and Jacob (Israel) were children of Isaac and grandchildren of Abraham.

Deu 2:6

**“buy water.”** In the ancient Near East, and even until recent times, wells were owned by the people who dug them. When Israel was traveling through desert lands they would have had to pay for the privilege of getting water from any wells dug there.

Deu 2:7

**“known your walking.”** This is the idiomatic sense (or “pregnant sense”) of the word “known,” meaning that God knew Israel and cared for Israel. It has the implication of, “I took care of you while you walked” in the wilderness.

[For more on the pregnant sense of a word, see commentary on Luke 23:42, “remember.”]

Deu 2:10

**“the Anakim.”** Anak was a “Fallen One,” one of the Nephilim, and his descendants were the Anakim. The Emim were also Nephilim, as we see here and in Deuteronomy 2:11.

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4].

Deu 2:11

**“the Anakim.”** The Anakim were descendants of Anak, who was one of the Nephilim (Num. 13:33), and thus they were related to the Rephaim, the descendants of Rapha (Joshua left some in the Philistine country (Josh. 11:22), cf. 2 Sam. 21:16, 18, 20, 22).

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

Deu 2:12

**“just as Israel did.”** This is referring to the tribes of Gad and Reuben, who conquered land in the Transjordan and lived there, and that happened in the last year of the wilderness wandering before Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

Deu 2:13

**“cross over the brook Zered.”** The “brook Zered” (more properly, “the Wadi Zered”) feeds into the south end of the Dead Sea and was considered the northern border of Edom and the southern border of Moab.

Deu 2:14

**“The days in which we came from Kadesh-barnea until we had crossed over the brook Zered were 38 years.”** This shows that the book of Numbers covers 38 years of the 40 years of the wilderness wanderings of Israel. The wanderings started when Israel refused to go into the Promised Land (Num. 13:1-14:4). The book of Deuteronomy only covers the last month of Moses’ life and the 30 days of mourning over his death, a period of only two months. When Israel refused to enter the Promised Land, God swore that all the mature men of that generation would perish in the wilderness (Num. 14:20-33).

Deu 2:20

**“Rephaim.”** These were descendants of Rapha, and were Nephilim.

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

Deu 2:21

**“the Anakim.”** The Anakim were descendants of Anak, who was one of the Nephilim (Num. 13:33), and thus they were related to the Rephaim, the descendants of Rapha (cf. Deut. 2:11. See also 2 Sam. 21:16, 18, 20, 22).

Deu 2:29

**“Ar.”** “Ar” means “city,” and Ar was apparently a notable city in Moab, but its location is unknown. It is mentioned several times in the Old Testament.

Deu 2:31

**“begin to possess it so that you inherit his land.”** The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh wanted land in the Transjordan (east of the Jordan River) and conquest of Sihon and the Amorite lands was part of the agreement that they made with Moses to settle in Transjordan (Num. 32:1-42).

Deu 2:34

**“Devoted to destruction.”** The Hebrew text is just “devoted,” but the context shows that it means “devoted to destruction” (see commentary on Josh. 6:17).

**“devoted to destruction...including the women and the little ones.”** The Canaanite nations had been genetically corrupted by Nephilim, and could not be godly or redeemed. They had to be destroyed. This is also stated in places such as Deuteronomy 7:2 and 20:16-18.

[For information on the Nephilim, see commentaries on Gen. 6:2 and 6:4.]

**Deuteronomy Chapter 3**

Deu 3:8

**“beyond the Jordan.”** “Beyond the Jordan” can refer to either east (Deut. 3:8) or west (Deut. 3:20) of the Jordan River depending on the context or the location of the speaker. In this context, it is east of the Jordan River.

Deu 3:17

**“the Sea of Chinneroth.”** This sea is better known as the Sea of Galilee. The Hebrew word Chinnereth means “harp,” and the Sea of Galilee is shaped like a harp, hence the name. The Sea of Galilee is actually a quite small lake about 700 feet (215 meters) below sea level, and the entire lake can be seen from the cliffs on both the east and west sides of the lake, so the shape can be easily seen. The Hebrew text has “Chinnereth” here, the singular form, but it is changed to the plural form “Chinneroth” here in the REV so that all the Old Testament references to it are spelled the same for ease of identification with its other uses (singular: Num. 34:11; Deut. 3:17. plural form: Josh. 11:2; 12:3;

**“Pisgah.”** A mountain (a peak in a mountain range) east of the Dead Sea.

Deu 3:20

**“beyond the Jordan.”** “Beyond the Jordan” can refer to either east (Deut. 3:8) or west (Deut. 3:20) of the Jordan River depending on the context or the location of the speaker. In this context “beyond the Jordan” means on the west side of the Jordan River.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 4**

Deu 4:3

**“all the men who followed Baal-peor, Yahweh your God has destroyed them.”** The book of Deuteronomy has a large number of verses in which God warns Israel that if they forsake Him and turn to pagan gods they will be destroyed. The need for the large number of warnings in Deuteronomy comes from the historical situation: This is the last two months of the Wilderness Wanderings before Israel crossed the Jordan River, and Israel was camped on the Plains of Jordan, across the Jordan from Jericho. In just a couple of months, they would encounter the Canaanites in the Promised Land and the gods they worshiped. Sadly, the Israelites did not follow God’s warnings. They worshiped Baal and other pagan gods and were eventually conquered and carried into captivity; the Kingdom of Israel by Assyria (2 Kings 17), and the Kingdom of Judah by Babylon (2 Kings 24-25). There are many warnings in Deuteronomy about pagan gods (cf. Deut. 4:3; 6:14-15; 7:4; 8:19-20; 11:16-17; 17:2-5; 29:25-28; 30:17-18; 31:16-18).

Deu 4:10

**“I will make them hear my words.”** The very first time that the Ten Commandments were given, God spoke them audibly to Israel from the top of Mount Sinai. It was later they were written on stone tablets.

[For more on God speaking the Ten Commandments directly to the Israelites, see commentary on Exod. 19:9.]

Deu 4:19

**“the sun and the moon and the stars, all the army of heaven.”** In this context, the “army of heaven” refers to the stars and planets (also thought of as “stars”) which appeared organized and thus were referred to as an “army.”

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Deu 4:25

**“making him angry.”** The NET text note on Deuteronomy 4:25 gets the sense of the text correctly when it says, “The infinitive construct [in the Hebrew text] is understood here as indicating the result, not the intention of their actions.” Although many English versions use the word “provoke,” the Israelites did not worship idols with the intention of provoking God. But the result of their idolatry was that God was angered. In everyday English, “provoke” means to do something to intentionally upset someone, and that is not what was happening with Israel’s idolatry.

Deu 4:26

**“perish, yes, perish...destroyed, yes, destroye​d.”** These are two examples of the figure of speech polyptoton. God is making it very clear that if people turned away from Him and served idols they would perish.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Deu 4:28

**“There you will serve gods.”** Slaves and captives could be forced to “serve” gods even if they did not believe in them or worship them. The worship practices of ancient gods required a lot of work. Wood had to be gathered and kept in store for the altar fires, water had to be kept and kept clean for washing, animals had to be kept so they were available for the sacrifices. Special garments had to be kept for the priests or special services. The temples and holy sites had to be maintained—there was simply a lot of “service” that had to be performed to keep the worship of ancient gods, including Yahweh, going as prescribed.

Deu 4:30

**“listen to his voice.”** In a context like this, the word “listen” can also be used idiomatically and have the meaning “obey.” Some scholars refer to this as the pregnant sense of the word. Many Hebrew words are used with an idiomatic or pregnant sense (see commentary on Luke 23:42).

Deu 4:35

**“There is no one else besides him.”** The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on this, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” point 11, and the REV commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

Deu 4:36

**“Out of heaven he made you to hear his voice.”** This refers to God giving the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai.

[For more on God speaking the Ten Commandments directly to the Israelites, see commentary on Exod. 19:9.]

**“on earth he made you to see.”** God spoke from heaven (the cloud above the mountain), and the people on earth heard the words and saw the fire.

Deu 4:37

**”your fathers.”** In most contexts, as here, the “fathers” of Israel are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom God promised their seed would inherit the land of Israel.

Deu 4:39

**“There is no other.”** Yahweh alone is God. There is no other God (see commentary on Deut. 6:4).

Deu 4:49

**“sea of the Arabah.”** The Dead Sea.

**“Pisgah.”** The mountain range on the western edge of Moab that overlooks Israel. Mount Nebo where Moses died is a peak in that range.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 5**

Deu 5:4

**“Yahweh spoke with you.”** Yahweh spoke the Ten Commandments audibly to Israel from Mount Sinai.

[For more on God speaking the Ten Commandments directly to the Israelites, see commentary on Exod. 19:9.]

Deu 5:6

**‘I am Yahweh your God.”** This is the first of the Ten Commandments, and it takes two verses, Deuteronomy 5:6-7. The Ten Commandments occur here in Deuteronomy 5 and in Exodus 20.

Deu 5:7

**“besides me.”** This verse can say that the Israelites are to have no other gods except for Yahweh, and it can also say that Israel is not to call any other god by the name “Yahweh.” Both ways to take the verse are true, and both are to be obeyed (see commentary on Exod. 20:3, “besides me”).

Deu 5:8

**“Do not make.”** This is the second of the Ten Commandments. The verb is singular, but it is a collective singular (see commentary on Exod. 20:4).

Deu 5:9

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Deu 5:11

**“Do not misuse.”** This is the third of the Ten Commandments. The Hebrew text is more literally, “You do not take up the Name of your God Yahweh for a vain thing (i.e., for an empty matter). The verb in the first phrase is a collective singular (see commentary on Exod. 20:4).

**“misuse the name of Yahweh.”** See commentary on Exodus 20:7.

Deu 5:12

**“Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”** This is the fourth of the Ten Commandments.

Deu 5:15

**“therefore Yahweh your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”** God rested on the seventh day in Genesis 2:1-3, but He did not command that anyone follow His example and rest on the seventh day until Exodus 16, when He gave the manna from heaven, and even then He did not fully explain the Sabbath. The Sabbath became part of the Law and the Old Covenant when it was given as part of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:8-11).

[For more on the Sabbath, see commentary on Exod. 20:10.]

Deu 5:16

**“Honor your father and your mother.”** This is the fifth of the Ten Commandments. The verb is singular, but it is a collective singular (see commentary on Exod. 20:4).

**“in the land.”** That is, in the land of Israel. Israel, the “Promised Land,” was the land God was giving to the Israelites.

**“is giving you.”** Some versions have “is about to give you,” and the Hebrew can have that meaning, and also that was mostly true since Israel had not crossed the Jordan River yet, but by Deuteronomy, the process of God giving the Promised Land to Israel had begun. For one thing, the Canaanites had heard that Israel was coming and were afraid of them, which gave Israel an advantage (Josh. 2:9).

Deu 5:17

**“Do not murder.”** This is the sixth of the Ten Commandments. The verb is singular, not plural (see commentary on Exod. 20:4).

[For information on murder, manslaughter, and the death penalty for murder, see commentary on Exod. 21:12. Verses that speak about murder and manslaughter include Exod. 20:13; 21:12, 28-30; Deut. 5:17; and Num. 35:9-34.]

Deu 5:18

**“Do not commit adultery.”** This is the seventh of the Ten Commandments. The verb is singular, not plural (see commentary on Exod. 20:4).

Deu 5:19

**“Do not steal.”** This is the eighth of the Ten Commandments. The verb is singular, not plural (see commentary on Exod. 20:4).

Deu 5:20

**“Do not give false testimony.”** This is the ninth of the Ten Commandments. The verb is singular (see commentary on Exod. 20:4).

Deu 5:21

**“Do not covet.”** This is the tenth and last of the Ten Commandments. The verb is singular (see commentary on Exod. 20:4).

Deu 5:22

**“These words Yahweh spoke to all your assembly.”** This refers to God Himself speaking the Ten Commandments in a loud voice from Mount Sinai, which occurred between Moses’ third and fourth time up Mount Sinai.

[For more on God speaking the Ten Commandments directly to the Israelites, see commentary on Exod. 19:9.]

**“And he wrote them on two tablets of stone.”** God wrote the Ten Commandments on stone on Moses’ fifth trip up Mount Sinai.

[For more on Moses’ trips up and down Mount Sinai, see commentary on Exod. 19:3.]

Deu 5:24

**“God has shown us his glory.”** In this context, the “glory of God” is the brilliant light that surrounded God like a cloud, and was often referred to as a cloud (see commentary on Ezek. 1:4 and Ezek. 1:28). In the case of Israel, God did show his glorious cloud of light on Mount Sinai, and the people heard his voice from the cloud (see commentary on Exod. 20:1), and Moses, accompanied by more than 70 people (there were 70 elders) went up Mount Sinai and visually saw God, just as others had done both before and after them (Exod. 24:9-11, and see commentary on Acts 7:55).

**Deuteronomy Chapter 6**

Deu 6:1

**“these are the commandments.”** The Hebrew is a collective singular, the Hebrew is more literally, “this is the commandment” but the phrase refers to all the commandments.

**“obey them.”** That is the idea of the more clipped Hebrew text, “to do” them (cf. NET ). Other translations are: “observe” them (TNK, NRSV); “you must obey them” (NLT); “follow them” (HCSB). Using the word “may” or “might” (KJV, HCSB, ESV, NASB) gives the wrong impression in English because God did not give His commands so that we “might” keep them, but so that we “would” keep them. When it comes to obeying God, it is important that the English translation conveys the meaning of the text very well.

**“are crossing over.”** Israel was about to cross over the Jordan River and then fight and possess the Promised Land.

Deu 6:2

**“fear Yahweh your God by keeping.”** “Fearing God” (which includes both fear and reverence) is integrally tied to obeying God. The person who says, “I revere (reverence, love) God” but does not keep His commands is fooling himself. Jesus taught, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15); “Whoever has my commandments, and is keeping them, that is the one who loves me” (John 14:21); “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word” (John 14:23); and “Whoever does not love me does not keep my words” (John 14:24). Peter Craigie translates the phrase: “fear the Lord your God by keeping all his statutes and commandments,”[[1]](#footnote-13845) and the *JPS Torah Commentary* has the comment: “Literally, ‘revere...by following.’” Everett Fox has, “in order that you may hold YHWH your God in awe, by keeping all his laws and his commandments….”[[2]](#footnote-30261) People who reverence God obey God.

**“and so that your days may be prolonged.”** The primary meaning of this phrase is that when the people of Israel obey God then the country (the “your” in the verse is plural) will be blessed by God and so the people will live long and blessed lives. However, in cases like this, although the primary emphasis is on Israel as a community, there is also an unstated secondary meaning that the people will live forever because they loved and obeyed God.

Deu 6:4

**“Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone!”** Deuteronomy 6:4 says that Israel has only one God, Yahweh, Yahweh alone. Furthermore, that there is only one God—Yahweh—is a fundamental truth in the Bible. In fact, it is so fundamental that it is part of the two great commandments in the Law (cf. Mark 12:28-32). As we would expect with any fundamental truth in the Bible, that there is only one God is mentioned a number of times and in different ways (e.g., Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; 2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Kings 8:60; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron. 17:20; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 18:31; 86:10; Isa. 37:16; 43:10; 44:6, 8; 45:5, 21; 46:9; Hos. 13:4; Joel 2:27; Zech. 14:9).

It is believed by some Trinitarians that the Hebrew word *'echad* (#0259 אֶחָד), “one,” that is used in Deuteronomy 6:4 and other verses indicates a “compound unity.” Concerning the use of the word *echad*, Anthony Buzzard writes:

“It is untrue to say that the Hebrew word *echad* (one) in Deut. 6:4 points to a compound unity. A recent defense of the Trinity argues that when “one” modifies a collective noun like “bunch” or “herd,” a plurality is implied in *echad*. The argument is fallacious. The sense of plurality is derived from the collective noun (herd, etc.), not from the word “one.”*Echad* in Hebrew is the numeral “one.” “Abraham was one [echad]” (Ezek. 33:24; “only one man,” NIV). Isaiah 51:2 also describes Abraham as “one” (*echad*; “alone,” KJV; “the only one,” NJB), where there is no possible misunderstanding about the meaning of this simple word.”[[3]](#footnote-31175)

In the Old Testament, there is no reference to the word “one” as indicating a plurality of any kind. A study of its uses in the Old Testament will reveal its simple meaning and the truth it conveys. It is used of “one” in number, “the first” in a series, “one” in the sense of “the same” or “alone,” and “one” in the sense of “each” or “a certain one.” It is used as “alone” in verses like Deuteronomy 6:4, and “first” in verses like Genesis 1:5 when God made light on the “first” day. The whole earth spoke “one” language before Babel (Gen. 11:1). Hagar cast her child under “one” of the shrubs (Gen. 21:15). In Pharaoh’s dream, there were seven ears of grain on “one” stalk (Gen. 41:5). In the plague on Egypt’s livestock, not “one” cow died of the Israelites’ livestock (Exod. 9:6). Exodus 12:49 says that Israel shall have “one” law for the citizen and the foreigner. The examples are far too many to list for this frequently used word, which appears more than 950 times in the Old Testament, and there is no hint in any Jewish commentary or lexicon that it somehow implies a “compound unity.”

The history of Jewish thought is well-known. They were famous in the ancient world for being downright obnoxious when it came to defending their “one God” against the polytheistic views of other civilizations. God chose the Jews as His people, and He chose to communicate to them in the Hebrew language. The Jews debated their writings to the point of tedium and argued over almost every word in the Law, yet there is no evidence that any of them thought that their word for “one” implied a compound unity. That assumption did not develop until Christians needed evidence for the Trinity in the Old Testament; it is a late and invalid assumption with no solid evidence behind it.

Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone,” where *echad* is translated “alone,” is one of the strongest texts *against* the Trinity. The Bible affirms that God is “one,” not “three-in-one” or some other plurality. This has been the rallying cry of Jews down through the ages who have stood aggressively against any form of polytheism or pantheism. Although it is commonly believed that Deuteronomy 6:4 (known as the Shema) is a statement of “monotheism” and thus the “compound unity” of God, that is not what the verse is saying. Of course, it is certainly a statement about monotheism (that there is one God), but that is not its primary emphasis.

In addition, it is not a statement about the compound unity of God for a number of reasons. For one thing, the compound unity of God does not appear in Scripture. Also, the Old Testament was given by God to the Jews so they could know and obey Him, and never in the more than 3500 years since the Shema was written have the Jews understood it to refer to a compound unity in God—quite the opposite. They took it to mean that there was only one God, and they fiercely fought against polytheism throughout their history. So if the Shema was God’s attempt to reveal a compound unity in Himself, the attempt was an epic failure. It makes much more sense that God gave the verse to the Jews and intended it to mean what the Jews say it means. Furthermore, the Jews did not take the Shema as their primary statement of monotheism because many other verses in Hebrew Scripture made that point just as clearly.

Also, the context of the Shema in the Old Testament and where it is quoted in the New Testament indicate that the Shema is not saying “God is ‘one,’” but rather is saying that Yahweh “alone” is God. The context of Deuteronomy 6:4 is using the Hebrew word *echad* (#0259 אֶחָד; “one, only, alone”) in the primary sense of “only” or “alone,” in contrast to the number “one,” and Mark 12:28-34 confirms this. Note how Deuteronomy 6:4-5 flow together and thus make a major—and logical—point: “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone! And you must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.” It is because Yahweh “alone” is God that we can worship him with “all” our heart, “all” our soul, and “all” our might. If we had more than one God, our worship would have to be divided between all the gods we served, and each god would get only “part” of our heart, soul, and strength. In fact, that is what happens with Trinitarians today: they divide their worship of God into the worship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But that division of worship is what is expressly forbidden by Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29.

Also, the connection between Deuteronomy 6:4 and Zechariah 14:9 shows that *echad* means “alone,” not “one” in the sense of a compound unity. Deuteronomy 6:4 was the heart of the first and great commandment, and it said to Israel that Yahweh “is our God,” (Israel’s God), yes, “Yahweh alone.” But in fact, although Yahweh was “alone” in the sense that He was the true God and Creator, that was not the way it was lived out in day-to-day life because Yahweh was not worshiped as “God alone.” There were always other gods among the people of God, and of course, the pagan world was filled with all kinds of pagan gods. Jacob had to tell his family to put away their pagan gods (Gen. 35:2). Joshua told Israel to put away their pagan gods but they never did (Josh. 24:23). Israel served Baal and pagan gods throughout their history in Israel (cf. Judg. 2:11-13).

Thankfully, the prophet Zechariah foretold a time when “In that day Yahweh will be *echad*” (Zech. 14:9). That is the same basic message as is in Deuteronomy 6:4, and *echad* cannot mean “one” in the Trinitarian sense of a compound unity because Zechariah was speaking about something new, that Yahweh “will be” *echad.* The nature of God does not change, so what will change in the future so that God “will be” *echad* in a way that He was not *echad* before? “In that day,” the day when Christ reigns as king over the earth, Yahweh will finally be *echad,* “alone,” in a realized sense among the people. There will be no other gods on earth in Christ’s kingdom. When Jesus is finally king on earth there will be no pagan idols, pagan altars, or pagan worship. Finally, Yahweh “will be” “alone” as the God who is worshiped on earth. God had always wanted to be God “alone” among His people, but He never was—the people always had other gods in the picture. But in the Millennial Kingdom, what God longed for and stated in Deuteronomy 6:4 will be finally actualized on earth: Yahweh alone will be God!

What should be clear is that Deuteronomy 6:4 is a statement about our personal relationship with God. He “alone” is God, so He is to be our only God and we must worship Him with all that we are and have. Deuteronomy 6:4 is not primarily a statement about monotheism, it is a statement about relationship. Stated another way, Deuteronomy 6:4 is not about the nature of God, it is about our relationship with God. Monotheism is important, and God had established that there was only one God earlier in the book of Deuteronomy. Only about 50 verses before the Shema, God had twice stated that He was the only God. Deuteronomy 4:35 says, “Yahweh is God. There is no one else besides him.” Four verses later Deuteronomy 4:39 reiterates that truth again and reads, “Yahweh is God in heaven above and on earth below. There is no other.” After establishing that there is only one God, Deuteronomy 6:4 then takes that truth and makes it personal: Yahweh who alone is God is to be “our” God, and we are to worship Him with all “our” heart, soul, and strength. Furthermore, after Deuteronomy 4:35, 39, and 6:4 have established that there is only one God, and thus Yahweh alone is to be “our God,” Deuteronomy 6:13 then says that we should fear and serve Him, and swear oaths in His name.

Furthermore, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4 as part of the first and great commandment: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone” (Mark 12:29). It is quite inconceivable that Christ would be promoting some form of the doctrine of the Trinity while at the same time quoting Deuteronomy 6:4 to a Jewish audience who then would have surely misunderstood him. According to the use of *echad* in Scripture, it is more reasonable to believe that Jesus was simply affirming that if we are to love God with all our heart we must be certain who He is—God alone for there is no other.

In conclusion, the Bible says that the proper name of God is “Yahweh” (Exodus 3:15) and it is used over 5,000 times in the Old Testament. Furthermore, “Yahweh” is clearly said to be “God” in over 1,100 verses in the Old Testament, which can be seen by anyone with a good concordance (e.g., Gen. 17:1; 21:33; 24:3; Exod. 5:3; 20:2; 34:14; Lev. 19:2; Num. 15:41; Deut. 4:35; 10:17; Josh. 22:22; 2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 18:31; 33:12; 88:1; 99:5; 100:3; Isa. 43:3). Furthermore, Yahweh is said to be the “father” (e.g. Deut. 32:6; Ps. 2:7; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Mal. 1:6; cf. Ps. 103:13; Prov. 3:12). Furthermore, Yahweh says in many verses that He is the only God, and there is no God besides Him (e.g., Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; 2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Kings 8:60; 2 Kings 5:15; 1 Chron. 17:20; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 18:31; 86:10; Isa. 37:16; 43:10; 44:6, 8; 45:5, 21; 46:9; Hos. 13:4; Joel 2:27; Zech. 14:9). So clearly in the Old Testament “God” is Yahweh, the Father, and is the only God, “there is no other” (Deut. 4:39).

Given those clear Scriptures, there would have to be very clear Scriptures in the New Testament that say Jesus is also God, but those scriptures do not exist. “The Son” is never called “Yahweh” or the Father anywhere in Scripture.

[For more information on the correct interpretation of Deut. 6:4, see the REV commentary on Mark 12:29. For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” and that appendix also contains a list of books for further reading on God not being a Trinity. For more information on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus reigns as king over the earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Deu 6:5

**“Therefore you are to love Yahweh your God with all your heart.”** There is only one God, so people are to worship Him with all their heart, soul, and strength. If there was more than one God, or if “God” was a plurality of “persons,” then the worship of Yahweh, the Father and Creator, would be divided between all the gods or “persons.” But that clearly is not what is supposed to happen. “Yahweh” is to get “all” the worship. Note that the word “all” is repeated three times for emphasis. The text could have said, “Love Yahweh with all your heart, soul, and strength,” but it does not read that way. Instead, the word “all” is repeated for emphasis and clarity.

When we understand that believers are to love Yahweh with “all” their heart, soul, and strength, we can understand more clearly why Yahweh does not want Israel to worship other gods—they would (and did!) divide the hearts of the believers. God forbids the worship of other gods in many verses (see commentary on Exod. 20:3).

Deu 6:6

**“in your heart.”** The words of God are to be “in (or “on”) your heart,” that is, they are to be so well-known that they are more than just memorized by mechanical repetition, although that is often a good start, but also they are to be understood to the end that they make sense as the foundation and guiding principles of one’s life. God loves people, His creation, and His words to us are an expression of that love. However, many people think and act as if God’s commands are restrictive and oppressive, but that only shows that many people are self-willed, prideful, and defiant toward God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus clearly demonstrated what godly humility looks like: “Not my will but your [God’s] will be done.” Each person must decide who is the most important one in their life. The right choice is always God. As our Creator, He deserves first place in our lives, but more than that He is also the One who can grant us everlasting life. God creates and sets up the rules: everlasting life or everlasting death. We have the privilege of making the choice.

Sadly, many people who think they are following God and have memorized and learned what they think are God’s commandments, have actually only learned the commandments of other humans. Since Genesis, people have been making up rules for others to follow and historically many leaders have been successful in passing off their doctrines as the commandments of God. Jesus spoke about that and said to the religious leaders of his time, “And he [Jesus] said to them [the religious leaders], ‘Isaiah prophesied rightly of you hypocrites, as it is written, The People honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they show devotion to me, teaching as their doctrines the commandments of men. You leave the commandment of God, and hold on firmly to the tradition of men.’ And he said to them, ‘You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition...*thus* making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you are doing many things like that’” (Mark 7:6-9, 13). People are responsible for doing their best to make sure that the commandments they follow are indeed the commandments of God and not just human tradition.

Deu 6:7

**“repeat them *over and over*.”** The Hebrew word is *shanan* (#08150 שָׁנַן), and it is the piel aspect. *HALOT* has, “to repeat...to speak, or to recite again and again (Deut. 6:7).”[[4]](#footnote-20774) The CSB has “Repeat them to your children;” the NAB has “Keep repeating them to your children;” and the NLT has “Repeat them again and again to your children.”[[5]](#footnote-24003)

Children learn by repetition, and parents have the responsibility to make sure their children have a knowledge of what God expects from them. The world acts as if children have the wisdom to make up their own minds about right and wrong, good and evil, and so worldly people want to make it a crime to try to direct the way children are to go in life, but the world will not be the Judge on Judgment Day, and parents who ignore the command of God to teach their children the ways of God are disobeying God. The Bible is clear that children are an inheritance from Yahweh (Ps. 127:3 ), and “a child who is left *to itself* puts his mother to shame” (Prov. 29:15). Adults and children need direction. Adults should have gotten some godly direction from their parents, but many never did and have to learn from the Bible, others, and the hard knocks of life. Children should have the advantage of learning about life and God from their parents, and God holds parents responsible for giving that godly direction.

Deu 6:8

**“bind them for a sign on your hand.”** This verse is the basis for the wearing of phylacteries, little boxes that contain Scripture that the ultra-orthodox Jews tie on the back of their hands and also tie on their foreheads. However, God did not mean for Deuteronomy 6:8 to be taken literally that way, which we can tell from the fact that this rule is for all Israel, and the nature of daily life in ancient Israel would not accommodate it. By saying to bind them to your head and hand He was emphasizing that the Word of God should be near their thoughts (head) and in what they do (hands).

The pure nature of this command of God was occasionally perverted by religious superstition, as we can see by the very word “phylactery,” which comes from the Greek word *phulassō* (#5442 φυλάσσω) which means to guard, to keep watch, to protect you from a person or thing, to keep safe. Thus the very thing that God said to assure that people would keep His Word and keep people from wandering from it occasionally became an object of superstition, complete with all the rules and regulations about exactly how to tie it on, when and where to wear it, etc.

[For more information, see commentary on Matt. 23:5.]

Deu 6:13

**“You are to fear Yahweh your God.”** Deuteronomy 6:13 is quoted in Matthew 4:10 and Luke 4:8.

Deu 6:14

**“Do not go after other gods, any gods of the peoples who are around you.”** The book of Deuteronomy has a large number of verses in which God warns Israel that if they forsake Him and turn to pagan gods they will be destroyed. The need for the large number of warnings in Deuteronomy comes from the historical situation: This is the last 2 months of the Wilderness Wanderings before Israel crossed the Jordan River, and Israel was camped on the Plains of Jordan, across the Jordan from Jericho. In just a couple months they would encounter the Canaanites in the Promised Land and the gods they worshiped. Sadly, the Israelites did not follow God’s warnings. They worshiped Baal and other pagan gods and were eventually conquered and carried into captivity; the Kingdom of Israel by Assyria (2 Kings 17), and the Kingdom of Judah by Babylon (2 Kings 24-25). There are many warnings in Deuteronomy about pagan gods, and the phrase “other gods” occurs over 60 times in the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 5:7; 6:14-15; 7:4; 8:19-20; 11:16-17; 17:2-5; 29:25-28; 30:17-18; 31:16-18).

Deu 6:16

**“Do not tempt Yahweh your God.”** This phrase in Deuteronomy 6:16 is quoted in Matthew 4:7 and Luke 4:12.

Deu 6:25

**“every one of these commandments.”** This translation of Deuteronomy 6:25—“every one of these commandments”—tries to capture the fact that “commandments” is singular in the Hebrew text. A more literal translation of the Hebrew is “all this command,” but that phrase is not very clear in English, so the REV has “every one of these commandments.”

The point the Hebrew text is making is vital to grasp in order to understand how God considers His Word and His commands. God does not look at the Law as a bunch of commandments and if a person does most of them they are more righteous than if they do some of them. God looks at the whole law as a giant single command, and to fulfill the Law a person would have to do “all this command,” i.e., the whole Law without breaking a single commandment. Thus, Moses says that a person will be considered righteous in the eyes of God if they do “all this command,” but humans with sin nature cannot accomplish that, hence righteousness cannot come through the Law (Gal. 2:21; 3:21). In fact, we learn from Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6 that Abraham was righteous by trusting God before the Law, and David echoed the same thing under the Law (Rom. 4:6-8). It was by being humble and trusting God that people were declared righteous before God even under the Law (Ps. 51:16-17; Mic. 6:8). Furthermore, there were signs all through the Law that being humble and trusting were what was important. For example, every sacrifice made was to contain salt, “the salt of the covenant” (see commentary on Lev. 2:13). The point of the salt was to reaffirm the covenant and one’s commitment to it, and to make it clear that no one could be righteous in God’s sight by just “going through the motions” of what God commanded in the Law.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 7**

Deu 7:1

**“the Hittite and the Girgashite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.”** All of these tribes except the Perizzites are descended from Ham’s son Canaan, and are thus included when the word “Canaanites” is used in its wider sense (and even then the Perizzites might be generally included as inhabitants of the land of Canaan). Genesis 10 says, “Canaan became the father of Sidon (his firstborn)[thus the Phoenicians], Heth [thus the Hittites], the Jebusite, the Amorite, the Girgashite, the Hivite, the Arkite, the Sinite, the Arvadite, the Zemarite, and the Hamathite” (Gen. 10:15-18). By the time of Deuteronomy and the book of Joshua, these tribes had become quite large, as Deuteronomy 7:1 says.

The nations that inhabited the Promised Land and the Transjordan are often listed in different ways, with different numbers. For example, here in Deuteronomy 7:1, God lists seven nations. However, in Exodus 23:23 there are only six nations listed, and the nation that is left out is the Girgashites. Then, in Exodus 23:28, the only nations listed are the Hivite, the Canaanite and the Hittite, but that list seems to be purposely shortened since the longer list was only five verses earlier.

**“Girgashite.”** The Girgashite nation is listed here, but is not included in some other lists of the pagan nations that Israel was to displace (e.g., Exod. 23:23).

**“Perizzite.”** A tribe of unknown origin that by the time of Joshua lived in the hill country of Judah and Ephraim. See commentary on Joshua 9:1.

**“seven nations greater and mightier than you.”** Verses such as Deuteronomy 7:1 are part of the logic that there were not 600,000 men who left Egypt, which with the addition of women and children would have made Israel easily number two million and realistically likely three million or more. The testimony of archaeology and history is that the Canaanite tribes were much smaller than that (see commentary on Exod. 12:37).

Deu 7:2

**“devote them to complete destruction**​**.”** The Canaanite nations had been genetically corrupted by Nephilim, and could not be godly or redeemed. They had to be destroyed. This is also stated in places such as Deuteronomy 20:16-18.

[For information on the Nephilim, see commentaries on Gen. 6:2 and 6:4.]

Deu 7:5

**“break down their altars and dash their standing-stones in pieces.”** God has no tolerance for idols. They are harmful in many different ways. They take away focus and worship from the one true God, which hurts a person’s relationship with God and can cost them salvation and everlasting life, or rewards in the future kingdom.

Furthermore, the worship that idols are given attracts demons. Demons crave worship, and are attracted to items that receive worship whether or not what is being worshiped was designed to be worshiped or not. For example, an idol, image of a god, or an amulet or something that supposedly has inherent power to protect, bring good fortune, etc., is designed to be worshiped or venerated, whereas “regular items” are certainly not designed for that purpose. But if a person begins to worship or venerate a “regular object” for some reason, and attributes invisible power to that object and gives it special attention (which is veneration), say a “lucky hat” or something, that veneration can attract a demon, and demons always work to destroy people’s lives, and they can work. There is nothing good or redeeming in an idol, they are to be destroyed, something God says often in the Bible (cf. Exod. 23:24; 34:13; Num. 33:52; Deut. 7:5, 25; 12:2-3). Godly kings like Josiah obeyed the command of Yahweh (2 Kings 23:6-15). Idols and images of gods often are quite valuable because they can be made from valuable materials such as gold, silver, precious stones, or even valuable or beautiful wood, or those valuable things can be part of the object. The wise believer who knows how the spirit world works does not hesitate to destroy those idols and objects of veneration because no amount of worldly wealth or beauty is worth hurting one’s relationship with God and giving demons access to one’s life because those demons only cause terrible harm.

[For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18. For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on rewards in Christ’s future kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Deu 7:6

**“your God has chosen you.”** There was only going to be one Messiah, Savior, and Son of God, and he had to come through one genealogical line, and God, for His reasons, chose that line to be through the nation of Israel. This fact defines what God means by setting His love on Israel (Deut. 7:7). In this context, to “love” means to give special care and attention. God is love, and He loves every person, but for His purposes, some people get more protection and care than others, which can be described as His “love” for them. Once God decided to bring the Messiah through Israel, the Devil especially focused on them and they were subject to spiritual pressure and attacks that other nations were not, and thus if the Messiah was going to be born at all, Israel needed God’s special attention and support.

Deu 7:7

**“set his love.”** See commentary on Deuteronomy 7:6.

Deu 7:16

**“your eye must not pity them.”** A Semitic idiom that means, “you are not to pity them.” In the culture, the “eye” reflected the character or attitude of the person, so for a person’s eye to pity someone was for the person to have an attitude of pity, which would then lead to having mercy and sparing the people. God’s command seems harsh, but God knew the hearts of the Canaanites, and we know the history of Israel. Israel did not obey God and thus did not destroy all the Canaanites. But the Canaanites did not become thankful and they did not convert to believing in Yahweh. Instead, the Canaanites led the Israelites into idol worship which led to misery and slavery for Israel and certainly everlasting death for many Israelites, who favored Baal and the other Canaanite gods over Yahweh and thus did not attain salvation.

[For more on idioms involving the eye, see commentary on Prov. 22:9.]

Deu 7:25

**“burn the carved images of their gods.”** Most idols and images of gods were made from wood or stone and could be burned in a fire. Much of the stone in Israel is limestone and is reduced to powder when it is heated very hot. Also, the ancients used to take the harder stone such as basalt or granite and heat it up, and then pour water on it to break it up.

[For more on what God said about idols, see commentary on Deut. 7:5.]

Deu 7:26

**“a thing devoted *to destruction*.”** If a person stole something that had been “devoted” for destruction, then that person became devoted to destruction as well. This is what happened to Achan and his family (Josh. 7:1-26; cf. Josh. 6:18).

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

**“detest, yes, detest it...abhor, yes, abhor.”** Deuteronomy 7:26 uses a double polyptoton for emphasis. The figure of speech polyptoton is when a word occurs in two different forms set against each other for emphasis. In this case, the Hebrew words translated “detest” and “abhor” each occur first as an infinitive and then as an imperative verb, thus the Hebrew more literally reads something such as, “you are to detest, detest! You are to abhor, abhor!

[For the English translation of doubling the verb with “yes” between them, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

**Deuteronomy Chapter 8**

Deu 8:3

**“every word.”** Deuteronomy is quoted in Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4. The Hebrew is “all” or “everything,” but because it comes out of the mouth of God, “every word” is meant, and that is the way Jesus quoted it and the way the Septuagint reads (Matt. 4:4).

Deu 8:14

**“becomes lifted up.”** In this context, this refers to becoming proud.

Deu 8:15

**“fiery snakes.”** The word “fiery” describes the intense fiery pain a person would feel if bitten by a snake or stung by a scorpion. To this day parts of the desert wilderness through which the Israelites traveled for 40 years are infested with poisonous snakes and scorpions.

In 1855 Horatio Hackett wrote: “the serpents which infested the Israelites were among the evils from which they suffered. In ‘that great and terrible wilderness were fiery serpents and scorpions,’ as Moses reminds them in his last instructions (Deut. 8:15). They still abound in the same and similar places. A few weeks later than the time of my journey they are said to be so numerous as to expose the traveler to great danger. It requires special caution, in arranging the bed at night, to guard against their attacks. One day we saw in our path an asp, a foot long, coiled up in the attitude of springing; which the Arabs killed, saying that it was exceedingly venomous. A few hours later on the same day, in turning up an old garment on the ground, they found another reptile, of a different species, but also malignant. The feet and legs, not only of the men, but of the animals which they ride, are liable to be bitten under such circumstances. We see the force here of Jacob’s language in describing the subtle character of the tribe of Dan. ‘He shall be a serpent in the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse’s heels, so that his rider shall fall backward’ (Gen. 49:17).”[[6]](#footnote-13280)

Deu 8:19

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Deu 8:20

**“you would not listen.”** In a context like this, the word “listen” can also be used idiomatically and have the meaning “obey.” Some scholars refer to this as the “pregnant sense” of the word. In this verse, it has the meaning “listen to and obey.” Many Hebrew words are used with an idiomatic or pregnant sense (see commentary on Luke 23:42).

**Deuteronomy Chapter 9**

Deu 9:1

**“Today.”** This is not literal; the Israelites did not cross the Jordan for some number of days after this. “Today” in this context means at this general time.

Deu 9:2

**“the sons of Anak.”** Anak was one of the Nephilim, the “Fallen Ones,” just as Numbers 13:33 says.

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

Deu 9:18

**“making him angry.”** The NET text note on Deuteronomy 4:25 gets the sense of the verse correctly when it says, “The infinitive construct [in the Hebrew text] is understood here as indicating the result, not the intention of their actions.” The Israelites would not do what they did in worshiping idols with the intent to provoke God, but the result of their idolatry was that God was provoked. In English, “provoke” is usually used when someone intentionally does something that upsets the other person, and that is not what happened with Israel’s idolatry.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 10**

Deu 10:3

**“having the two tablets in my hand.”** From this description, and from what we know about stone and clay tablets that have been uncovered by archaeologists, the traditional picture of Moses having two huge stone tablets with the Ten Commandments on them is almost certainly wrong. Tablets with writing on them were sometimes very small, only a couple inches square, to as large as 12 inches by 12 inches, but the usual size was more like 4x6 inches, and that could well be the case here.

Deu 10:4

**“that Yahweh spoke to you on the mountain.”** It is not well-known that the first time the Ten Commandments were given God spoke them to the people in a loud voice from Mount Sinai, but that is how they were first given. It was over a month later that he wrote the Ten Commandments on stone (see commentary on Exod. 19:9).

**“on the day of the assembly.”** God wanted all Israel to hear the Ten Commandments, so He had Moses gather all the people of Israel to the base of Mount Sinai. Then He spoke the Ten Commandments in a loud voice that all the people could hear. The day the people gathered at the base of Mount Sinai and heard the voice of God is referred to as “the day of the assembly.”

Deu 10:6

**“Beeroth Bene-jaakan.”** The phrase means, “the wells of the sons of Jaakan.” Some scholars take this phrase as the proper name of the place, “Beeroth Bene-jaakan,” but it is likely that even if it is a name, it originated because it was literally the wells of the sons of a man named “Jaakan.” The location is not known.

**“and Eleazar his son ministered in the priest’s office in his place.”** Aaron had two living sons, Eleazar and Ithamar. They were both priests, as were their descendants, but of the two it was Eleazar who became the High Priest after Aaron.

Deu 10:9

**“no portion nor inheritance.”** This refers to an inheritance of land. The tribe of Levi did not get a land area assigned to them. Instead, they lived in many different cities throughout the tribes of Israel and were supposed to minister to the people, teach them the law, and act as judges. The cities the Levites and priests were to inhabit are set forth in Joshua 21.

Deu 10:10

**“40 days and 40 nights, like *I did* the first time.”** The first time Moses got the Ten Commandments written on stone he stayed on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights (Exod. 24:18), and this second time he got the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets he was on the mountain for 40 days and nights again (Exodus 34:28). Here in Deuteronomy, he is telling about getting the second set of tablets.

Deu 10:11

**“the land that I swore to their fathers to give to them.”** In this context, “the fathers” are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had told each of them the land would be given to them and their descendants (see commentary on Gen. 15:18). God repeated the promise that He would give the land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants many times, and said it in slightly different ways. He told Abraham that he and his descendants would get the land (Gen. 12:7; 13:15-17; 15:7, 18; 17:8). He told it to Isaac (Gen. 26:3). He told it to Jacob (Gen. 28:13; 35:12; 48:4). Then over and over He told Israel about the promise or that He would give them the land (cf. Exod. 6:4, 8; 12:25; 13:5, 11; Lev. 14:34; 20:24; 23:10; 25:2).

Deu 10:12

**“what does Yahweh your God require of you but to fear Yahweh your God.”** There are several times in the Bible when God lists things He wants people to do, as He does here in Deuteronomy 10:12-13, and they are sometimes quite similar, but the heart is the same (see commentary on Mic. 6:8).

Deu 10:14

**“Behold, to Yahweh your God belongs heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.”** This is restated in a number of places (e.g., Ps. 24:1-2; 50:12; 89:11).

Deu 10:15

**“yet Yahweh set his affection on your fathers to love them.”** In this context, the idea is that God’s setting His affection and love on Israel more than on other nations is due to God’s plan to bring the Messiah through Israel. There would only be one Jesus Christ, and so there could only be one genealogy from Adam to Christ, and one nation in which that genealogy lived and thrived, and God chose and planned for the nation to be Israel. Of course, the Devil soon figured that out also, and so through the generations, there was a spiritual war that raged around Israel, with the Devil trying to destroy it and kill the people, and God giving special care to Israel, including His laws, to keep them holy and safe.

Deu 10:17

**“who does not show partiality nor takes a bribe.”** God is completely just and fair in His dealings with people. He does not show special favor to one person above another and He cannot be bribed. In the biblical society the rich and powerful often got special treatment, while in our modern society the poor and disadvantaged often get special favor because the rich “can afford it” (of course there are times when the rich and powerful get special treatment today as well). But giving special treatment for any reason is a miscarriage of justice and God does not work that way. On Judgment Day, every person will get what they deserve, and that is the way God expects judges to act in this world.

Deu 10:22

**“70 persons.”** Deuteronomy 10:22 is a summary statement, and the number 70 is not exact (see the REV commentary on Gen. 46:27). Exodus 1:5 is also a summary statement that says “70.”

**Deuteronomy Chapter 11**

Deu 11:1

**“Therefore you are to love Yahweh your God.”** Deuteronomy 11:1 is connected logically with Deuteronomy 10:22: “Your fathers went down into Egypt as 70 persons, and now Yahweh your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.” It would have been totally unexpected that Jacob’s family would go to Egypt as 70 people but then multiply into a numerous nation in spite of being in hard and bitter forced slavery. That amazing thing could only have happened because God had watched over Israel and protected it, so now God says that Israel is to respond to God’s love by loving God and keeping His commandments.

Deu 11:2

**“I am not speaking to your children.”** The people of Israel murmured against God and rebelled against Him over and over, so when they refused to go into the Promised Land (Num. 13-14), God said that every man who was over 20 years old when they left Egypt would die in during the 40 years of wilderness wanderings (Num. 14:29). Deuteronomy 11:2 is in the eleventh month of the fortieth year and on the verge of going into the Promised Land with Joshua as their leader, and God gave a message to the people of Israel about obeying Him, and He reminded them that there were people among the multitude who had seen his great miracles such as the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army.

Deu 11:4

**“to this day.”** The Hebrew text literally reads, “to this day.” The destruction of the army of Egypt was 40 years earlier, but they were so completely destroyed that in 40 years they had not regained their strength.

Deu 11:6

**“Dathan and Abiram.”** The record of the death of Dathan and Abiram, and how the earth swallowed them up, is Numbers 16:1-35.

Deu 11:10

**“watered it with your foot.”** This seems to be a reference to a way that water was drawn up out of the Nile River by means of a treadmill-like machine that lifted the water out of the river and dumped it into trenches on the ground that carried the water out into the fields.

Deu 11:14

**“I will give the rain of your land in its season.”** One of the great lessons of the Bible is that the behavior of people affects the land that they live on. This lesson is throughout the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1, 12, 15, 22-25, 38-40; Lev. 18:24-25; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10). (See commentary on Lev. 18:25).

**“former and latter rain.”** There was one rainy season in Israel, and it usually started in mid to late October and ended in April. The rains at the start of the season got the planting going, and were called the “former” rains. The rains at the end of the wet season allowed the grain to come to maturity and were called the “latter” rains. For more on the rainy season and the former and latter rain, see commentary on James 5:7.

Deu 11:16

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Deu 11:19

**“when you lie down and when you rise up.”** The phrase, “when you lie down and when you rise up” is an example of the figure of speech polarmerismos, where two opposite things are juxtaposed such that they refer to a complete whole. Here in Deuteronomy 11:19, lying down at night and rising up in the morning are put for the whole of life.

[For more on polarmerismos, see commentary on Josh. 14:11.]

Deu 11:24

**“the western sea.”** The Mediterranean Sea.

Deu 11:25

**“on all the land.”** This is a metonymy for all the people of the land. It is the people of the land who will be afraid of the Israelites.

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

Deu 11:27

**“the blessing if you will listen to the commandments of Yahweh.”** In a context like this, the word “listen” can also be used idiomatically and have the meaning “obey.” Some scholars refer to this as the “pregnant sense” of the word. In this verse it has the meaning “listen to and obey.” Many Hebrew words are used with an idiomatic or pregnant sense (see commentary on Luke 23:42).

Deu 11:30

**“beyond the Jordan.”** The phrase “beyond the Jordan” can refer to either east (Deut. 3:8) or west (Deut. 3:20; 11:30) of the Jordan River depending on the context or the location of the speaker. Here in Deuteronomy 11:30, the Israelites were east of the Jordan River, so “beyond the Jordan” in this context meant west of the Jordan River.

**“the Canaanites who live in the Arabah opposite Gilgal.”** The Arabah is the part of the Great Rift Valley that is around the Dead Sea and north of it for 15 miles or so. It is mostly desert and scrub wilderness. The Canaanites lived “opposite Gilgal,” that is, west of Gilgal and up into the mountainous area in central Israel, and that is where Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim are. The name “Gilgal” was added by a later editor, because the site was not called “Gilgal” until the time of Joshua (cf. Josh. 5:9).

**“the road of the going down of the sun.”** We would more normally say, “beyond the western road,” but exactly which road Moses had in mind is not stated and is debated. Some say it is the road just west of the Jordan that ran north-south through the Jordan Valley, while others suggest that it was the well-known road that ran north and south from Syria to Egypt.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 12**

Deu 12:2

**“destroy, yes, destroy.”** The Hebrew text uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis.

[See commentary on Genesis 2:16 for more on polyptoton.]

Deu 12:3

**“break down their altars and dash their *sacred* pillars in pieces.”** Sacred standing-stones were often set up as part of the worship of pagan gods, and pagan altars were a central part of pagan worship. But God has no tolerance for idols. They are harmful in many different ways. They are to be destroyed.

[For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18. For more on idols being harmful, see commentary on Deut. 7:5.]

Deu 12:4

**“act that way.”** The Israelites were not to worship Yahweh the way the pagans worshiped their gods.

Deu 12:5

**“to the place that Yahweh your God will choose...even to his habitation you must seek, and there you must come.”** From Adam until the Exodus, people worshiped God wherever they were, just as Abraham did when he traveled and set up altars in different places. Then, as Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, the people worshiped Yahweh right where they were because the Tabernacle was traveling with them from place to place. Now, here in Deuteronomy 12:5, and in other places in Deuteronomy, God makes it clear that things are going to change. God said that people would have to come to the place where He was to worship Him. We now know from history that the First Temple, Solomon’s Temple, was still some 500 years in the future, but God was preparing His people for His personal presence at a singular place of worship, a place where people could go and be with God more intimately.

Ultimately, God was not going to be worshiped by different people who were in different places but all worshiping at the same time (although that is the way worship is done today, in the Administration of Grace in which we live; cf. Eph. 3:2). Ultimately, God wanted everyone to come to where God was making His presence known. Historically, this first place was where the ark of the covenant and the High Priest were with the Tabernacle, and the “place” that God chose was the place where the Tabernacle was. Next, God’s presence was at Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem (but the sin of the people eventually drove God away from there and the Temple was burned to the ground), then Ezra’s Temple (later remodeled by Herod the Great), then, in the Millennial Kingdom, God’s presence will be in the Millennial Temple and also via the presence of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Finally, in the Everlasting City, God Himself will live with his people (Rev. 21:3). The fact that the people had to come to where God was in order to honor Him with their tithes and offerings elevated God. After all, He is the creator of the heavens and the earth, and people, and it is proper that people go to God rather than just casually worship Him from wherever they happen to be. The idea of going to where God has chosen to place Himself to worship Him is introduced heavily in Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23, 24, 25; 16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11).

To better understand why God wanted “worship” to be at the place He would choose we have to have a good understanding of what “worship” meant to the ancient believer. It was not prayer, singing, and learning about God. That was all valuable, but that was not generally considered “worship.” For ancient believers, “worship” involved bowing down or prostrating oneself before God, offering a sacrifice or offering, and in some cases, such as with the Passover lamb or the sin offering, eating a fellowship meal there where God was. This could only be done where God was.

[For more on biblical worship, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom and Temple, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Deu 12:11

**“to the place that Yahweh your God will choose.”** Israel did not know it at this time, but that place turned out to be Jerusalem, and specifically the Temple Mount where eventually the Temple was built.

[For more on the “place that Yahweh your God will choose,” see commentary on Deut. 12:5.]

Deu 12:12

**“because he has no portion nor inheritance with you.”** The Levites were not allowed to have land; they were given the service of Yahweh and His Tabernacle/Temple as their inheritance, so the rest of the tribes of Israel were to share with them. When the people brought offerings and vows, with the exception of some sacrifices, Yahweh got a portion that was burned on the altar, the priests and Levites (and every priest was also a Levite, a descendant of Jacob’s son Levi) got a portion, and the people got to eat a portion. That made offering sin offerings and such a time of rejoicing, as we see here, and the ones bringing the offering were to share with the Levites as we see here in Deuteronomy 12:12 (cf. also Deut. 12:27).

Deu 12:14

**“in the place that Yahweh will choose.”** From Adam to the Exodus, people worshiped God wherever they were. Then, shortly after the Exodus, during the wilderness wandering, the Jews worshiped at the Tent of Meeting (the “Tabernacle”), but during that time the people went where the Tent went, so worshiping there was both logical and convenient. Starting in Deuteronomy, which was in the eleventh month of the fortieth and last year of the wandering, God began to make it clear that He would choose a place on earth where people were to go to worship Him. We now know that during the life of David that place came to be Jerusalem, but at this time God did not reveal that to the people.

[For more on the “place that Yahweh your God will choose,” see commentary on Deut. 12:5.]

Deu 12:15

**“inside all your gates.”** That is, inside your towns, the towns that the people lived in all over Israel. People could eat their regular food and hunted meat right in the town where they lived, but their tithes and offerings were to be eaten in “the place that Yahweh chooses,” i.e., Jerusalem, but it would be hundreds of years in the days of Solomon, before the choice was clear. Before that time, the place was wherever the ark of God and Tabernacle were set up.

Deu 12:18

**“in the place that Yahweh will choose.”** From Adam to the Exodus, people worshiped God wherever they were. Starting in Deuteronomy, which was in the eleventh month of the fortieth and last year of the wandering, God began to make it clear that He would choose a place on earth where people were to go to worship Him. At first that “place” was wherever the Tent of Meeting (the “Tabernacle”) was, but during the life of David that place came to be Jerusalem, but at this time, before Israel crossed the Jordan River, God did not reveal that to the people.

[For more on the “place that Yahweh your God will choose,” see commentary on Deut. 12:5.]

Deu 12:19

**“Be careful that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land.”** Sadly, the people were greedy and often kept all their food instead of sharing with the Levites, and also did not regularly go to the place where the Tabernacle and later the Temple, were placed (just like many Christians do not go to a church or fellowship of some kind where they can worship God with other Christians). That the people often did not share with the Levites or make their sacrifices at the Tabernacle put the Levites and priests in a tough position because according to the Mosaic Law, they could not own land. So to make a living and support their families the Levites and priests had to go outside their calling and profession and find whatever work they could find. We see that, for example, in Judges 17 (esp. Judg. 17:8), when the Levite took a wage to become a priest to Micah and the pagan gods he had set up, and later became a priest to the pagan god at Dan. He would not have felt the need to do that if the people were properly supporting him.

Deu 12:25

**“You must not eat it so that it will go well with you and with your children who come after you.”** The phrase “so that it will go well with you” can also be translated “so that it may go well with you.” Sometimes this life does not go well with people who obey God, and that is covered by the conditional nature of the phrase. But it also can mean “so that it will go well with you,” and that is the more salient point here because it will always go well on Judgment Day for people who obey God, and the everlasting life they will enjoy in the future make obedience in this life always worth it even if things don’t go well here and now on earth (cf. Deut. 12:28: “that it will go well with you and your children after you forever”).

Deu 12:26

**“vows.”** That is, the offerings that go with the vow. This verse is not saying that a person should not make a vow unless he or she is in the place God chooses, it must be understood that the thing that showed the seriousness of the vow and in a sense validated it was the offering or sacrifice that went with the vow, and that offering had to be made at the place God chose, which up until the Temple was built by Solomon was where the Tabernacle and the ark of the covenant were. Later, in Deuteronomy 14:24, God allowed people who lived far away to sell their sacrifices and offerings at home and then travel with the money to Jerusalem, where they could buy the animals needed to do the sacrifice or fulfill the vow.

Deu 12:27

**“And the blood of your *other* sacrifices is to be poured out...but you may eat the flesh.”** The reason for adding the word “other” is to make it clear that if the burnt offering was an animal it was to be wholly burnt except for the skin. The skin of the burnt offering was not burned, but was given to the priest who offered the offering (Lev. 7:8). The rest of the burnt offering was completely burned on the altar (Lev. 1:8-9, 12-13). Birds were treated a little differently (Lev. 1:14-17).

Deu 12:28

**“listen to.”** The Hebrew text is literally “hear,” or “listen to,” but “hear” was often used idiomatically as “obey” (some scholars refer to this as the “pregnant” sense of the word). In this context, the full sense of the word is “listen to and obey,” which is why some English versions have “listen to,” while others have “obey.” This verse teaches a great lesson. If people want things to go well with them, especially in the next life, they must listen to and obey God. Sadly, the “listen to” part often gets skipped because most people do not carefully read, and read over and over for understanding and depth of meaning, the Bible, the Word of God. Then, with the “listen to” part being skipped, the people often don’t really know what or how to obey, so they end up disobeying in ignorance.

[For more on the idiomatic sense, the “pregnant sense” of some biblical words, see commentary on Luke 23:42.]

Deu 12:29

**“where you are going in to dispossess them.”** The place they were “going in to dispossess them” was the land of Israel, the Promised Land.

Deu 12:30

**“I will do the same.”** This may seem illogical to us today, but we must remember that back at that time, and for many centuries to come, it was generally believed that certain gods lived in certain places and controlled what happened in that place. Yahweh tried to make it clear to His people that He was the God over all the earth, but that was not a generally held belief. So if the Israelites moved into Canaan and had trouble with the weather, or animals, or almost anything at all, they would be tempted to try to discover the “god” that was supposed to control that area and appease him (or her). That led Israel into the worship of pagan gods. Of course, that attraction was exacerbated by the fact that much pagan worship had sex and ritual prostitution attached.

The belief that certain gods controlled certain places is actually real in the battle between God and the Devil, because God is universal, but demons are local and live in specific places and did, and still do, exert some control over those places.

[For more about gods living in specific locations, see commentary on 1 Kings 20:23.]

Deu 12:31

**“burn their sons and daughters.”** The Canaanites were intermixed with the Nephilim, who were heartless and evil to the core, which is why God said to destroy them. Human sacrifice is horrific, and the thought of burning children to death is so evil there are no words to express how evil it is. Sadly, it even occasionally occurred among the Israelites (e.g. 2 Kings 21:6).

[For more on the Nephilim, see comments on Gen. 6:4.]

Deu 12:32

**“Whatever thing I command you, that you must be careful to do; do not add to it or take away from it.”** The Jews regularly disobeyed this, and added all kinds of traditions and regulations that they then forced upon the people as being as binding as the Law itself. Jesus Christ challenged them about that and called them hypocrites (cf. Matt. 15:1-9).

**Deuteronomy Chapter 13**

Deu 13:2

**“not known.”** This does not mean “not known about,” as if it were a new god that no one had been exposed to, but rather “not worshiped,” using “known” for having a relationship with.

Deu 13:3

**“you are not to listen to the words of that prophet.”** This is a huge and important point. Most people who read the Bible say that if a prophet foretells a sign or wonder and it comes to pass then he is a true prophet of God, but that is not the case. The signs and wonders of many false prophets come to pass. The people are to know the Word of God well enough to discern whether or not what the prophet said is godly or not from God. It is the Word of God that tells whether a prophet is true or false, not whether the sign or wonder comes to pass. 1 Corinthians 14:29 says that when a prophet speaks others are to judge what is said, and 1 John 4:1 says not to believe every “spirit” (prophecy) but to test them to see if they are from God, because many false prophets are in the world.

[For more on the word “spirit” sometimes referring to a prophecy, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:12.]

**“for Yahweh your God is testing you.”** This does not mean that God sent the false prophet so He could test the people. It means in God’s eyes the everyday situations in life in which people are tempted to turn from the true God and His commands and follow their own desires or the ungodly advice of others are tests that God wants us to pass and which demonstrate our love for Him. Life is full of tests that demonstrate our love for God. God says to pray. Do we? God says to help the poor and needy. Do we? God says people live by every word of God. Do we read and learn the Bible, or do we neglect and ignore it and not know what it actually says? God says not to have other gods. Do we obey that, or do we “help” God out by having “lucky” objects, and/or protective amulets, wearables, statues, etc., things that then end up taking some of God’s glory? Do we fully follow God’s commands, or if a modern “prophet” (a prophet, teacher, counselor, leader) tells us it’s okay to do something contrary to God’s Word do we follow the words of that “prophet?” There will be a Day of Judgment, and the wise person knows that and so obeys the words of God, not their own desires that are conditioned by the ungodly society around them or the words of others that lead them from God.

Deu 13:5

**“must be put to death.”** This may seem a little harsh, but we must realize what is at stake here. If a false prophet leads the people away from the worship of Yahweh and away from obeying His Laws, and leads them into false worship, those misled people could very well lose their everlasting life and be doomed in the Lake of Fire (cf. Ezek. 33:12-15). God never wants that to happen. Evil people who would lead others away from Yahweh are “wicked” (Deut. 13:6-11, esp. 11) and unrighteous and will die in the Lake of Fire anyway, so taking their life now does not take away much and it protects God’s people two ways: first, by getting rid of the immediate problem and threat, and second, because other false prophets who hear about it will think twice before they start telling people to forsake Yahweh and worship other gods (Deut. 13:11).

[For more on dying in the Lake of Fire (cf. Rev. 20:11-15) see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Deu 13:8

**“your eye is not to pity him.”** This is a Semitic idiom that means, “you must not pity him.” In the culture, the “eye” reflected the character or attitude of the person, so for a person’s eye to pity someone was for the person to have an attitude of pity, which would then lead to having mercy and sparing the person. But God knew that idolaters in the camp of Israel would eventually lead many people away from God and to everlasting death, so He commanded the death penalty for such people. If someone wanted to turn away from Yahweh and worship idol gods, they were free to leave and go live among the pagans, but they were not free to stay in the camp of Israel and influence people to turn from Yahweh.

The New Testament tells us that when a person in the congregation acts or teaches in such a way that they overthrow the faith of other believers, they are to be put out of the congregation (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 1 Tim. 1:20; Heb. 12:15).

[For more on idioms involving the eye, see commentary on Prov. 22:9.]

Deu 13:9

**“kill, yes, kill.”** The Hebrew uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis. The Hebrew reads, somewhat more literally, “but killing you are to kill him,” repeating the word “kill” twice with the two verbs inflected differently.

[For more on this translation and polyptoton, see commentary on Gen. 2:16, “eat, yes, eat.”]

Deu 13:10

**“stoned him to death with stones.”** The standard method of killing a criminal was to stone them with stones (cf. Lev. 20:2; 24:23; Num. 15:35; Deut. 13:10; 21:21). Some people have asserted that the Jews just dropped one huge stone on the person, but there is no evidence for that in the Bible. Also, stoning with stones was how Achan and his family were killed (Josh. 7:25), and how the Jews killed Stephen (Acts 7:58-60).

[For more on stoning people to death, see commentary on Lev. 20:2.]

Deu 13:13

**“sons of Belial.”** This is a designation of sons of the Devil.

[For more on sons of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12. For more on the unforgivable sin and children of the Devil, see commentary on Matt. 12:31.]

Deu 13:15

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Deu 13:17

**“to cling to your hand.”** A graphic way of saying that no one was to steal any of the things that were devoted to destruction.

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

Deu 13:18

**“listened to.”** In a context like this, the word “listen” can also be used idiomatically and have the meaning “obey.” Some scholars refer to this as the “pregnant sense” of the word. In this verse it has the meaning “listen to and obey.” Many Hebrew words are used with an idiomatic or pregnant sense (see commentary on Luke 23:42).

**Deuteronomy Chapter 14**

Deu 14:1

**“between your eyes.”** Although the literal Hebrew is “between your eyes,” we must remember that people back in those times had no easy way to cut hair, and so often men had longer hair and the hair on the front of their head could hang down like bangs and end up “between the eyes.” One way that some ancients would mourn the dead was to cut a bald spot just above the forehead where it could be easily seen, in which case there would be no hair to droop down between the eyes. Here in Deuteronomy 14:1, God does not want people marking themselves or disfiguring themselves for the dead. This was in part because life is ahead, not behind us, but also because many people, both ancient and modern, think that dead people are alive in some form, which opens those people to demons who impersonate the dead as ghosts or in seances. Those demons work to win the confidence of people and get them to believe they really are speaking to people “on the other side,” and at that point, the demons can give people a lot of false information, the most basic of which is that dead people are actually alive in some form somewhere. The Bible is clear: dead people are dead, and that is what makes this life so incredibly valuable.

[For more on dead people being dead in every way and not alive anywhere or in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.]

Deu 14:13

**“any kind.”** That is, any kind of falcon or kite, but also including eagles, vultures, etc., from the verses above. Basically, no kind of bird of prey was clean to eat. For the translation “any kind,” instead of “according to its kind,” see commentary on Genesis 1:11.

Deu 14:14

**“any kind of raven.”** That would include crows, which are a kind of raven-like bird.

Deu 14:19

**“you are not to eat them.”** God did not want people eating flies, gnats, butterflies, and such. He does say that the locust can be eaten, however (Lev. 11:22).

Deu 14:22

**“tithe, yes, tithe.”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton, where the word “tithe” is repeated twice in the Hebrew text, but the two occurrences are inflected differently. The double use of “tithe” is for emphasis, which some translations express by saying something such as, “You are to surely tithe.”

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

The Law of Moses commanded people to give a tenth of the grain they grew and the other vegetable harvests such as grapes and olives (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:21; Deut. 14:22; Mal. 3:8-12). Animals were tithed also, but differently (Lev. 27:32). There was no formal tithe in the over 2500 years from Adam to the Mosaic Law. The reason for the institution of the tithe was that God commanded that the tribe of Levi could not own land and was to do the work of the Temple, as well as other duties that required their attention. As long as the people of the other 11 tribes of Israel paid their tithe, there was money for the Levites. When the Law of Moses was fulfilled and the physical Temple was no longer the true Temple, the tithe was no longer a legal requirement (the Body of Christ is the Temple today—see commentary on 1 Cor. 3:16).

Since there is no legal requirement to give a tenth today, the Bible says that Christians are to give as they purpose in their heart (2 Cor. 9:7). However, they are still to give, and giving generously is always God’s heart. Christians are to give to those who minister the Word of God within the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 9:11-14). They are also to give to those in need (cf. Phil. 4:10-14), and are to keep in mind that those who sow generously will reap a generous reward for it (2 Cor. 9:6).

Deu 14:23

**“in the place that he will choose.”** In Deuteronomy God heavily introduces that in the future people will have to come to where He is to worship (see commentary on Deut. 12:5).

Deu 14:26

**“and you may spend the money on whatever your soul desires, for cattle or for sheep or for wine or for beer.”** Bringing money instead of animals was done a lot by the Jews while the Tabernacle and later the Temple existed. Animals traveled slowly and were cumbersome to herd along, so it made much more sense to sell the animal in one’s hometown and just carry money. Sadly, by the time of Christ, the greedy priests made the regulation that the “unclean money” of other nations could not be used in the Temple to buy animals for sacrifice, and so the priests established moneychangers who changed the foreign coinage into “proper Jewish coinage” that the people could use to buy animals to sacrifice. Of course there was usually no exact way to evenly trade the foreign money for the Jewish money, so in the trade, the priests, who controlled the system, always made out ahead and the people lost money in the exchange.

Jesus Christ knew that the whole system was bogus and only established to further enrich the priests, who were generally already rich, which is why when he went into the Temple at Passover time he turned over the moneychangers’ tables, drove the animals away, and called the place where they were “a den of robbers” (Mark 11:15-18; John 2:13-17). Those evil priests and Levites, and any person who behaves like them and takes advantage of others will not do well on the Day of Judgment.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 15**

Deu 15:1

**“At the end of every seven years you must make a release.​”** In this context, the seventh year was a fixed time, and tracked by the priests. So as the year of release approached people were less likely to lend because they would be less likely to be fully repaid. While that makes monetary sense, it was not God’s heart and He reproves it. The poor need the money (or whatever they borrow) now, not in a couple years when a new cycle of seven begins, and God says He will bless Israel if they will take care of the people.

The seventh year was different for cases where a person was forced (often by debt) to serve another. In those cases, the guilty party did serve seven years (cf. Deut. 15:12).

Deu 15:4

**“However there will be no poor among you.”** This statement is based in the context of Israel obeying all the commands of God, which they never did. A few times in history they may have gotten close, but as a whole, they never did keep all the commands of God. So Deuteronomy 15:11, that there would always be poor people in the land, is much more realistic and is in fact what happened historically in Israel.

Deu 15:7

**“close your hand.”** An idiom meaning to be selfish to.

Deu 15:8

**“open, yes, open...lend, yes, lend.”** The Hebrew text emphasizes the fact that the richer person must be willing to lend to the poorer person by using the figure of speech polyptoton, where the same verb is repeated but in two different tenses (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

Deu 15:9

**“the seventh year, the year of release.”** According to the Law of Moses, every seventh year was a year of release. On the seventh year, slaves had to be released, and they could not be sent away empty-handed, they had to be given enough to start their life again (Exod. 21:2; Deut. 15:12-15), the land had to be released from its labor and not cultivated (Exod. 23:11; Lev. 25:4-7; Neh. 10:32), and any debt that was owed to a brother Israelite had to be forgiven (Deut. 15:1-3; Neh. 10:32).

The “seventh year” was fixed on the calendar. For example, if you lent money to someone, the “seventh year” was not seven years later, but when the “seventh year” came up, which might have been the very next year. Here in Deuteronomy 15:9 God warns the Israelites not to be stingy and have an “evil eye” against their fellow Israelite and to lend to the needy even if the year of release was near and the chances of being repaid were slim.

**“your eye be evil.”** The “evil eye” is a Semitic idiom for being greedy and stingy. God is telling people not to be stingy, but to give to their needy brother even if the year of release, the seventh year, is close and it does not look like the needy one will be able to pay you back before his debt is released. Biblically, an evil eye is greedy or stingy; while a “good eye,” or a “single eye,” is generous.

[For more on idioms involving the good eye, see commentary on Prov. 22:9. For more on the idiom of the evil eye, see commentary on Prov. 28:22.]

Deu 15:10

**“give, yes, give.”** The Hebrew text repeats the verb “give” twice, the first as an infinitive, the second as an imperfect. This is the figure of speech polyptoton, and emphasizes that the person is to give generously.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Deu 15:11

**“Because the poor.”** The opening word is more properly, “for,” but here it has more the force of “because” (cf. NASB, and note the NIV).

Jesus also taught that there would be poor people among the more wealthy people (cf. Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8). It is good to give to the poor, but that is all the Bible says to do—help them survive and get back on their feet. There is no justification for the idea that society is responsible for raising the poor up to the economic level of everyone else so everyone has the same things in life. There are many different reasons that the poor are poor, and trying to get them to be equal with everyone else in society only hurts the people in society who are diligent and plan and thus have enough and some to share, and taking their money from them by force of law only results in hurting the whole society. Note that whenever Jesus told a parable about people being given money and stewarding it, any money the person who hid or lost his money had left was taken from him and given to the one who had been the wisest with the money he had been given (cf. Matt. 25:28-29; Luke 11:20-24).

When it comes to helping the poor, the Bible sets some wonderful examples. First, Proverbs makes it clear that parents are to teach their children to plan ahead and plan for their future. Failure to do that can result in someone having a very difficult life, so parents need to be diligent about teaching their children to prepare for the future. Also, Proverbs says that godly parents and grandparents should plan their lives so they can leave an inheritance to their children, which can be a huge help to the children (Prov. 13:22). Then, after being helped and supported by the immediate family, God intended that the extended family was to watch out for each other and support each other in times of trouble. This was part of the idea behind the concept of the “kinsman-redeemer,” and we see that in cases such as when Boaz helped out Naomi and Ruth. God designed the family and clan to be the primary support system for people all throughout their lives, from babies to when people are elderly and in need of help.

Also, people are wise to be a part of a mutually loving community of believers who help and support each other. This is usually the Church, and being part of a loving congregation is very valuable. Acts 6:1 and 1 Timothy 5:16 are two verses that show the Church helping the poor among them, and many churches are very good about helping the poor, and also the people in the church are often very helpful in helping and supporting one another. Church is to be more than a place to go to sing and worship God, it is a place to build friendships and community among the believers, who can then be mutually supportive of each other.

Christians are also to realize that if they help the poor, God will reward them for it on Judgment Day. Proverbs 19:17 says that the person who shows favor to the poor lends to Yahweh and Yahweh will repay them for the help they give. That repayment might not happen in this life, but it certainly will in the next. So for a Christian to notice a poor person and extend some help to them is supposed to be part of every Christian’s life.

It is important to realize also, however, that there are things that poor people can do to help themselves, and God expects people to do what they can to support themselves. In biblical times people who could not work went to public places and begged, and God often blessed that effort. That may not be available or safe today, but that does not mean that there are not things that poor people can do for themselves to get back on their feet or get further ahead in life. James says that people have not because they ask not, and someone working to have enough or get out of poverty should be diligent to pray and to ask God for help and also for ideas as to how to get help.

**“open, yes, open.”** The Hebrew text repeats the verb “open” twice, the first as an infinitive, the second as an imperfect. This is the figure of speech polyptoton, and it emphasizes that the person is to give generously.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Deu 15:14

**“supply, yes, supply.”** God wants people to give the ones who have served them a good chance to make it in the world and not end up back in debt, so He emphasizes that point by repeating the verb “supply” twice, an infinitive pared with an imperfect, and thus using the figure of speech polyptoton. In this case, the meaning of the figure is to supply him with plenty so he can get a good start.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

Deu 15:15

**“you are to remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt.”** The “you” and “slave” are singular. Each person is to remember the past, and the hardships Israel went through in Egypt.

Deu 15:16

**“If he tells you.”** The “he” is accurate. The men were set free in the seventh year (or at least they were supposed to be; some cruel masters would not release their slaves). In contrast, the women slaves who were single were married into the family and were therefore not released (cf. Exod. 21:7-11).

Deu 15:17

**“and he will be your servant forever.”** The word “forever” in this case means for a long time, because the servitude ended in the year of the Jubilee (Lev. 25:39-41).

**“Also to your female servant you are to do likewise.”** The women slaves who were not married did not go free like the men did, they became part of the household of the family they were sold to (cf. Exod. 21:7-11). So this must refer to female slaves who were married when they became slaves.

Deu 15:18

**“for double of the hire of a hired hand he has served you six years.”** If the master had hired a worker instead of having the slave for six years it would have cost him twice as much.

Deu 15:19

**“All the firstborn males that are born of your herd and of your flock you are to dedicate to Yahweh your God.”** The firstborn of the herd and flock would be clean animals and so they were able to be sacrificed to Yahweh. God said, “You are to dedicate them,” which in this case means dedicate them or “make them holy” by sacrificing them. So the firstborn male of every flock or herd animal was to be sacrificed to Yahweh, as Deuteronomy 15:19-23 makes clear. Note also, however, that blemished animals could not be sacrificed; and also, any time a firstborn animal was sacrificed, the family who brought it got to eat some of the meat.

Deu 15:20

**“in the place that Yahweh will choose.”** Here once again as has occurred a number of times in Deuteronomy, the people are to elevate God by going to where He is instead of just doing what they want wherever they are.

Deu 15:22

**“the unclean and the clean alike may eat it.”** That is, people who are ceremonially clean and people who are not clean may eat of the firstborn animals that are sacrificed to Yahweh.

**“as if it were a gazelle or a deer.”** When someone hunted a gazelle or deer and the whole family or clan ate it, both the people who were ceremonially clean and the people who were “unclean” could eat it. Things that made people Levitically unclean in the eyes of God were having an issue of blood, having touched a dead body, and having had sex that day. So here in Deuteronomy 15:22, God says that the firstborn male of the herd or flock that is sacrificed to Him may be eaten by anyone, clean or unclean.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 16**

Deu 16:1

**“Observe the month.”** Here in Deuteronomy 16, God lays out the pattern for the three major festivals in the Hebrew calendar: Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks (also called “Pentecost”), and the Feast of Booths (also less correctly called the “Feast of Tabernacles”), although there are details that need to be learned from other chapters about these feasts, for example, some of the other names they are called. Leviticus 23 lays out the Hebrew festive calendar in more detail.

Here in Deuteronomy 16:1-8, God treats Passover as if it were part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Although technically, the Passover was killed on Nisan 14 and the Feast of Unleavened Bread started on Nisan 15, the Passover meal was eaten the evening of Nisan 14 and would typically be a long ceremony and meal that would last past sundown, and sundown started Nisan 15 and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Thus, in actual practice, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread melded together.

**“Abib.”** Abib was the first month of the Hebrew religious calendar and it was also called Nisan. It typically fell sometime in April. It must be remembered that Israel used a lunar calendar of 354 days, not a solar calendar of 365 days as is common today. That meant Israel’s year was shorter than our year by 11 days, so if their Abib started the same time our May started on one year, the next year their Abib would start 11 days earlier, or April 20. However, the years were adjusted forward about every three years so that the barley crop could be harvested in Abib as the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread required. That adjustment was made by adding a thirteenth month, a second month of Adar, which was the twelfth month, to some years. So some years had Adar 1 and Adar 2 to catch the lunar calendar up with the times the crops would be ready.

[For more on the Jewish calendar and God changing the first month from Tishri to Nisan, see commentary on Exod. 12:2. For more information and a more complete list of the feasts and sabbaths in Israel, see commentary on Lev. 23:2.]

Deu 16:2

**“of the flock and the herd.”** The Law said the “Passover lamb” could also be a goat (cf. Exod. 12:5).

**“You are to sacrifice the Passover to Yahweh your God of the flock and the herd in the place that Yahweh will choose to cause his name to dwell there.”** This command was why people eventually went to the Temple at Jerusalem to sacrifice their Passover lambs. ​In Deuteronomy God heavily introduces that in the future people will have to come to where He is to worship (see commentary on Deuteronomy 12:5).

Deu 16:3

**“bread of affliction.”** Unleavened bread, that is, bread made without yeast, is not particularly good tasting, so it is called the “bread of affliction.” When Israel left Egypt they took bread with them, but they did not have time to let the yeast cause the bread to rise and become tasty, they had to hurry out of Egypt so the bread they had with them was unleavened.

Deu 16:6

**“you must sacrifice the Passover at evening, at the going down of the sun.”​** In this context of the sacrifice of the Passover, the “evening” is the start of the early evening, when the sun is starting to noticeably go down. The traditional time is 3 p.m. Leviticus 23:5 has the phrase “between the two evenings.” In Jewish culture, there was an early evening when the sun was first noticeably falling in the sky, and that “evening” traditionally was 3 p.m. Then there was the second evening, much like our western evening, the time of waning daylight that just preceded sundown and by Jewish reckoning of time the start of a new day.

Deu 16:10

**“the Feast of Weeks.”** This feast is also called the “Feast of Harvest” (Exod. 23:16), and “Pentecost” in the New Testament (Acts 2:1).

Deu 16:13

**“Feast of Booths.”** This feast is also called “the Feast of Tabernacles,” but technically “booths” is the correct translation. The Feast of Booths is a harvest feast, and at the time of the harvest, it was typical for farmers to build temporary shelters out in their fields and stay there to protect the harvest from animals, birds, and thieves. The Feast of Booths and the people living out in booths for one week a year served to remind Israel of when they lived in the wilderness in tents and booths immediately after they left the slavery they experienced in Egypt, and also served to remind Israel that God was the source of their bountiful harvest.

Deu 16:16

**“Three times in the year all your males are to appear before Yahweh.”** The importance of the three pilgrimage-feasts is emphasized by the fact that God says several times that every Israelite male was to appear before Him at these three feasts (Exod. 23:14, 17; 34:23-24; Deut. 16:16), (see commentary on Exod. 23:14).

Deu 16:18

**“You are to put in place judges and officers.”** The Hebrew word translated as “put in place” is *natan* (#05414 נָתַן), and it has a range of meanings that include “give, set, place, consecrate, dedicate, appoint, make.” The YLT reads, “Judges and authorities thou dost make to thee within all thy gates.” The King James Version says, “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates.” The LSB reads, “You set for yourself judges and authorities within all your gates.” The NASB reads, “You shall appoint for yourselves judges and officers in all your towns.” The people were to make judges and rulers for themselves. These were not chosen by God but by the people, in other words, the people of a town got together and decided, thus voted upon, who would be the local leaders over them.

This is basically an election of judges and officers, except the people who got together and appointed the judges were very limited. Technically they were to be male citizens of the congregation of Israel, but also men who were not blemished by having their testicles damaged in some way (see commentary on Deut. 23:1). In other words, they were to be men who had a vested interest in the heritage of Israel and passing that heritage on to their own children. The system could have worked if everyone was humble and honest, but that seldom seems to be the way things are in politics, and so many elders and judges were corrupt.

Some Christians today say that Christians should not get involved in politics, and admittedly politics can be dirty and messy, but that is because the stakes are so high. Ungodly people scrap and fight for power, and then control others and keep them from living a godly and prosperous life. Christians should do what they can within the confines of the law to keep such ungodly people out of office.

Deu 16:20

**“Justice! Justice.”** The Hebrew text starts by repeating the word “justice” twice for emphasis, and that is translated different ways in the different English versions. Technically it is the figure of speech repetitio (“repetition”)[[7]](#footnote-11109) and it is used for emphasis. Rulers, judges, and teachers—leaders—will be judged more strictly on the Day of Judgment than “regular believers” will (cf. James 3:1). Christ taught that to those who were given more, more would be required (Luke 12:48), and here in Deuteronomy 16:20 God places special emphasis on the fact that leaders are to desire justice, not personal gain.

Deu 16:22

**“a standing-stone.”** Standing-stones were set up for various reasons, some of them being godly memorials, but here the context is pagan worship. Standing-stones would often be set up as part of the worship of pagan gods, and God has no tolerance for idols. They are harmful in many different ways and are to be destroyed.

[For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18. For more on idols being harmful, see commentary on Deut. 7:5.]

**Deuteronomy Chapter 17**

Deu 17:3

**“bowed down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**“the sun or the moon or any of the army of heaven.”** In this context, the “army of heaven” refers to the stars and planets (also thought of as “stars”) which appeared organized and thus were referred to as an “army.”

Deu 17:5

**“to your gates.”** The gate of the city was the most public place in the city. That the offender was taken to the gate of the city to be stoned showed that this was to be a public execution, and everyone could see what would happen to a person who bowed down to other gods and thus worshiped them. Thus the stoning of the offender was more than an execution, it was a very graphic illustration and instruction to everyone else that God was very serious about following Him and not false gods. It seems very likely that in most cases a person in the Old Testament times who turned away from Yahweh to the worship of pagan gods would not only lose their life here and now, but would forfeit their everlasting life as well, so turning from God to pagan gods was very serious indeed. Sadly, given the fallen nature of humankind and the often corrupt political systems on earth, this system of stoning was rarely used for actual offenders and sometimes used for political purposes (cf.Naboth, 1 Kings 21:7-13).

Deu 17:8

**“between blood and blood.”** Blood feuds become very entangled and difficult to sort out, and they are complicated by emotion and the concept of honor and who is gaining or losing honor by the way something is done or decided. Blood feuds have been known to go on for centuries in the ancient Near East, and even today they can be a problem. The problem of blood feuds was exacerbated in biblical times because there was no police force, so if someone killed another person, it was the job of the family or relatives of the dead person to avenge the death of their family member by killing the killer. The one who kills the killer is referred to in the Bible as “the avenger of blood” and regulations governing how that vengeance is to be carried out are in Numbers 35:9-29 and Deuteronomy 19:1-13.

Deu 17:9

**“the Levitical priests.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads, “the priests the Levites,” and this phrase is correct since every priest was also a Levite, but it can be confusing so many versions and commentaries read “Levitical priests,” as does the REV.

[For more on the Levitical priests, see commentary on 2 Chron. 30:27.]

Deu 17:10

**“that place that Yahweh will choose.”** ​In Deuteronomy God heavily introduces that in the future people will have to come to where He is to worship, and “that place that Yahweh will choose” is the place where God says he is present (i.e., the Tabernacle, then the Temple). The High Priest and other priests were serving there, and they would give the word of Yahweh to the people (see commentary on Deut. 12:5). The High Priest was the ultimate “Supreme Court” of Israel, and he would be where the ark of the covenant was, representing God. His decision was final.

Deu 17:12

**“the priest.”** In this context, “the priest” would generally be the High Priest.

Deu 17:14

**“set a king over me.”** Here God speaks about Israel putting a king in place over them to rule them instead of being ruled by an invisible God and His laws. God knew the people would eventually want a king and gave Israel commands about how the king was to behave and obey God even though it would be over 400 years before Israel finally decided to have a king. God spoke again about the king in Deut. 28:36.

Deu 17:15

**“set, yes, set.”** Deciding to have a human king instead of God directly ruling over the people through elders, which had been the way things had been done since the Exodus, was a huge move to make, and God emphasized that they were to use His choice for a king, not theirs, and He emphasized that with the figure of speech polyptoton, repeating the same verb twice in a row but in different cases.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“you are not to put a foreigner over you.”** A non-Israelite king would not have the interest in the success of Israel as a nation and the care of the Israelite people in the same way that an Israelite king would have. God was interested and invested in the continuance of Israel.

Deu 17:16

**“acquire many horses.”** A king would acquire many horses out of pride and in order to have a strong chariot force as part of the army, but God wants His people to rely on Him, not on the weapons of the flesh. Besides, a strong army does not guarantee victory, as history and the Bible show over and over (cf. Deut. 20:1; Ps. 33:17; Prov. 21:31).

Deu 17:17

**“silver and gold.”** The king was not to accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. It is a temptation to do that out of pride and because it could be used to hire mercenaries if the kingdom was ever attacked, and for other reasons as well. The king was supposed to put his efforts into making the kingdom strong and prosperous by doing things that helped ensure the people obeyed Yahweh and had what they needed to be individually prosperous. Those things would include things like better roads for travel and commerce, especially roads to Jerusalem so people could obey God and attend the Feasts, more strongly fortified cities to discourage foreign attack, especially on the borders of Israel, and such things as that. The king was not just to build a central treasury with a lot of valuables and consider himself rich.

Deu 17:18

**“write for himself a copy of this law.”** It was vital for the prosperity of the kingdom (and the everlasting life of the king personally) that he obey the Law of Moses and that he was instructed from the Law in what his people were to do so that they obeyed God. Having his own personal copy of the Law in his own handwriting ensured that he had the Law handy to read and review at all times. Of course, handwriting a copy of the Law of Moses would take months, but it was that important to God that the king know the Law. Sadly, there is no record that any king of Israel ever did that, and many things the kings did can be seen to be in ignorance of, or disobedience to, the Law. Christians today are not commanded to write a personal copy of the Bible to have for themselves, but Christians would be much better off if they read the Bible every day, learned what it said, and made a diligent effort to obey it.

**“the Levitical priests.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads, “the priests the Levites.” Every priest was also a Levite.

[For more on the Levitical priests, see commentary on 2 Chron. 30:27.]

Deu 17:20

**“he and his sons.”** If the king diligently obeys the Law of God, and does his best to ensure the people of his kingdom do too, he will prolong his days in the kingdom and his dynasty, the reign of his sons after him, will be prolonged also.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 18**

Deu 18:1

**“the Levitical priests.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads, “the priests the Levites.” Every priest was also a Levite.

[For more on the Levitical priests, see commentary on 2 Chron. 30:27.]

Deu 18:2

**“no inheritance of land.”** All the other tribes got an inheritance of land, but the Levites got the service of Yahweh and food from His sacrifices and offerings, and they got 48 cities to live in (see commentary on Num. 35:7).

Deu 18:3

**“sheep.”** The Hebrew word can refer to a sheep or a goat.

**“belly.”** This would refer in general to the inner parts. The 2011 NIV reads “internal organs,” which catches the sense.

Deu 18:8

**“the sale of his ancestral property.”** The Hebrew text simply reads the sale of his “fathers” (i.e. “ancestors”), but it refers to what has come down to him from his ancestors. This would not include land because the Levites could not own land, but could refer to other possessions that his ancestors might have gained.

Deu 18:9

**“you are not to learn.”** The so-called “black arts” and magic arts and pagan worship are not instinctively understood by humans, but are learned. God’s people are to stay away from all activity that is not a glory to God. Witchcraft and the black arts can fascinate the senses and their power can be attractive to the flesh, but those abominable and demonic practices and also the physical things that are associated with them such as wands, crystal balls, Ouija boards, etc., are to be completely avoided. The power that they have comes from God’s arch-enemy, the Devil, and if a person, and especially a believer, chooses the Devil over God he or she will have terrible consequences.

**“the abominable things that those nations *do*.”** The Devil is always trying to lure people away from God, and has many ways to do it. One of them is by getting people to look to him for information instead of looking to God. This section in Deuteronomy 18 gives us a list of some of the practices that God calls “abominable.” The Devil was effective in getting those practices inculcated into the pagan culture of the ancient world, and many of these practices are still going on today despite the fact that they are an abomination to God. The “nations” in the verse specifically refers to the various Canaanite nations, including the Ammonites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hittites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

People generally want more information than God wants to give them. God wants people to act wisely, make decisions for their own lives, and accept the consequences of the decisions they make. However, that takes a lot of wisdom, time, and risk, and many people are unwilling to do that. Besides, all the human wisdom in the world cannot tell us many of the things we would love to know: will a boyfriend/girlfriend make a good life partner; will a certain investment work out; will changing jobs help or hurt me in the long run; will my child turn out to be a good person; and many more questions like those. But God is comfortable with us not knowing those things.

God knows that we live in a fallen world, and that we are not going to be able to fix it or to “make everything right” in our lives. He wants us to trust Him on a day-to-day basis and have confidence that our next life will be wonderful, and sorrow and death will be no more. For the mature Christian, the fact that life is hopelessly broken and things go wrong in people’s lives is evidence that Adam’s sin ruined the world, and it leads us to recognize how horrible sin is, and how important it is that we make a genuine effort to obey God. The brokenness of life forces us to trust in God’s support, and it builds our desire for the restored world in the future.

Understandably, however, many people are not satisfied with being part of the consequences of Adam’s sin, and they don’t want to wait for the Millennial Kingdom for things to improve in their lives. People want to be “right” and do not want to take the risks inherent in making their own decisions. The Devil takes advantage of that, and he also takes advantage of the fact that many people are content to hand off their decision-making to “invisible forces” they believe are somehow more knowledgeable than themselves. Thus, the Devil supports many different ways of telling the future and influencing people to make decisions based on the information that he provides.

Providing different ways of dispensing information supports the Devil’s agenda in many ways. It weakens people’s resolve to obey God; it weakens people’s emotional growth in making, then taking responsibility for, their own decisions; it gives evidence, false evidence, that God is not important to people’s lives because they can get the information they want from other places; it provides an avenue for the Devil to feed people false and misleading information; it enriches disobedient people such as diviners and sorcerers with both money and influence; and, by engendering people’s disobedience and the devaluing of God, it hinders the unsaved in getting saved and hinders believers from building up rewards in the future Kingdom of God.

The list of practices in Deuteronomy 18:10-11 is not exhaustive, but it is indicative of the way culture will go if the people do not know God and the truth He provides about the visible and invisible world. There is a lot of overlap in the practices listed below, and that is understandable because although different demonic arts have specific differences, there is a lot of overlap, just as in English, concepts like “magic,” “sorcery,” and “witchcraft,” have a lot of overlap. The point of the list is that it gives us enough information to be clear that God wants to be our only God and our only source of supernatural information. Getting information from the Devil always in some way ends in harm, and God knows that.

[For more on the Messiah’s future kingdom on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1.]

Deu 18:10

**“makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire.”** The reference to passing children through the fire is widespread in the Old Testament but is not well understood (cf. Lev. 18:21; 2 Kings 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; 23:10; Jer. 32:35; Ezek. 16:21; 20:26, 31; 23:37). At least three times it is associated with the god Moloch (Lev. 18:21; 2 Kings 23:10; and Jer. 32:35), and twice it is associated with divination (2 Kings 17:17; 21:6). It is quite possible that the practice varied in different times and cultures.

Passing a child through the fire appears here in Deuteronomy along with other types of divination for guidance or gaining knowledge of the future. That fact argues strongly that at least sometimes the practice was used as part of a ceremony to determine the future. However, it is also possible that it was a sacrifice designed to appease the gods and bring about a favorable future. That certainly seems to be the case in 2 Kings 3:26-27 when the king of Moab sacrificed his son because he was losing the battle. In any case, the scope of Scripture, including verses such as Leviticus 18:21 and Ezekiel 16:21, as well as supporting evidence from archaeology, conclusively support the fact that passing children through the fire was not just some harmless means of prognostication that somehow involved children, it either sometimes or always involved actual child sacrifice.

**“who practices divination.”** The Hebrew doubles the root word for emphasis, and the phrase in the Hebrew text is *qosem qesamim* (קֹסֵ֣ם קְסָמִ֔ים). It is difficult to accurately bring that Hebrew phrase into English that reads smoothly because *qosem* is a participle and *qesamim* is the noun. A very wooden translation would be “divining divination,” but that is hard to understand in English. The essence of the phrase is picked up in many versions that translate it as one who “practices divination.” That translation reads well in English and catches the sense of the phrase, but it loses the emphasis provided by the doubling of the root word.

Divination is the process of acquiring supernatural knowledge by various means, and there are literally hundreds of different ways of divining, depending on the time and culture. Some are specifically mentioned in the Bible, such as looking at the liver of an animal (Ezek. 21:21), using a stick (Hos. 4:12), or casting lots (Esther 3:7). The Bible allowed for certain ways to cast lots, so we must not consider all lot casting to be ungodly, but some of it certainly is).

**“tells fortunes.”** Although “tell fortunes” brings to mind pictures of Gypsy palm readers, there are many ways people try to tell the future. The exact Hebrew word in the text is *meonen* (מְעוֹנֵ֥ן) from the root word *anan* (#06049 עָנָן). The meaning of *meonen* is debated, which we can see by the different ways it is translated in the English versions: “augury” (ASV); “soothsayer” (CJB, NAB, NRSV); “tell fortunes” (HCSB, ESV); “observer of times” (KJV); “practices witchcraft” (NASB); “an omen reader” (NET; cf. NIV); and “use sorcery” (NLT).

Merrill Unger wrote about *meonen*: “But the precise etymology of the Hebrew term is uncertain. Some would derive it from the root *anan* (‘to cover’), ‘one who practices hidden or occult arts.’ This explanation, though, has no real support from usage. Others would connect the word with *anan* (‘cloud’), ‘one who observes the clouds with a view of obtaining an oracle.’ Still others would make it a denominative from *ayin* (‘eye’), ‘one who smites with the evil eye.’ But nothing in the context would suggest any of those views. The most likely explanation is that the expression is from the Semitic root meaning ‘to emit a hoarse nasal sound’ …such a sound as was customary in the reciting magical formulas (Lev. 19:26; 2 Kings 21:6).”[[8]](#footnote-22915) Isaiah 8:19 speaks of mediums and people who try to get information from the spirit world who “chirp and mutter” as part of the practices they engage in.

*HALOT* has “to interpret signs, soothsayer.”[[9]](#footnote-18465) It is likely that in this context *meonen* refers more generally to those who engage in various magical arts to determine the future rather than those who actively practice magic and other “black arts” with the intent of influencing the future. There are many different ways people attempt to “tell someone’s fortune,” including Ouija boards, Tarot cards, and palm reading; and the list goes on and on. Many of those people do in fact speak or chant as they practice their art, and that could have been ridiculed in Isaiah as “chirp and mutter.”

**“interprets omens.”** The Hebrew verb is *nachash* (#05172 נָחַשׁ), and it referred to interpreting omens and divining by means of them. In Genesis 44:5 and 15, Joseph was said to be able to use his cup to divine (which is the same Hebrew word: interpreting omens), but it is also possible that he never did so, but used that as a ruse. There is no biblical record of Joseph actually interpreting omens or using any type of divination except by the revelation he got from God.

**“practices sorcery.”** The Hebrew verb is *kashaph* (#03784 כָּשַׁף). For our purpose, a sorcerer is “one who practices magic by using occult formulas, incantations, and mystic mutterings…it is evidently commonly employed to include the whole field of divinatory occultism.”[[10]](#footnote-31187) A sorcerer is one who seeks to control things in the natural world by summoning or controlling supernatural forces. Scholars have not been able to exactly pin down the ancient understanding of the difference between a “witch” and a “sorceress,” and the words may in fact have been basically synonymous. There seems to be very little difference between our understanding of a “witch” and a “sorcerer,” and although older versions such as the KJV use “witch,” the modern versions almost universally use “sorcerer,” which might be due to the fact that the word “witch” in our modern times usually, but not always, carries the idea of an old woman who lives alone with black cats, big pots, all kinds of weird ingredients, and who casts spells that turn people into frogs and such. That is not a true image of what witches or sorceresses are like. Actually, the modern definitions of “witchcraft” and “sorcery” given in different sources vary greatly and are often contradictory. For example, some sources say witchcraft usually involves doing good while sorcery involves doing evil, while other sources say witchcraft deals with doing evil too. But call it witchcraft or sorcery, the real problem is that they both deal with demons.

God commanded that sorcerers and sorceresses were to be put to death (Exod. 22:18; cf. Lev. 20:27). That was because of their intimate involvement with demons, which are the avowed enemies of God and righteousness, and are hurtful to all of God’s creation. There are only two ultimate supernatural sources, God and the Devil, and anyone who is working with supernatural powers that are not from God is against God. The idea that there is “good witchcraft” is a falsehood foisted upon people so the Devil can gain a larger foothold on the person and society.

The existence of spiritual forces, both good and evil, has been known since God created humankind. The Devil appeared to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1), and the Devil and his demons have continued to appear to people throughout the ages. In fact, it was demons appearing in various forms that gave rise to the polytheistic theologies and mythologies in the ancient world. Just as demons appear to people today as different spirits and ghosts, the evidence indicates that demons appeared to people in the ancient world as different gods and goddesses of all kinds of shapes and sizes. Furthermore, the gods appeared in different ways that revealed a hierarchy among them (as indeed there was a hierarchy in the demonic world), and also it was clear to the ancients that different gods were at war with each other, which is reflected in the ancient mythologies and is also a part of modern portrayals of spiritual forces such as we see in so many books and movies today.

Given the fact that demons appeared to people in different forms, it would be natural for the ancient people to turn to them for supernatural power and help, and thus the interaction between demons and humans was the driving force behind the widespread practice of divination and magic. So, for example, the list of demonic practices in Deuteronomy 18:9-11 was not some invented list. When Moses penned Deuteronomy, the activities mentioned in chapter 18 were actually being practiced by the peoples who were occupying the Promised Land (Deut. 18:9), and Joshua and his army would be in that land less than three months after Deuteronomy was written. So for Joshua and his army, Deuteronomy 18 was “hot off the press” and extremely important if they wanted God’s help in conquering the Promised Land.

So what we see in Deuteronomy is that when God separated the nation of Israel from the other nations and made them “His people,” He forbade them to deal with the demonic world in any and every form. The Israelites were not to get involved with supernatural power such as divination and sorcery; they were not to deal with demons (even though they did not know the forces were demons). Furthermore, they were to put to death anyone among them who got involved in working with the supernatural other than that which was knowingly from Yahweh.

The necessity to put to death Israelites who dealt with demonic spiritual forces was due to the fact that in the time of the Old Testament, the average believer did not have the gift of holy spirit. That gift was poured out upon every believer on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), but before Pentecost, the people had to deal with spiritual wickedness in a physical way, by putting the evil person to death. Today every believer has the gift of holy spirit (Eph. 2:13-14) and so we wrestle against evil forces with spiritual weapons (Eph. 6:10-20). Sadly, most Christians are taught little or nothing about demons and about how to wrestle against them, which is like being in a war and having a closet full of guns and grenades, but not knowing what they do or how to use them, or frankly, even being aware that there is a war going on. Christians need to wake up to the spiritual battle, and if any Christian is involved in any of the activities in this list in Deuteronomy, they need to immediately quit, repent, and ask for God’s forgiveness.

Deu 18:11

**“or one who casts spells.”** The Hebrew phrase is *chover chaver* (חֹבֵ֖ר חָ֑בֶר), using the same root as a participle and then a noun. A much more literal rendering would be something like, “a binder of bands,” or perhaps, “one who ties ties” (the BDB[[11]](#footnote-27960) mentions “tie a magic knot”). In older English, magic spells were equated with “charms,” and thus some sources might speak of a “charmer who charms.” The root idea is that the person who can “bind with a band” can cast a spell or make magic that binds a person in some way. We can see why Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible has: “who bindeth with spells.” In Psalm 58:6 the verb refers to a snake charmer, in Isa. 47:9 and 47:12 the noun refers to magic spells.

**“one who inquires of spirits or of a familiar spirit.”** The Hebrew is *shoel ob* (שֹׁאֵ֥ל אוֹב). The word “ob” referred to a pit or hole in the ground and then by extension to spirits that lived there (another meaning of the Hebrew word is “skin-bottle,” and some lexicons only give that meaning, which can be confusing to people trying to study this subject). Thus, the phrase refers to one who asks or inquires of spirits, particularly the so-called spirits of dead people. This would include mediums, necromancers, and others who try to contact the spirit world. Mediums and people who consulted familiar spirits (demons) were to be put to death (Lev. 20:27).

The phrase “familiar spirits” is from the Hebrew word *yiddoniy* (#03049 יִדְּעֹנִי), from the root *yada* (#03045), “to know,” and thus refers to “a knower,” or one who has a “familiar spirit.” The phrase “familiar spirit” is found in many Bibles and comes into English from the Latin word *familiaris*, which meant “of the family,” but which was used, among other things, to describe household slaves and servants. The idea is that mediums and spiritists usually have some particular spirits or “spirit guides” (demons!) who “know” things and with whom they are regularly in touch and who serve them.

**“necromancer.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “one who inquires of [or consults with] the dead.” The Devil successfully supports the belief that dead people are not really dead by the appearance of ghosts, apparitions, and other types of visitations by “dead people,” which are actually demons impersonating the dead. Demons have the power to manipulate matter to make visible figures appear with more or less clarity. Some “ghosts” appear as real as in real life, while other ghosts or apparitions appear in very vague or unclear ways, such as a dim figure in a smoky haze.

Necromancy is the term for the practice of contacting the dead, and many people, for many various reasons, want to contact those who have died. The desire to contact the dead is so strong that it goes on even among Christians despite the fact that it is specifically stated to be an abomination to God. Sadly, traditional Christian doctrine feeds the practice of necromancy by teaching the unbiblical doctrine that when a person dies, only the body dies and the “soul” (or “spirit”) lives on. But death is the absence of life, and it is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). When a person dies, they are totally dead, lifeless in every way, and will be that way until Jesus Christ raises them from the dead. That is why our hope is in the return and appearing of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:7), not in our own death, and it is why the Judgment occurs at his appearing and not at our death (2 Tim. 4:1). When a person “contacts the dead,” they are actually in touch with demons that impersonate the dead and who only have a hurtful, demonic agenda no matter how “nice” what they communicate seems to be.

The Devil has a multi-faceted agenda for making people think that dead people are not dead. For one thing, it makes physical death itself seem much less horrible. The thought of dying and being totally dead in every way, gone from life and loved ones, is very unsettling to many people and they willingly find reasons to believe that is not what happens. But being dead is what the Bible says happens. The first death is temporary, and people will be resurrected on their Day of Judgment, but for those who are unsaved, death via the Lake of Fire will follow the Judgment and be a permanent “second death” (Rev. 20:13-15).

Another reason the Devil has for getting people to believe the dead are alive is so that through mediums, apparitions, ghosts, etc., the Devil can communicate erroneous and hurtful information to the living. Of course, if everything being communicated from the spirit world was hurtful, people would see through the delusion, and because of that, much of what the demons communicate is either temporarily helpful or neutral. But the Devil does have an evil agenda, which is why any “communication with the dead” is an abomination to God.

[For more information on what happens when we die, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Deu 18:13

**“You must be blameless before Yahweh.”** The way to be blameless before Yahweh is to know God’s commands and obey them. It is a major fault among believers that they do not generally truly know the Word of God. They simply do not spend the time learning the Bible and God’s commands the way they should.

Deu 18:14

**“does not allow you to do so.”** In the Hebrew text, the verb translated “allow” is perfect tense (past tense) but the effect is present and thus carries the meaning “does not allow.” God does not allow His people at any time to get involved with things associated with demons such as witchcraft and divination.

Deu 18:15

**“Yahweh your God will raise up to you a prophet.”** It is important to connect Deuteronomy 18:15 with Deuteronomy 18:11-14. In verses 11-14 God tells His people what not to do to get information from the spirit world—don’t use divination or seek omens or try to talk to the dead. But God does not leave His people without information, after telling people what not to do, He tells them what to do, which is go to the prophets of God and get information from them.

Deu 18:16

**“in Horeb in the day of the assembly.”** Here in Deuteronomy 18:16, Mount Sinai is called “Horeb,” and the “day of the assembly” was the day when Moses brought all Israel to the base of Mount Sinai to hear the words of Yahweh, and He spoke the Ten Commandments in a loud voice from the top of Mount Sinai. The record is in Exodus 19:16-20:21.

**“Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God.”** This refers to God Himself speaking the Ten Commandments in a loud voice to the Israelites from Mount Sinai, which occurred between Moses’ third and fourth time up Mount Sinai. It was later, on Moses’ fifth trip up Mount Sinai, that God wrote the Ten Commandments on stone and gave them to him.

[For more on God speaking the Ten Commandments directly to the Israelites, see commentary on Exod. 19:9.]

Deu 18:19

**“I will require *a reckoning* from him.”** The Hebrew text is simply, “I will require from him,” and it leaves us to imagine and consider what God would require from any person who did not listen to the words of Yahweh spoken by His prophet. We can be sure that anyone who ignores the words of God will receive severe consequences, but those consequences are unstated in this verse.

Deu 18:20

**“will die.”** It is a common Christian teaching that if a prophecy is given but does not come to pass, the one who gave the prophecy is a false prophet and, at least in Old Testament times, would have been put to death. That teaching is in error. We must remember that God is love, and prophecy is just one expression of that love. Therefore, many prophecies are actually just warnings of what will happen in the future if things do not change, but if they do change then the prophecy will be changed or will simply not come to pass as spoken. So, many prophecies are conditional and change if the conditions change. God says specifically in His Word that if He says something to a person, but the person changes, the outcome will be different from what He originally said (Ezek. 33:13-16). He says the same thing in Jeremiah about whole nations. If God speaks disaster to a nation, but it repents, He will not bring the disaster, and vice versa (Jer. 18:7-11).

Walter Kaiser, Jr. writes: “In Scripture at large, there is always a suppressed or an expressed ‘unless,’ or even a conditional ‘if,’ to all God’s predictions., except those attached to his promised salvation in the Edenic protoevangelium of Gen. 3:15, the Abrahamic covenant of Gen. 12:1-3, the Davidic covenant of 2 Sam. 7, the new covenant of Jer. 31:31-34, the Noahic covenant with the seasons in Gen. 8:21-22, and the promise of the new heavens and the new earth in Isa. 66. All other promises or predictions of God’s promised mercy depend on repentance, or judgment for failure to respond (for example, Lev. 26:40-45; Ezek. 18:5-29; Luke 13:3, 5; Rev. 2:5, 16, 21-24; 3:3, 19-20), always directly teaching or implying that the blessing or the judgment will be called off if there is a reversal of the nation’s actions resulting in sincere repentance. This passage [Jer. 18:5-10] is significant because it demonstrates that even when God gives a direct threat of judgment, even without mentioning explicitly any conditions, they are still implied from the whole teaching of Scripture….”[[12]](#footnote-19757)

Thus, for example, Samuel was not a false prophet when he told Saul he would be king over Israel (1 Sam. 10:1) and then circumstances changed and God took the kingship away (1 Sam. 13:14; 15:26). Nathan was a true prophet of God and prophesied that David would have peace in his kingdom (2 Sam. 7:11). But then David sinned by having Uriah killed and committing adultery with Bathsheba, so the prophecy changed, “Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house” (2 Sam. 12:10). Nathan also told David that God would establish his kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12). But when David turned from God that prophecy was nullified. God later said that He would tear the kingdom away from Solomon (1 Kings 11:11).

Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, was not a godly person, and the prophet Shemaiah told Rehoboam that God would abandon him to Shishak, Pharaoh of Egypt (2 Chron. 12:5). But Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah repented, so God said that instead of destroying them, He would deliver them (2 Chron. 12:7). Isaiah was not a false prophet even though he told Hezekiah he would “die, and not live,” but Hezekiah prayed and humbled himself, and God gave him more years (2 Kings 20:1-6). Elijah was not a false prophet just because what he said to Ahab did not come to pass—the circumstances changed when Ahab humbled himself before God (1 Kings 21:20-29).

Josiah was a godly king, so God sent Huldah the prophetess and told him he would be gathered to his grave in peace (2 Kings 22:20). But Josiah became proud and involved himself in a war he had no business being in, and was killed in the war (2 Chron. 35:23-24). His circumstances changed so the prophecy did not apply. Zedekiah was similar to Josiah in that he did some godly things, so God sent Jeremiah with the prophecy he would die peacefully (Jer. 34:5). But then Zedekiah gave into the pressure of ungodly men, and God pointed out that he and the leaders of Judah disobeyed Him (Jer. 34:17-21). Eventually, Zedekiah’s children were killed while he watched, then he was blinded and taken in chains to Babylon, where he died—hardly a “peaceful” death (Jer. 52:11). Jonah prophesied that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days, but the people of Nineveh repented and God did not bring the prophecy to pass. But Jonah was not a false prophet simply because what he said did not come to pass—everyone knew the circumstances changed (Jon. 3:4-10).

Also, it seems clear that prophets were not considered false prophets if they spoke the word that God gave them about the End Times and it did not come to pass. If that were the case, most of the “minor prophets,” John the Baptist, Paul, and others would be false prophets. God has the timing of the End Times under His control, and He seems to keep putting it off. About 800 BC, Joel said the End was near; close at hand (Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14). More than 700 years before Christ, Isaiah said the End was near, in “a very short time,” and it draws near speedily (Isa. 13:6; 29:17-18; 51:3-6). Around 600 BC, Zephaniah said the End was near and coming quickly (Zeph. 1:7, 14, 15), and about that same time Ezekiel said the same thing (Ezek. 30:3). Obadiah (late 500s BC?) said the end was near (Obad. 1:15), and Haggai, around 520 BC, said the End was “in a little while.” John the Baptist said it was near (Matt. 3:2). Paul said “the time is short,” the End is “almost here,” “near,” and “soon” (Rom. 13:12; 16:20; 1 Cor. 7:29; Phil. 4:5). James said the coming of the Lord was “near” and the Lord was “standing at the door” (James 5:8-9). Peter also said it was near (1 Pet. 4:7), and 1 John 2:18 says that “this is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). Hebrews says it is in a little while (Heb. 10:37), and Revelation says the End will happen soon and is near (Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:6, 20). It has now been thousands of years since those words were spoken, and theologians have tried many creative ways to make the “time problem” go away by saying things like, “Since the End for you is the day you die, it is always ‘near.’” But those explanations are not convincing because not one person in the audience that the prophets were speaking to thought the prophet said, “the Day of the Lord is near,” but really meant, “You are going to die soon.” The biblical prophets were not “false prophets” because their prophecies about the timing of the End Times did not come true. God, for His own reasons, kept pushing back the time of the End—He kept changing the circumstances. The point is that just because a prophecy does not come to pass does not mean the prophet was a false prophet; there are many reasons prophecies don’t come to pass.

Biblically, a false prophet is a person who gets information from a demonic source and/or leads people away from the true God, and the Old Testament said to put those people to death (Deut. 13:1-5). In fact, Deuteronomy clarifies what a false prophet is by specifically pointing out that even though the prophecy given by the false prophet comes to pass (which most people think would qualify him as a “true” prophet) the false prophet must be executed. Deuteronomy makes it very clear that simply giving a prophecy that comes to pass does not make someone a true prophet of God (Deut. 13:1-5).

It is important to realize that false prophets are not “false” because what they say is wrong. They are “false” because they do not represent the “true” God. Balaam was a prophet who stood against God, yet everything the Bible records him prophesying was true (Num. 22:1-24:25). The Devil knows the facts of a situation and is not shy about using his prophets to reveal it. The woman with the spirit of divination spoke the truth about Paul and his companions, which would make her a true prophet in some people’s eyes, but she was a false prophet and spoke via a demon, ultimately turning people away from Paul and the truth he presented (Acts 16:16).

Deuteronomy 18 contains a significant section about prophecy. Unfortunately, many translations add to the text to supposedly help clarify it, but what they add actually is not the truth of what God is trying to say. For example, the NIV84 says that a prophet who presumes to speak in God’s name things God did not command him to say “must be put to death.” However, the Hebrew text does not say he is to be “put to death,” the Hebrew text is much better translated as the KJV, NASB, Rotherham, and some other translations say it: “shall die.” The translation, “must be put to death” is not what the Hebrew text says, but rather is an assumption about what it means.

The words, “shall die” do not indicate the means of death. A study of the phrase reveals that sometimes it means, “shall be put to death,” as the NIV84 translators assume it means, but it can also mean, “shall die” in a purely factual sense. There are many examples showing the two ways this phrase can be translated. For instance, Deuteronomy 17:12; 22:25 and 24:7 are uses of the phrase when it clearly means “execute” or “put to death,” and 1 Samuel 2:34; 1 Kings 14:12 and Proverbs 15:10 and 19:16 are places where it simply means to die (every human “shall die,” so the obvious meaning is that the false prophet shall die before his natural time. There is, however, also the overtone of everlasting death, because false prophets will not be in the Resurrection of the Righteous). Since the phrase “shall die” is not conclusive, we must study the context and scope of Scripture to discover what meaning it has in any given verse.

Also, to determine what God says about prophets whose prophecies do not come to pass, we need to read the text carefully—especially because prior false teaching may have prejudiced our mind as to what the text says. Note carefully what Deuteronomy says to do when a prophecy does not come to pass: “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:22 NIV84). If a prophet speaks something that does not come to pass, the people should simply “not be afraid of him.” When we put verse 22 together with Deuteronomy 13:5 and 18:20, an interesting picture develops. If a prophet speaks to people with the intent of leading them away from God, he “must be put to death.” On the other hand, if a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the prophecy does not come to pass, perhaps it is conditional. How would the people know? In any case, the people should not be afraid of him and, if he is a false prophet, he “shall die.”

The Bible has examples of prophets who spoke prophecies that were not from God and who died. One is in the book of Jeremiah. Nebuchadnezzar’s army had attacked Judah and taken people and material goods back to Babylon. Jeremiah had foretold that the Babylonian Captivity would last 70 years (Jer. 25:11-12). However, another prophet, Hananiah, challenged Jeremiah and said that the captivity would be two years or less (Jer. 28:3). How were the people going to know the truth? As it turned out, Hananiah died that year, while Jeremiah lived and his prophecy came to pass (Jer. 28:15-17).

Hananiah turned out to be the false prophet, and he died before the two-year time period ended. He died, fulfilling the words of Deuteronomy that he “shall die,” but he was not executed by the people. Eli and Amaziah were priests, but it can reasonably be assumed from the culture and their position that they prophesied at least occasionally, and both of them also died of unnatural causes without being executed (1 Sam. 4:18; Amos 7:17).

It is very important when considering this subject of true and false prophets to realize that the Bible does not have even one example of a prophet being executed when his prophecies did not come to pass. That, combined with the fact Deuteronomy does not require a prophet whose prophecy did not come to pass to be executed, is very strong evidence that just because a prophecy does not come to pass does not mean the prophet was a “false prophet” or should have been executed under Old Testament law.

On the other hand, the Bible does have examples of prophets who were put to death when they led the people to worship other gods. Elijah had the 450 prophets of Baal put to death, and Jehu had the prophets of Baal executed (1 Kings 18:40; 2 Kings 10:18-31).

It is worth mentioning that true prophets were sometimes executed or imprisoned because they challenged the political system of the time. John the Baptist was imprisoned and eventually executed for telling the truth to a king who did not want to hear it. Jeremiah foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and was imprisoned for speaking against the city (Jer. 26:11). Micaiah was imprisoned when he spoke against the king of Israel long before it was known whether what he said was right or wrong (1 Kings 22:27). Asa, king of Judah, threw Hanani the prophet in prison for reproving him (2 Chron. 16:7-10). Amaziah, king of Judah, threatened to kill a prophet if he did not stop his prophetic reproof (2 Chron. 25:15-16), and there were other leaders, such as Jezebel, who killed the prophets of God for political reasons of their own (1 Kings 18:13).

From the evidence in Scripture, it is wrong to conclude that if a prophecy does not come to pass, the prophet is a false prophet. True prophets can speak prophecies that do not come to pass for a number of reasons: because of the conditional nature of prophecy; because the people who receive the prophecy do not do what is required for it to be fulfilled; or because a prophecy sometimes focuses more on the “take-home message” than specific details, so sometimes details do not work out exactly as the prophet stated (as in the prophecy of Agabus; Acts 21:10 versus Acts 22:22-24; 26:21).

In contrast, Scripture reveals that false prophets can give prophecies (and do signs and wonders) that are accurate and do come to pass. However, false prophets will ultimately lead people away from God and His written Word whether what they say comes to pass or not. Psychics and mediums do this consistently. They are “spiritual” people, but they are not spiritual in the godly sense of the word. They are in contact with demons, but usually they, and the people they advise, do not know it. This is just one more reason why each Christian needs a good understanding of the Bible. When we know the truth set forth in the Bible, we know when we are being led away from it. If we do not know it, we can ignorantly be led away from God and into sin.

The student of prophecy who understands the above information realizes the complexity of prophecy. Both false prophets and genuine prophets can speak prophecies that are factually correct and/or come to pass. Similarly, both false prophets and genuine prophets can speak prophecies that are not factually correct or do not come to pass. Therefore, looking at whether or not a prophecy comes to pass is not the ultimate test of a true prophet. It is an indicator, especially over time, but it is not conclusive. By having an understanding of how prophecy works, we will not fall into the trap of castigating or ostracizing a true prophet who had a prophecy not come to pass, or accepting into our Christian ranks a false prophet whose words have come true.

Deu 18:21

**“word.”** Here, as in many places in the Bible (and indeed, in Christian speech), the word “word” is used in the sense of a message.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 19**

Deu 19:3

**“the distances.”** The Hebrew is literally “the roads,” but in this context, the “roads” are measured to determine the distances in the territory of Israel.

Deu 19:4

**“in time past.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic and more literally, “from yesterday and the day before.”

Deu 19:6

**“avenger of blood.”** A member of one’s family or clan that would kill anyone who killed someone in the family (see commentary on Num. 35:19 and commentary on Ruth 2:20, “kinsman-redeemer”).

**“while his heart is hot.”** The avenger of blood has just lost a relative and almost certainly a friend, and he is filled with emotional anger even though the killing was an accident.

**“in time past.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic and more literally, “from yesterday and the day before” (cf. Deut. 19:4).

Deu 19:9

**“indeed, you are to keep all this commandment that I command you this day by doing it.*”*** God adds this phrase about obeying Him in the middle of His command to have cities of refuge where a person who killed accidentally. The reason for this addition is to sternly remind the people that the one who loves God obeys His commandments even when he does not want to or does not feel like it. Someone who has just lost a good friend to an accidental killer may not want to let the killer live, but that is the command of God and it must be obeyed or the avenger of blood will bring bloodguilt upon himself and perhaps even on those around him who support what he did.

Deu 19:12

**“so that he dies.”** Murderers are to be put to death.

[For more on the death penalty, see commentary on Exod. 21:12.]

Deu 19:14

**“You must not move your neighbor’s boundary marker.”** Sadly, it was common for the wealthy and powerful to increase their land by moving the ancient boundary markers that were set up in the first one or two generations after the land of Israel was conquered. That was a common way that the wealthy took advantage of the poor and weak in the land. The rich stole land from the disadvantaged and added it to their own by moving the boundary marker. It was cold-hearted and stealing to do that, and brought consequences upon Israel, and will bring serious consequences upon the man himself on Judgment Day (cf. Eccl. 12:13-14).

Deu 19:17

**“before Yahweh, before the priests and the judges.”** The fact that the people who have the dispute have to stand before Yahweh, before the priests, tells us that the people with the controversy were to go to “the place that Yahweh chooses to put His name there,” that is, where the Tabernacle or Temple and the High Priest were, which was eventually at Jerusalem. Although making judgments that settled controversies was one of the jobs of the priests, especially the High Priest, as the kingdom of Israel developed it happened that more and more of the judgment was done by the king. However, as a practical matter, it turned out that many controversies were settled in people’s hometowns by the elders at the gate of the city rather than people going to Jerusalem or where the king was.

Deu 19:19

**“then you must do to him as he had planned to do to his brother.”** The way God deals with perjury is righteous, and if implemented would go a long way toward eliminating perjury in courtrooms. People who lie in court do great damage to the justice system as a whole and also great damage to the individuals whom they lie about. But in most cases, the sentence for perjury is very light if there is any sentence at all, so there is a great temptation to lie in court to further one’s own agenda. The Bible has examples of people who lie in court and thus we can see that it is not only in modern times that society ignores this command of God about what to do with perjurers, this command seems always to have been ignored. For example, what happened to the false witnesses at the trial of Jesus who could not even agree with each other? They testified with the intention of having Jesus executed but Jesus was not condemned at that trial based on anything they said but rather what Jesus himself said to the High Priest. So, by this command of Deuteronomy 19:19, they should have been tried and discovered as false witnesses and executed. But were they? It’s very likely they walked out of the trial as free men, and that is what happens far too often today as well.

Believers must make up their minds that if they want God’s justice in the land then they must learn what God’s justice is and work to ensure that it is then carried out. But as we see here, carrying out God’s justice takes great resolve. Will we really execute a person who lies at the trial of a person accused of a capital crime? Most people do not have the resolve to see that justice carried out, even though word would get around about how perjurers were being dealt with and then witnesses at trials would be much more likely to tell the truth to avoid severe consequences and then true justice could be done. Thankfully, on Judgment Day, God will have the resolve to carry out true justice on those who have done evil throughout their lives, so believers will be able to see true justice done even if they don’t have the resolve to do it themselves.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 20**

Deu 20:8

**“heart melt.”** This is an idiom for a person losing courage.

Deu 20:13

**“All its males.”** The Hebrew uses the word for “male” here, not “man,” which can mean “person; human.”

**“the mouth of the sword.”** The idiom, “the mouth of the sword” is used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Deu 20:16

**“you are not to leave alive anything that breathes.”** The inhabitants of the Promised Land, Israel, were genetically corrupt in a way that made them evil and they could not be healed in any way, nor could they be saved. All that they could do was promote evil, so God commanded that they be killed off (see commentary on Gen. 6:4).

Deu 20:17

**“Devote them to destruction, yes, destruction.”** God commanded that the nations inhabiting Canaan be completely destroyed, and He emphasized that fact by using the figure of speech polyptoton, where a verb is repeated twice but with different inflections, in this case, the verb “devote to destruction.” The Canaanite nations had been genetically corrupted by Nephilim, and could not be godly or redeemed. They had to be destroyed.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

[For information on the Nephilim, see commentaries on Gen. 6:2 and 6:4.]

Deu 20:18

**“so that they do not teach you.”** Note that there is no consideration that the Israelites would teach the Canaanites about Yahweh. As a group, they were genetically evil, although there were some of them that were not genetically tainted, such as Rahab the prostitute and her family.

Deu 20:19

**“you must not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them because you can eat from them.”** This is logical and kind. Also, after the conquest, the people who then inhabit the city will still be able to eat from those trees. Fruit trees take many years to be truly productive, so cutting down fruit trees takes away food from people for many years after the siege.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 21**

Deu 21:1

**“If a corpse is found on the soil that Yahweh your God is giving you.”** Deuteronomy 21:1-9 is an important section of Scripture because it shows that just because a person or a town did not actively sin or commit a crime does not mean that they did not have any responsibility for a sin or crime done near them. Far too often people want to ignore something that they think they had no part in (and in fact did not have an active part in) when in fact their sin, or lack of aggressive obedience to God, helped to open the door for the sin or crime that was committed. The Bible says that God will bless the land and people if they obey Him, but have they been truly obedient? Have you, or the people of your area or town, really obeyed God? Are you and the town steadfast in prayer like God says to be? Do you obey the commands of God like He says to? Did you put the right leaders in place who guide the people in righteousness? All these kinds of things are actually participation in the great war between God and the Devil, between Good and Evil, and they affect the amount of demonic activity in your life and in your community. So when a town falls short of genuinely obeying God it does have some culpability in sinful activities that occur in and around it, and that is why God commanded that if there was an unsolved murder, the elders of the town had to do a sacrifice of atonement to have the sin forgiven. That is also why people in the Bible pray for themselves and the people of the land (cf. 2 Chron. 6:14-42; Neh. 9:32-38).

Deu 21:3

**“a heifer.”** A heifer is a young female cow that has not yet had a calf.

Deu 21:7

**“answer and say.”** “Answer and say” is a common idiom. There is no question spoken, it is an answer or statement about the situation.

Deu 21:12

**“into the midst of your household.”** Biblical households were large and usually the family was large and the extended family lived next to, or even with, a person. So a young woman—likely no older than 15—whom a man brought home as a wife was not just alone with the man, but was with his entire family and extended family. At that point, depending on how well the girl was accepted by the family and treated by them, her life could be a good one or a living hell. No doubt many girls in that situation got treated as slaves by the family.

Deu 21:13

**“take off the clothing of her captivity.”** There is much more to this than we might generally expect. In those ancient days when clothes were handmade and families were large it was quite common that the only clothes a person had were the clothes they had on, and that clothing was usually traditional to the family or clan that the person belonged to. So to take off one’s clothing and put on the clothing of another nation, clan, or family was to abandon one’s family and one’s nation and become a member of another nation, clan, or family, which could be very difficult emotionally. A modern example might be a tried and true Ohio State University alumni having to wear a University of Michigan Jersey all the time. Another example from history was when the Barbary Pirates, who were Muslims, captured European ships and made slaves out of their captives. They made them wear Muslim clothing and the European slaves complained bitterly about it because they felt it betrayed their identity as Christians. For the young captive girl, as difficult as leaving her old family identity might be, the way to peace and success for her was to move forward and become part of the family she now belonged to. That was true for the captive girls from any country. After all, it was a common custom to kill the men and take the women captive.

**“weep for her father and her mother a full month.”** The Law made sure that men who captured a girl to take home and marry gave the girl a full month to adjust to her new situation before the man who captured her had sex with her. To fulfill the Law the man must show some restraint and respect for the girl, not just basically rape her. The Hebrew text is idiomatic and reads “a month of days,” which means a full month. The fact that the girl wept for her father and mother—who were likely dead—for a full month was in keeping with the custom of allowing a full month for mourning someone’s death (see commentary on Deut. 34:8).

Deu 21:16

**“make the son of the beloved the firstborn.”** According to the way God commanded that inheritance be handled, the firstborn son got twice as much as any other son. So if a man only had two sons, the elder would get two-thirds and the younger one one-third. This could be difficult to do. We can well imagine that that wife who was loved would put tremendous pressure on her husband to honor her son by giving him the right of the firstborn. Daughters were not considered for inheritance as they would be part of the family into which they married.

Deu 21:19

**“elders...gate.”** In the biblical culture of the Old Testament, it was the custom that the elders and judges of a city would sit at the city gate (Gen. 19:1, 9; Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:11; 1 Sam. 4:18; Esther 2:19, 21; 3:2; Lam. 5:14; Dan. 2:49).

[For more on the elders at the gate, see commentary on Prov. 1:21.]

Deu 21:21

**“Then all the men of his city are to stone him with stones so that he dies.”** There is no investigation as to the accuracy of the parents’ accusation. The fact that parents would come forward to have a child executed is all the evidence needed, but beyond that, the child lived in the community and his reputation would be well-known. Also, it was the men of the city who stoned the child, the women were excused from that action.

Deu 21:22

**“and he is put to death and you hang him.”** This is not talking about putting a person to death by hanging. The person is killed and the dead body is hung on a tree as a lesson and warning to others.

**“tree.”** The Hebrew word can also allow for this to be a wooden stake. What was actually used in any given case would have been determined by what resources were in the area.

Deu 21:23

**“his body is not to remain all night on the tree, but you are to surely bury him the same day.”** It is amazing that this command in the Law was fulfilled in Jesus Christ even though that fulfillment was not done intentionally. It usually took people two or three days to die on a cross in Roman crucifixion, and since Roman crucifixion was done in part to terrorize the people into submitting to Rome, the Romans had no reason or intention to take Jesus’ body down from the cross in a way that fulfilled the Mosaic Law. Similarly, when the religious leaders shouted “Crucify him” to Pontius Pilate and gave Jesus to the Romans to be crucified, they had no specific intention of having the Law of Moses fulfilled in Christ. But by God’s design, it was the Passover when Jesus was crucified, and the scrupulously religious Sadducees and Pharisees did not want any human body, not just Jesus’ body, hanging on a Roman cross during their feast day (John 19:31). So they directed that Jesus and the people crucified with him be treated in a way that would assure they would all die so the dead bodies could be taken down that day (John 19:32). Jesus, for his part, gave up his life, the others died by the purposely accelerated process of crucifixion. The end result was that, although Jesus had no control over it, and neither the Romans nor Jews intentionally planned it, even in his death on the cross as a sin offering (2 Cor. 5:21) and a curse on our behalf (Gal. 3:13), Jesus fulfilled the Law. His dead body was taken from the cross before sunset—he did not remain all night on the cross.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 22**

Deu 22:1

**“and hide yourself from them.”** This verse is similar to Exodus 23:4. In this context, “your brother” is your fellow Israelite. If you see someone’s animal wandering off, you are not to pretend you did not see it, but you are to take it back to them. This command of God shows God’s concern for personal selflessness and the importance of helping others even if it inconveniences you. Note that God did not say, “take the animal back if you are not busy doing something else.” The fellow Israelite whose animal is wandering may well live several miles away, and rounding up their animal and taking it back to them could take half a day or even more (for animals that have wandered many miles, see Deut. 22:2). Making an effort like that is simply what it takes sometimes to obey God, live a sacrificial life, and build a true community that gives everyone peace and joy.

It is easy to see how to apply this command today. People may not have animals that wander off, but it is common for people to leave things behind when they go places, and many times with a little investigation you can find out who left something and be able to return it to them. Finding something that someone left behind and keeping it is not “finders keepers losers weepers,” it is disobeying God and often even stealing, and it will be brought up in the records on the Day of Judgment.

Deu 22:2

**“near to you.”** In the context of the ancient world when everyone usually walked everywhere, “near to you” was not just a few miles away, but many miles away. A wandering cow or donkey could wander many miles looking for food and water or other animals to mate with.

**“into the midst of your house.”** This could well be understood as “into the midst of your household.” It was common for families to live together in houses that were attached or were very close together, almost like a family compound. The verse is not saying bring the animal into your house, like we might have a dog or cat in the house, although very often that was done for the safety and protection of the animal, especially at night. The person who found the animal was to bring it home to where he lived.

Deu 22:3

**“you are not to hide yourself from them.”** The verse is saying that you are not to ignore lost items that you could return with a little effort. It is noteworthy that the Bible does not even mention stealing. It does not say, for example, “you are not to hide yourself from them and you are not to keep them for yourself.” Stealing was so wrong and so evil it is not even considered in this context, but sadly it is the common sentiment today, “If you leave it and I find it, it’s mine.” No its not! And you do not want that being brought up on Judgment Day. If you have stolen and now cannot return the item, repent and confess your sin so that it is forgiven, and if there is anything you can do to make restitution, do it.

Deu 22:4

**“lift, yes, lift.”** This verse is similar to Exodus 23:5. God is so concerned with people helping and supporting one another that in this example in Deuteronomy 22:4 He uses the figure of speech polyptoton to emphasize how important it is to help each other. In the Hebrew text the verb lift is repeated twice, “lift lift,” but the verb has different cases, such as “lifting lift.” The idea is “you are to surely help him lift” the animal up again. Too often in our modern world we ignore people in need because we “don’t want to get involved,” or “we are too busy.” That is not to be the attitude of the one who follows Christ and God’s commands, we are to extend ourselves to help others.

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

Deu 22:5

**“There is not to be.”** This verse has been mishandled when it comes to application in our modern culture. It has sometimes been said to refer to “pants” and “dresses,” which is not the case. In the biblical culture, both men and women wore robes, although the length and colors were different—even though some of those differences would be hard for us today to distinguish at first glance. Beyond that, the men wore “things,” such as weapons, that a woman was not to wear, and the women wore “clothing” that the men were not to wear—there was a difference between the clothing, etc., that was worn by the different sexes.

The point of the verse is that God created the two sexes, and the difference between them was to be understood and respected, and was also to be reflected in the way people dressed. C. F. Keil writes about “the divine distinction of the sexes, which was kept sacred in civil life by the clothing peculiar to each sex…The immediate design of this prohibition was not to prevent licentiousness, or to oppose idolatrous practices…but to maintain the sanctity of that distinction of the sexes which was established by the creation of man and woman, and in relation to which Israel was not to sin.”[[13]](#footnote-19216)

Our modern culture does not have strict norms on style of dress like the Israelites had, and men and women wear much of the same clothing. Nevertheless, Deuteronomy 22:5 shows us that God wants us to know and honor the distinction between men and women, and to reflect that honor of His creation in the way we dress. There are clearly ways to dress that are more male or more female, and to purposely dress in such a way as to obscure the distinction in the sexes is, as the verse says, “an abomination to God.”

**“a man’s things.”** The first half of the verse, about “man’s things,” is more than just clothing, but anything that in that culture would specifically pertain to a man, such as a weapon. In contrast, the second phrase is specifically about woman’s clothing.

Deu 22:7

**“set free, set free.”** In the Hebrew text, the verb translated “set free” is repeated twice for emphasis because the tendency of people would be to take all the birds because people traveling on the road were generally hungry and any fresh food was welcome.

**“do this so that it will be well with you.”** Cultivating and practicing compassion in one’s life makes life much more of a blessing than being hard hearted, and also God is able to bless people who have compassion for people and animals in many unseen ways. Also, letting the mother go free helps ensure that there will be many birds for future generations. If it is early enough in the nesting season, most mother birds whose nests are destroyed simply build another and lay more eggs.

Deu 22:8

**“make a railing for your roof.”** Almost all houses in the ancient Near East had flat roofs and it would be easy for people to accidentally fall off, so in the Mosaic Law, God commanded that people put railings on the roof. This “law” was part of the Torah (the “instruction.” “Torah” does not technically mean “law,” it means “instruction”). God gives us this instruction about roof railings to guide us, and in doing so shows that if something is inherently dangerous, people should take steps to protect others from the danger. As such, this command in the Torah to build a railing is also God’s instruction to do many other things that keep people safe. This instruction in the Bible legitimatizes building codes and other codes that keep people safe. Of course, society sometimes goes too far with the codes they put in place, but in general, having building codes and other safety codes is godly and has saved many lives. Early in the industrial revolution when there were no safety codes many people in America died on the job due to conditions and machines that were inherently unsafe.

Deu 22:9

**“be forfeited as holy.”** This is a regulation against cross-breeding and trying to change God’s created order, even though it now is part of a fallen world. The plants of anyone who is trying to crossbreed are to be forfeited as holy, and thus taken to the Tabernacle or Temple and burned as an offering so they will not reseed and thus continue to grow. Today this command is regularly ignored, and at some point, it will be clear that God’s people and His creation are worse off for it.

Deu 22:10

**“Do not plow with an ox and a donkey together.”** Although this command directs one to have a respect for God’s created order, it is also about having care and concern for the health and safety of animals. The ox and donkey are mismatched. One would pull harder than the other, shouldering more of the work, and the difference in the height of the animal and the length of the stride means they would not be working together which would make the yoke rub harder on both the animals.

Deu 22:12

**“You are to make yourselves tassels on the four corners of your cloak.”** This law was a repetition and thus an emphasis on the more specific command that God gave in Numbers 15:37-40, which was that the Israelites were to make “tassels,” twisted cloth tassels that had a strand of blue in them, and sew them on the four corners of their outer garments so that they would see the blue tassels and remember to do the Law. It has been said that this command was obeyed by Jews up until their revolt against the Romans, at which time the Romans forbid the outward show of people being a Jew. The Jews responded by making prayer shawls that they wore under their clothing and they put the tassels on those prayer shawls, where they still are to this day.

There is, however, a modern movement by some Jews to put the tassels back on the outer garment that they are wearing as the Law commands. However, that is much more difficult to do today than it was when the command was originally given. In Moses’ day, most people had very few clothes and usually only one outer cloak or robe, so putting a tassel on “the four corners of it” was quite easy (not that the robe had corners, but rather that one can imagine four corners; right front and back and left front and back). Today, however, people often have dozens of articles of outer clothing that they wear depending on the weather, if they work inside or outside, and what they are doing, so trying to put four tassels on the outside garment of everything they wear would be close to impossible. Thus we can see why just putting the tassels on the prayer shawl and wearing that makes practical sense, and is usually what is done by orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jews today.

Deu 22:13

**“hates.”** The word “hate” can have a large semantic range from “hate” to “dislike” to even “ignore.” Here “hates” or “dislikes” is the appropriate meaning.

[For more on “hate” see commentary on Prov. 1:22.]

Deu 22:14

**“when I came near to her.”** To “come near” a girl was an idiom for sexual intercourse.

Deu 22:15

**“elders at the gate of the city.”** In the biblical culture of the Old Testament, it was the custom that the elders of a city would sit at the city gate (Gen. 19:1, 9; Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:11; 1 Sam. 4:18; Esther 2:19, 21; 3:2; Lam. 5:14; Dan. 2:49).

[For more on the elders at the gate, see commentary on Ruth 4:11; and for Wisdom being at the city gate, see commentary on Prov. 1:21.]

Deu 22:17

**“spread the cloth.”** This is the cloth from the girl’s first night of sexual intercourse, which had blood on it. Especially when girls married young and had protected themselves as they grew up it was common for a girl to bleed during her first intercourse, and it was common in some cultures for the parents of the girl to get the sheets on which that first intercourse occurred and keep them as proof that their daughter was a virgin when she married. Today girls usually marry much later, and things like riding a bike or horse (young women used to ride “side saddle” to protect themselves but they no longer do that), or many other activities that girls now participate in break the hymen such that they do not bleed when they first have sexual intercourse.

Deu 22:19

**“100 shekels.”** 100 shekels is roughly 2.5 pounds (1.13 kg). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

Deu 22:22

**“If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband.”** In the biblical culture, adultery was punishable by death. Adultery destroys the family unit, which God designed to be the central piece and very foundation of human society, and so it is a very grievous sin. Although the wife often could not divorce her husband, the man had no excuse for adultery. The Law allowed him to divorce his wife or take a second wife. One of the Ten Commandments is to not commit adultery, but it does not give a punishment if one does commit adultery (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18).

Deu 22:24

**“the girl because she did not cry out in the city.”** In the biblical world, houses were very close together, even touching one another, and there were no windows, so what happened in one house could usually be clearly heard in the nearby houses. In fact, it was common in the culture for neighbors to know most of the business of their neighbors. Also, families were large and between older parents who stayed at home and a large number of children, some of whom were usually home, it was difficult indeed to have any privacy in the biblical world, and people grew up expecting none. So, for example, while modern couples might be embarrassed to have their children hear them having sex at night, in the biblical world where the whole family slept together in the main room of the house (which was often the only room), to the children, Dad and Mom having sex at night was just an annoying sound they made. Also, the girls were usually married and out of the house at 14 or 15, and the boys at 16 or so. So any girl who was approached by a man to rape her could just cry out and she would have lots of help in just seconds.

Deu 22:29

**“50 shekels.”** Fifty shekels is roughly 1.25 pounds (567 grams). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

**Deuteronomy Chapter 23**

Deu 23:1

**“may not enter into the assembly of Yahweh.”** “The assembly of Yahweh” was the voting members of the Israelite community. God is invested in the future, and a man who cannot have children is likely to be concerned for himself and his generation and not the future generations, so he is not allowed to vote in the assembly.

Deu 23:2

**“A son born from a forbidden union is not to enter the assembly of Yahweh; even to the tenth generation.”** The Hebrew text says more literally, “A forbidden union one,” but voting members of the assembly were all men, thus the translation, “a son.” A forbidden union would be adultery or incest. It may seem harsh to forbid a man born of adultery from voting in the assembly of Israel, but such a person is likely to be much less inclined to strictly keep the Law of Moses because they look on their own situation and want to make allowances for it. The idea of the tenth generation is that memories were long in biblical times and generations were short, it was common for girls to give birth by age 16, so the stain of an adulterous birth would be remembered and affect the family for many generations. Some scholars believe that ten generations is just an idiomatic way of saying “forever,” based on the way it is used in the next verse, Deuteronomy 23:3.

Deu 23:3

**“An Ammonite or a Moabite is not to enter the assembly of Yahweh.”** The reason that Moabites and Ammonites were forbidden from entering the voting congregation of Israel is due to the fact that those nations were hostile to Israel when Israel came out of Egypt, and they ended up being defeated in battle. Feelings are strong in the biblical culture and last a long time, so there was a very good chance that a Moabite or Ammonite would harbor prejudices against Israel that would hurt Israel at some point. Some commentators think that the prohibition of Moabites and Ammonites entering the congregation of Israel applied only to Ammonite or Moabite males, not females. This would better explain how an Israelite man, Boaz, married Ruth (see also Ruth 1:4).

**“even to the tenth generation...forever.”** It seems that in this context “the tenth generation” was a cultural way of saying “forever,” which becomes clear when we see the way the verse ends and also when we compare it with Deuteronomy 23:6.

Deu 23:4

**“they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia to curse you.”** The three-chapter record of Balak, king of Moab, hiring Balaam to curse Israel is Numbers 22-24. Also, Balaam came back to the area and was killed in the Israelite conquest of Midian. He had coached the women of Midian on how to entice the men of Israel into pagan worship (Num. 31:8, 16).

Deu 23:8

**“The sons of the third generation who are born to them may enter into the assembly of Yahweh.”** Because of the blessings of God upon Israel when they were being obedient to God, and because of the righteous laws that obedient Israelites lived by, and because the Israelite culture was kind and did not have things such as human sacrifice, Israel always had people from other cultures living among them (note the mixed multitude of people who came out of Egypt with Israel; Exod. 12:38). Also, foreigners were allowed to become circumcised and join with Israel in things such as keeping the Feasts of Yahweh (cf. Exod. 12:48). So foreigners from certain countries who lived for generations in Israel and were circumcised were allowed to join the assembly of Israel. Thus not all the people of Israel were pure descendants of Jacob even though over time it surely happened that descendants of foreigners who joined with Israel would intermarry with genetic Israelites (note Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah the Hittite).

Deu 23:10

**“because of what happens to him by night.”** That is, because of a nocturnal emission of semen, which made a person ritually unclean for the day and until he performed the cleansing ritual. The man was not to go back into the camp until he was ritually clean. The idea behind this was the fact that God was holy and would not dwell among people who were not clean. God was invisibly among the people in the army camp of Israel, blessing and protecting them, but if they allowed sin and uncleanness in the camp then God would leave and they would be defeated by their enemies. Any emission of semen made the man unclean, and if he had sex with a woman she was unclean too (Lev. 15:16-18).

Deu 23:11

**“sunset.”** This could be translated “evening,” but since the word “evening” was used to describe both the early evening of about 3 p.m., and the later evening around sunset, the word “sunset” is both accurate and more precise.

Deu 23:12

**“a place outside the camp.”** People had bowel movements outside the camp and buried their poop, which kept the camp much more sanitary and liveable. This was true of the Israelite army when they went to fight and true of the Israelite tent camp as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. One of the things that set the Israelites apart from other nations was that they had sanitary laws such as this one that kept human waste outside of where people lived and the children played, and this kept the Israelite people much more healthy than other nations generally were. The people knew nothing of germs or what actually caused disease, so God did not try to explain that. Instead, He said that He walked in the camp among the people, and being a holy God, He did not want to encounter any human waste—we might go so far as to say that God did not want to step in any poop (Deut. 23:14). This made sense to the Israelites, who understood that Yahweh occasionally took on human form to better fellowship with his creation (see commentaries on Acts 7:55 and Gen. 18:1). God walked in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8), and He said He walked in the camp of Israel, so the people kept their camp clean for Him. Today we know about germs, bacteria, viruses, and such and understand much more about how disease spreads and why proper sanitation is important to a healthy society, so just like the Israelites of thousands of years ago, we put sanitation laws in place.

Deu 23:15

**“Do not deliver to his lord a slave who has escaped from his lord to you.”** The wording of Deuteronomy 23:16-17 seems to be such that it is referring to a runaway slave from a foreign nation who is running to Israel for asylum. Virtually every country in the ancient Near East had extradition treaties such that runaway slaves would not be harbored but would be returned to their owners. However, Israel was not to return such runaway slaves but allow them to live in Israel. It is likely that this is an outward expression of the holiness and mercy of God, who showed His characteristics through His law as it was lived out by His people.

**“lord.”** The word “lord” in this verse is a grammatical plural, “lords” but it is referring to one lord and is translated that way in the versions. It sometimes happens in Hebrew that a singular word like “lord” is pluralized, and that is done for different reasons, although the reasons may not be immediately apparent.

Deu 23:17

**“no cult prostitutes.”** Verses such as Deuteronomy 23:17 are one of the reasons that so many modern nations make prostitution illegal. God did not want there to be cult prostitutes or even prostitutes (Lev. 19:29) in Israel. A major reason for that was that it damaged the value of the family unit, which God designed to be the center and stability of human society. Also, cult prostitutes in particular made the worship of pagan gods more attractive to men, who were often drawn to the sex (cf. Num. 25:1-3).

Deu 23:18

**“the wages of a dog.”** The fact that male prostitutes had anal intercourse and were entered from the back like dogs have sex with one dog on the back of the other led to male prostitutes being referred to as “dogs.”[[14]](#footnote-13669) This verse is not about an actual dog, although there are some scholars who think that it is. The wages of “the two of these,” the wages of both the male and female prostitute, were an abomination to Yahweh and were not to be given as an offering to Him. Money made in ungodly ways is unacceptable to God, just as prayers prayed by people engaged in ungodly activities are not acceptable to God (see commentary on Amos 5:22).

Deu 23:19

**“your brother.”** Here meaning fellow Israelite; this is made clear by the next verse (see Deut. 23:19-20).

**“interest on money *that you lend*, interest on food, *or* interest on anything.”** Israelites were not to charge interest on anything they loaned to a fellow Israelite, period. No interest on money, food, or anything else. The underlying reason is that all Israel was part of a covenant community that was promised the blessing of God if they obeyed God. So, if anybody needed anything it must be some sort of crisis, and to loan with interest in a crisis rather than freely helping out in the crisis only makes the matter worse and does not help the collective community be strong in the things of God. Also, not freely lending to help a fellow Israelite in a time of need is to deny that we have what we have only because of the blessing of God. Especially in an agricultural community, the saying is true that “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” Sadly, this regulation was not followed by many in Israel, and it was common for wealthy people to lend with interest. However, Jeremiah told God that he did not (Jer. 15:10). This command in Deuteronomy 23:19 was stated earlier in the Torah (cf. Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-38). Christians could well apply this law to themselves and fellow Christians as part of the general guidance in the New Testament: “let us do good to all *people*, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Gal. 6:10).

Israelites were allowed to charge interest to non-Israelites, however (Deut. 23:20).

Deu 23:20

**“to a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you must not charge interest.”** The command to not charge interest on a loan to a fellow Israelite occurs in several places in the Torah (cf. Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-38; Deut. 23:19-20).

Deuteronomy 23:19-20 became a pivotal part of the debate about money in Europe in the Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages, the Church stated that a Christian could not charge interest to another Christian based on this verse and the others that say the same thing, so nations set up banks and lending institutions run by Jews, who could then charge interest to Christians. In that way, wealthy Christians and institutions avoided the rule established by the Chuch and continued to charge interest through their Jewish intermediaries, and the Jews became the bankers and money lenders throughout Europe and became wealthy themselves. It was the wealth and power of the Jews in charge of the money that was often one of the reasons the Christians hated them, and Jews became the primary bankers and were associated with various activities having to do with money for centuries.

Sadly, as often happens, the ungodly and immoral rules established by the Christian Church and enforced by the state about Christians not charging interest to other Christians deepened the divide between Jews and Christians, and their mutual distrust and the apparent financial advantages to being a Jew no doubt hindered any efforts to evangelize Jews. It is also worth noting that Deuteronomy 23:19-20 has been used as evidence that Jews hate non-Jews, but that is misreading the Bible. It is not morally wrong to charge reasonable interest on a loan of money or for the use of property. So it is not morally wrong for Jews to charge interest to non-Jews. Rather, it is a blessing and a show of support and unity that a Jew would not charge interest to another Jew. A Jew charging interest to a non-Jew but not to a fellow Jew is not hating the non-Jew, it is showing great love and support for the fellow Jew.

God hates the bondage of debt, and if one Jew can help a fellow Jew be prosperous by not charging interest on a loan, then that is a godly thing to do. Leviticus 25:35-38 explains more about the purpose for not charging interest: it is to support the poor people. “If your brother has become poor and his hand cannot support him among you, then you are to uphold him” (Lev. 25:35). These verses bring up a moral issue for Christians who want to make money by making loans with interest. If we are really interested in having a strong Christian community instead of being individually wealthy, we should apply these verses to fellow Christians. However, that can be difficult to do for various reasons, including the fact that the Christian community is not as homogenous and distinct as the Jewish community was; some people borrow money and then waste it; some people borrow money for “wants” and not “needs,” and the list goes on. On the other hand, however, there are clearly times when fellow Christians are in need and it is a good and godly thing to help support them.

Deu 23:21

**“require, yes, require.”** Vows to God are serious, and God expects people to follow through with what they vow. He emphasizes that point by the figure of speech polyptoton, doubling the verb “require.” Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 says a very similar thing to what is said about vows in Deuteronomy.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“counted as a sin to you.”** If a person vows a vow to God but then does not pay it, his vow was a lie, and lying is a sin. Also, generally in those times, a legitimate vow was much more formal than just making a statement into the air. It would begin with a statement into the air, but would often be formalized with some kind of sacrifice or offering to God making it clear to everyone that if God does what I am asking, then I will do (whatever his vow is) in return. So although the stated vow may have been private, a vow with a sacrifice or offering was not.

Deu 23:22

**“it will not be a sin.”** It is never a sin not to vow, so if you are considering making a vow, consider it carefully. If you vow, you are required to fulfill the vow.

Deu 23:24

**“When you come into your neighbor’s vineyard.”** Although the Law allowed for someone to go into the crops of their neighbor, it is obviously just as a matter of passing through, and the law was mainly meant for travelers, who might not be able to carry all the provisions they needed for the journey. This law is not saying that you did not have to plant your own crops because you could just go eat from your neighbor’s crops. This is an example where the Law had to be applied in a common-sense manner.

**“your soul.”** Many versions have something like “appetite” or “desire,” and in this context, these are legitimate translations of *nephesh,* ”soul.”

Deu 23:25

**“pluck the ears with your hand.”** A person walking through a grain field may eat some grain as he walks, but he is not to actually harvest the grain; it was planted and cared for by someone else. God allows travelers to eat as they travel because God says that if Israel will take care of one another that He will bless the yield of the crops and there will be plenty for everyone. Also, the farmers are to have care and concern for fellow Israelites as they travel and be concerned that they are not hungry and weak from lack of food.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 24**

Deu 24:1

**“he is to write her a bill of divorce.”** A woman in this situation may be forced to leave with little except what she was wearing. She has no parental rights; any children belong to the family of the husband, and the physical possessions of the household do too. A woman got to leave with what she was wearing, and that was a major reason that it was customary for a woman to wear a lot of jewelry and even use silver and gold pieces as jewelry. That money could give her a start in life. Jesus Christ referred to this law of divorce in Matthew 5:31 and 19:7.

Deu 24:3

**“second husband.”** More literally, the “following” husband.

Deu 24:4

**“may not take her again.”** Divorcing a wife was easy in the biblical world, as we see from Deuteronomy 24:1-3, which could lead to men divorcing their wife in the heat of passion, but then wanting to reconcile later. This law, that if he divorced his wife and she married again, that she could not later go back to her first husband, would have given husbands a reason not to divorce a wife in the heat of passion. Ahasuerus divorced his wife Vashti when he was drunk and angry, and seems to have regretted it later (Esther 2:1). Thus this law may have helped save many marriages that would have otherwise ended in divorce.

**“after she has been made unclean.”** Sexual intercourse made a person ritually unclean, so the fact that the woman had married another man made her unclean to her former husband. However, interestingly, she could marry a third man whom she had never been with before.

Deu 24:5

**“and bring happiness to his wife.”** The wife would be happy to have her new husband with her at home, but beyond that, there is a good chance that in that year she would become pregnant, and it was a blessing to the woman and to the whole family for her to have a baby.

We must keep in mind that in the biblical culture most people lived in clans and in very close proximity to their relatives. Also, it was the custom that a woman left her family and joined the clan of her husband’s family. Genesis 2:24 says a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, but that is not what happened in the physical world, it was the woman who left her family and joined the husband’s family and clan. Since it was typical for a girl to be married around 12-14 years of age, we can see that it would be very unsettling and even scary for a girl of 12-14 years of age to be pulled from her family and taken to live in another clan that might someday travel from her own clan. Furthermore, there was no easy communication in those days, and especially for women, it was not common for them to travel outside the village where they lived. That meant that for a young wife to see any familiar family member could be rare or even basically never, and even more so once she started having children which would certainly restrict any travel she might have once been able to do. So in order to allow the young wife to become acclimatized to her new social environment the Law of Moses provided for the husband to stay home with her the year after they were married and thus provide some stability, protection, and love for her. During that first year, the man would have his regular job, but he would not be away from the house engaged in war or doing things involved with public duty.

Deu 24:6

**“hand mill…upper millstone.”** It was the custom in biblical times to make bread every day, which is one reason Jesus prayed, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3). The women, or slaves, ground the grain into flour, and the most common way they did that was with a hand mill made of two circular stones, one set on top of the other. The lower stone did not move while the upper stone turned and the weight of the upper stone put pressure on the grain and ground it. Most often two women would sit across from one another and turn the upper stone together, which is why Jesus said that two women would be grinding at the mill when one was taken and the other left (Matt. 24:41; Luke 17:35). The upper stone was lighter than the lower stone, but still quite heavy, and Abimelech, one of Gideon’s sons, received a deadly wound when he was attacking a city and got too close to the wall and a woman threw an upper millstone that hit him in the head (Judg. 9:53). Pictures of these hand mills can be found in most books on the customs of the Bible.

Bread was the staple of life for most people, and the Bible refers to it as the “staff” upon which people lean to sustain them (see commentary on Lev. 26:26). That is why here in Deuteronomy the Law of Moses did not allow a person to take a millstone as security for a debt or pledge. People had to be allowed to live even if something happened and they could not repay a debt or return what they borrowed. Almost every house ground grain daily, so the sound of the hand mill was a joyous sound in a village and signaled that life was normal and good. When Babylon attacked Judah and burned the Temple, Jeremiah portrayed the extent of the destruction by saying that the sound of the millstones would be heard no more (Jer. 25:10), and centuries later the apostle John portrayed the destruction of “Babylon” the same way (Rev. 18:22).

Grinding grain was always the work of the women of the house or of slaves, and that custom is highlighted in a few different verses in Scripture. For example, when Job was professing his innocence to his three friends, he said that if he had committed adultery, “then let my wife grind for another, and let others bow down upon her,” referring to his wife being with another man (see commentary on Job 31:10).

When the Philistines captured Samson and blinded him, they made him grind grain like a woman to heap indignities on him and break his spirit (Judg. 16:21). Some pictures portray Samson pushing a huge grain mill like the kind normally turned by animals, but that is not at all what happened. First, Samson had lost his strength and would not have been able to turn the commercial grain mills; they were just too heavy. Second, Samson ground grain, “in the prison house,” and there would not have been a commercial grain mill in the prison. Lastly, the Philistines were not interested in testing Samson’s strength, they were interested in demoralizing him and breaking his spirit by making him do women’s work. The Babylonians did the same thing to the young men they deported from Judah when they captured Judah and sacked and burned Jerusalem; they made the young men use the hand mills and grind the grain (Lam. 5:13). Also, Isaiah foretold that when the Persians conquered Babylon, they would make the highborn women grind grain (see commentary on Isa. 47:2).

If a person lived in a larger city, there likely would have been a baker with a large commercial grain mill. The commercial mills had very large stones that were turned by donkeys or oxen. The commercial mills had upper and lower stones like the small hand mills used by the women. The bottom stone did not move and looked sort of like a huge stone ice cream cone turned upside down, except it did not come to a sharp tip, but was rounded off. The upper stone was like another ice cream cone that fit over the top of the bottom stone, but it too was rounded off and had a hole in the top. The grain was poured into the hole in the top of the upper stone, and as the animal turned the mill, the grain was ground and sifted down through the stones and was collected at the bottom. The large commercial mills ground the grain much more finely than the small hand mills used by the women, and the miller was paid for grinding by taking a percentage of the flour. Commercial millstones weighed many hundreds of pounds, and they were the millstones that are mentioned by Jesus Christ when he spoke of having a millstone tied around the neck (see commentary on Mark 9:42; cf. Matt. 18:6).

Deu 24:7

**“then that thief must die.”** The death penalty for kidnapping is also found in Exodus 21:16.

Deu 24:10

**“to get the thing that he has pledged.”** That is, to get whatever it was the person pledged to give as security for the loan. The fact that the wealthy person was going to lend something to the poor person did not give the wealthy person the right to bully the poor man and act like he had a right to his life and property. The poor man may have been poor, but his home was still his home and not property that the wealthy man had a right to invade, and just go right in and take what the poor man said he would give as security for the loan. God respects and protects the rights and property of the needy, as we see from this law in Deuteronomy 24:10. The person may be needy, but they are still God’s creation and His people and He loves them and honors them for who they are, and everyone else should too.

Deu 24:12

**“you must not sleep in his pledge.”** If the person was truly destitute it would be likely that the only thing that he owned that was of value would be his outer robe, which was both a protection from the weather during the day and the blanket that kept him warm at night.

Deu 24:13

**“return, yes, return.”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton, in which the verb is doubled for emphasis. God wants to be very clear that the robe taken as a pledge on the loan will be given back by sundown so the poor person has something to sleep in. Note that the most important thing in the verse is not the wealthy person getting a return on what he has lent, but for him to act righteously before God. On the Day of Judgment, the rewards from God for living righteously will far outweigh any material thing that could be gained here on earth in this life.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Deu 24:14

**“You are not to oppress.”** The context makes it clear that the specific type of oppression being spoken of in this verse is not paying a hired servant at the end of the day. Poor people depended on getting paid at the end of every day, and then they could buy their “daily bread” with the money. Not paying them was a cruel oppression. However, although the context is about not paying the worker daily, the vocabulary, “do not oppress,” refers to all the other types of oppression as well. God’s command is to love others, and anything short of that is evil in God’s eyes.

Deu 24:15

**“you are not to let the sun to go down on him.”** In the biblical world, workers worked until sundown but not past that time because once it became dark life became difficult and dangerous. There were no truly effective lights to give light to what people were doing or where they were walking, so to make a worker work until dark was cruel and put the worker in danger and thus was a sin.

Deu 24:19

**“it is to be for the foreigner, for the fatherless and for the widow​​.”** God has great concern for the poor and disadvantaged. In several places in Scripture He commands people to leave food for the poor (cf. Lev. 19:9-19; 23:22; Deut. 24:19). The blessing of God on one’s life for caring for the widow, orphan, and disadvantaged far outweighs any extra money one could earn by being stingy and keeping everything that grew in the field, or every dime that you earn (cf. Prov. 28:22).

Deu 24:20

**“beat *the olives off* your olive tree.”** This refers to the biblical custom of harvesting the olives off the olive tree by beating the branches of the tree with long poles until the olives fell off. This custom was common around the biblical world, and is illustrated on Greek vase paintings; in fact, it was in use in some places until very modern times. Sheets of cloth were spread under the tree to collect the olives. Sadly, when the olive tree is beaten, some of the new tender shoots that would produce olives the next year are damaged, and so it often happens that olive trees only yield a good crop every other year.

Deu 24:21

**“you are not to glean it.”** To “glean” a field, fruit tree, or vineyard was to go back after the harvest and look for any remaining grain or fruit. There would almost always be some produce remaining, and it was to help feed the disadvantaged. It is worth noting, however, that the disadvantaged were expected to glean for themselves and thus make some effort to provide for themselves. The farmer was not responsible for gleaning the harvest and then giving it to the disadvantaged. God designed people to work (cf. Gen. 2:15), and so working for what one has instills a pride and purpose in life that is very important for one’s overall well-being, and it would be good if societies would figure out how to help the disadvantaged provide for themselves rather then just give them things. Of course, there are people who cannot work at all, and they have to be provided for differently.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 25**

Deu 25:1

**“guilty.”** The Hebrew word translated “guilty” also can be translated “evil.” Thus the sentence can legitimately be translated, “and declare evil the evil one,” but in this context or a court of law the evil one is “guilty.”

Deu 25:2

**“in his presence.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “before his face,” but the meaning of the English phrase “be beaten before his face” is unclear. The person convicted as guilty was to be beaten in the presence of the judge who oversaw the punishment.

**“*and* by number.”** The number of lashes is determined by the crime of the guilty person. The maximum number of lashes allowed by the Mosaic Law was 40 (Deut. 25:3). In time the custom of the Jews was not to give a person more than 39 lashes because if there was a miscount it would be breaking the Law to give more than 40.

Deu 25:3

**“then your brother would be contemptible in your eyes.”** The guilty person may be guilty of a crime, but he or she is still a human being to be respected. Even if the person is disliked, that does not give the one dealing out the punishment the right to treat them in an ungodly manner. Corporal punishment such as whipping can be very effective in deterring crime even though its use is generally condemned today, but there is a limit after which it is simply cruel. That is why God said give no more than 40 lashes.

Deu 25:4

**“You are not to muzzle the ox when it treads out the grain.”** This is an example of the Mosaic Law instructing people in compassion. After the grain harvest, the grain (wheat, barley, etc.) needed to be threshed to get the kernels of grain separated from the stalk so that it could then be winnowed and eventually ground into flour. One common way to thresh the grain was to put the grain on the stalk into a huge pile and let a cow or cows walk over it again and again, and their hooves would knock the grain off the stalk. But the grain harvest was usually April through June, and it was often very hot in Israel at that time of year and the cattle would be hungry, so the compassionate thing to do was to let the cows graze on the grain stalks as they worked. The cows would eat very little compared to the work they saved their owners if the owners had to thresh the grain another way. A godly person takes care of their animals (Prov. 12:10). This lesson in compassion is meant to extend far beyond cattle to all animals and people, but the cattle are given as an example.

Deu 25:5

**“If brothers live together.”** This does not mean in the same house. It was common for families to live very close together, including in a family compound. Or if the family lived in tents, the tents would be very close together.

**“The duty of a husband’s brother.”** The “duty of a husband’s brother” was to ensure that the dead brother had a son who could then inherit the dead brother’s land and keep the land in the family. It is noteworthy that keeping the land of Israel in the families to whom it was allotted was more important socially than the potential happiness of the widow who might not have particularly liked her husband’s brother. But in any case, she would stay in the extended family that she had been a part of and was accustomed to.

Deu 25:7

**“gate of the city to the elders.”** In the biblical culture of the Old Testament it was the custom that the elders of a city would sit at the city gate (Gen. 19:1, 9; Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:11; 1 Sam. 4:18; Esther 2:19, 21; 3:2; Lam. 5:14; Dan. 2:49).

[For more on the elders at the gate, see commentary on Ruth 4:11; and for Wisdom being at the city gate, see commentary on Prov. 1:21.]

Deu 25:9

**“in the presence of the elders.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “before the eyes of the elders,” that is, while the elders watch.

**“answer and say.”** The original text of the Old and New Testaments has the phrase, “answered and said” or “answer and say” more than 100 times in the Bible, and it can sometimes be confusing because “answered and said” is often used when no one asked a question. The phrase is an idiom, so it gets its meaning from the cultural use and not the specific meanings of the words in the phrase. The person who “answered and said” may not have been answering a direct question from someone, but they were answering and addressing the situation that was presenting itself before them. For example, in this case, the widow answered the situation she was in with her brother-in-law, and spoke to him.

**“house.”** This is one of the places where “house” clearly means “household,” i.e., the family.

Deu 25:11

**“brother.”** In this context, a “brother” is a fellow countryman, usually a fellow Israelite. It does not mean a family member although it could be; fights between members of the extended family were not uncommon.

**“genitals.”** The Hebrew word is from the root “shame,” and literally means “that excites shame” (or perhaps “that elicits shame”). Common translations are “genitals,” “private parts,” and “secret parts.”

Deu 25:12

**“cut off her hand.”** This seems harsh, but children were the safety and security of the family, and a woman who grabbed a man by the testicles endangered him and his wife, and perhaps his entire household. Women understood this and there is no record in the Bible of a woman ever grabbing a man’s testicles when men were fighting.

Deu 25:13

**“differing weights.”** The literal Hebrew is “a stone and a stone.” This command was understood in the Old Testament culture. The command is not saying a traveling merchant cannot have different weights in his bag, i.e., a one-shekel weight, a five-shekel weight, a 20-shekel weight, etc. What it is forbidding is having differing weights but claiming they are the same weight. Unscrupulous merchants often kept stones of different weight in their bag that only they could easily tell apart; stones that were a little heavier for buying and stones that were a little lighter for selling, so that they bought a lot and sold a little. But that kind of dishonest dealing is an abomination to Yahweh (Lev. 19:35). Cheating in buying and selling has been around for thousands of years, but God sees and will repay. It is better to have a little less in this life and more in the next than more in this short life but less in the next.

[For more on trading using honest balances, see commentary on Prov. 11:1.]

Deu 25:14

**“differing measures.”** The Hebrew is literally, “an ephah and an ephah” (an ephah was a dry measure, equal to about 23 quarts (22 liters)). This is the same kind of command as in Deuteronomy 25:13. An unscrupulous homeowner who bought and sold grain might have two ephah measures that looked very similar; a larger one for buying and a smaller one for selling.

Deu 25:18

**“lagging behind you.”** The Hebrew word “lagging” contains the idea that the people were weak, unsteady, feeble. The weaker among the Israelites were lagging behind, and the Amalekites attacked them, not the stronger warriors up in the group who could more readily defend themselves. For that cowardly act, God declared war on the Amalekites.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 26**

Deu 26:2

**“you are to take of the first of all the fruit of the ground.”** From reading the whole chapter we see that the person was to take the firstfruit of his tithe to the Tabernacle/Temple after he had distributed the tithe in his city and had given it to the disadvantaged; the widow, orphan, foreigner, and Levite (see commentary on Deut. 26:13).

Deu 26:5

**“A wandering Syrian was my father.”** The “Syrians” were more properly called “Arameans,” and “father” refers to “ancestor.” In this case, the ancestor is Jacob, who was a shepherd and thus wandered the land. Jacob was the one who went down to Egypt with his family. The reference to being a “Syrian” is unclear, but may be due to the many years he spent there and the fact that the two women he married, Rachel and Leah, and their female slaves that he had children by, were all Syrian. The word “wandering” is translated from the Hebrew word primarily meaning “lost,” but it is possible that in this context it refers to Jacob’s old age and ailing state, that he was ailing and close to death. Jacob was an old man of 130 when he went to Egypt (Gen. 47:9), and died not long after he got there (Gen. 45:28; 46:30). Thus, for example, Young’s Literal Translation reads, “a perishing Aramaen is my father.”

Deu 26:10

**“that you, O Yahweh, have given me.”** When the ground produces a crop of any kind, we should always recognize the blessing of God in making that possible. Without God’s blessing, humanity would starve to death. We live in a fallen world and between direct demonic activity to thwart our work, bad weather, disease, and animals and insects that would eat what we are trying to grow, no crop would ever come to harvest. God’s blessing and holding off evil is why human effort to grow a crop is at all fruitful, and people should recognize that.

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Deu 26:12

**“within your gates.”** That is, inside your cities. The disadvantaged were not to be badly treated and kept out of the city as if they were lepers or something deplorable. They were to be pitied and helped.

Deu 26:13

**“in the presence of Yahweh.”** This is somewhat confusing because at first reading it seems the person has traveled with his tithe to where the Tabernacle or Temple is (Deut. 26:2), and thus where the ark of the covenant, the High Priest, and Yahweh were, but yet he had to distribute his tithe to the people that were in his city (Deut. 26:12). A closer reading reveals that before traveling to the place where the Tabernacle/Temple was with the firstfruit of his tithe, the man had distributed all of the tithe except the firstfruit to the disadvantaged people in his city. Then he traveled to where the Tabernacle/Temple was with the firstfruit of his tithe and set that before Yahweh. That is why when he got to where the Tabernacle/Temple was he could say that he had already given the tithe to the disadvantaged.

**“the holy *portion*.”** The “holy portion” is the tithe. The man is saying that he has not kept any of what he was supposed to tithe, but has given it all to Yahweh by giving it to the disadvantaged.

**“commandments.”** The Hebrew text is singular, “command,” but it is a collective singular and thus translated “commandments.”

Deu 26:14

**“nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean.”** If an unclean person touched any food, that food would then be unclean also, and the unclean person would then eat it (or get rid of it some other way) while he or she was unclean. An unscrupulous person could “accidentally” touch some of the tithe while they were unclean and then the unclean food would have to be eaten instead of being given to the disadvantaged.

**“nor given *any* of it for the dead.”** It was customary for family and friends to gather and have a funeral meal together after burying someone who had died. It could happen that someone who wanted to save his own food could use the excuse that the people at the funeral meal had been disadvantaged by the sudden loss, and so he could use the food that was supposed to be given to the widows, orphans, etc. and feed it to those gathered for the funeral.

**“I have listened to the voice of Yahweh my God.”** In this context, the word “listened” also has the meaning “obeyed.” The man listened to and obeyed the commands of Yahweh, which is certainly the wise way to live.

Deu 26:15

**“Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people.”** This is a short but heartfelt and powerful prayer. People should regularly pray for God to bless the land they live on and the people of the land.

Deu 26:17

**“Today you have declared Yahweh to be your God, and that you will walk in his ways.”** The wording of Deuteronomy 26:17-19 shows that what has now happened that day in the camp of Israel is that the people have renewed their covenant with God. The disobedient and grumbling generation that came out of Egypt had died off, and God was now dealing with a new generation that would soon be under Joshua’s leadership because Moses would die this month. In this renewal of the covenant God made at Sinai (Exod. 24), God restates that He will bless the people and set Israel above the nations, and Israel will be a treasured possession to Him; and the people of Israel restated that they will listen to and obey the Law, the words of Yahweh. That Israel renewed their covenant with God that day explains the “today” language in this chapter and the next (cf. Deut. 27:9), and is said to be a cutting of a covenant in Deuteronomy 29:1.

**“and listen to his voice.”** The word “listen” also means “obey,” the Hebrew word has both meanings. The people of Israel declared that they would listen to God and obey Him, and believers today should do the same.

Deu 26:19

**“and in name.”** The word “name” refers to reputation and fame. If Israel will obey the commands of God, He will bless them in such a way that everyone else will see it and thus hopefully be drawn to Him too.

**“as he has spoken.”** Some versions have “as he has promised,” because generally when God says something about what He will do in the future, His statement has the force of a promise because He never lies. However, what He says is often conditional depending on how the other party involved acts. In this case, we see that God intended to elevate Israel, but she behaved so wickedly that for most of history He abandoned those plans.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 27**

Deu 27:1

**“Moses and the elders.”** The phrase “Moses and the elders” is unusual because Moses usually speaks to the people by himself in Deuteronomy, but now he teams up with the elders to tell the people to keep the commandments. The shift is subtle but important. Moses will die before Israel crosses the Jordan, and it will then be the responsibility of the elders to ensure that the people keep God’s commandments, and this is especially true as Israel scatters and lives in different cities in the Promised Land. As we see from history, the elders did not do a good job at that, and shortly after Joshua died the people turned to the idols of the land.

Deu 27:2

**“on the day.”** The phrase “on the day” is quite literal but is idiomatic for “when” or “at the time.” It does not literally mean on that day, but within a reasonable time.

Deu 27:3

**“when you have crossed over.”** That is, crossed over the Jordan River. At this time, Israel was camped in the plains of Jordan, east of the Jordan River and east of Jericho.

Deu 27:5

**“you are not to wield an iron tool on them.”** The altar was to be built according to God’s direction for altars (see commentary on Exod. 20:25).

Deu 27:6

**“burnt offerings.”** The sacrifice of the burnt offering is spoken of in Leviticus 1 among other places.

Deu 27:7

**“you are to eat them there.”** When people offered peace offerings or sin offerings, they got to eat a large portion of the meat of the sacrifice. The people generally did not eat much meat because there was no way to keep any leftovers without them spoiling, so even though offering a sacrifice was usually due to sin or a feeling of separation from God, it was also a time of rejoicing and having a wonderful meal. Also, since no one could eat that much meat alone, it was common for family and friends to be there. For example, when Elkanah went yearly to offer a sacrifice to Yahweh, his extended family went with him and he gave portions of meat to everyone (1 Sam. 1:3-4). God commanded that the meat from the sacrifice had to be eaten that day or the next, but any meat still left on the third day had to be burned (Lev. 19:6).

Deu 27:8

**“write very clearly.”** Hebrew has a lot of letters that if not written carefully can be confused, so writing very clearly was important if people and future generations were to be able to understand what was written.

Deu 27:9

**“the Levitical priests.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads, “the priests the Levites.” Every priest was also a Levite.

[For more on the Levitical priests, see commentary on 2 Chron. 30:27.]

**“This day.”** Israel had just renewed their covenant with God (see commentary on Deut. 26:17). Israel had wandered for 40 years in the desert wilderness and the generation that came out of Egypt had died off after 40 years of complaining and disobedience. Now this next generation of people renewed the covenant with God and so God declared them to be His people, and it was with that elevated status that they would cross the Jordan River under Joshua’s leadership within the next month or so.

Deu 27:12

**“these *tribes* are to stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people.”** Moses had spoken to the people about Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim earlier (Deut. 11:29).

Half of the twelve tribes of Israel were to stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, and half the tribes were to stand on Mount Ebal and speak the curses of Law. The priests and the ark of the covenant, which held the tablets with the Ten Commandments of the Law that Israel had sworn to obey, were in the valley in the middle. The meaning is clear enough: people either obeyed the Law and were blessed, or they disobeyed the Law and were cursed. There is no middle ground or fence to sit on. A person was either obedient to God or disobedient.

Deu 27:15

**“a carved image or a cast image.”** That is, an idol carved from wood or stone or an idol cast from metal.

**“and sets it up in secret.”** If a person made an idol in public, his sin is already covered under the Ten Commandment and his punishment is covered in the Law. So this law in Deuteronomy 27:15 goes further. If a person makes an idol in secret, the Bible is saying that it is still a sin in God’s eyes and the person will be cursed.

This should be a stern warning to the people today who have an idol, which can be an object in their house or which they wear on their body, a statue, “lucky object,” amulet that wards off an evil eye, or any kind of thing to which they ascribe the power to help or bless them and which receives special attention due to that fact. An idol does not have to be a statue of a known god or goddess to be an idol. In God’s eyes, an idol is anything that is somehow paid homage to by receiving special attention and ascribed spiritual power. Those objects steal the honor and power that should be ascribed to God alone, and besides that, they can attract demons into one’s life because the demons crave the honor being given to the object. God says the person with a secret idol will be cursed, and believers should take that very seriously and do what 1 John 5:21 says: “guard yourselves from idols.”

Deu 27:16

**“dishonors.”** The Hebrew word translated “dishonors” can also mean “shows contempt for,” or “insults.” All those meanings would be wrapped up in that word. This is the opposite of the fifth of the Ten Commandments: “honor your father and mother.”

Deu 27:17

**“Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor’s boundary marker.”** The fact that the command not to move someone’s boundary marker is stated twice in Deuteronomy (Deut. 19:14; 27:17) shows that it was a temptation to do but also that it was a very serious sin in God’s eyes. Stealing someone’s land is a crime and serious sin. Also, see commentary on Deuteronomy 19:14.

Deu 27:18

**“Cursed is anyone who leads a blind person astray on the road.”** Although this command is very specific, we must remember that it is part of the “Torah,” the “Instruction,” and therefore has both specific application and wider application. In this context, the wider application is that handicapped people are not to be mistreated “for fun” or for profit. For example, a person can steal from the purse of a blind man and not worry about being identified in court or chased down the road, but just because there is no specific law about stealing from the blind does not mean that it is not a serious sin in God’s eyes (there is, of course, a command in the Law about not stealing).

Deu 27:19

**“Cursed is anyone who denies the justice due to the foreigner, fatherless, or widow.”** This command is similar to the one in Deuteronomy 24:17, but comes with a curse. This verse highlights the justice of God and the concern that people should have about how they will fare on Judgment Day when each person is judged by God because it was often the case that the disadvantaged did not do well when they tried to bring wealthy and powerful people to court and get justice. The courts were often biased, and besides that, powerful people could cause trouble in many ways. The disadvantaged often found it easier and/or safer to try to live with the problem rather than to take it to court, and that may be the reality in human courts. However, on Judgment Day, when people stand before God, people will get what they deserve, so it is wise for a person to obey God now so that they will be blessed by Him later (see commentary on Ps. 62:10 and 2 Cor. 5:10).

Deu 27:20

**“Cursed is anyone who lies with his father’s wife.”** Deuteronomy 27:20-23 are four verses that deal with sexual sin, and the sins mentioned would normally be done in secret. So often these sins would not be discovered by people, but if they are left unconfessed and unatoned for, they will be revealed and have consequences on Judgment Day (see commentaries on Ps. 62:12 and 2 Cor. 5:10). An important point to make in this context is that God designed the family, a father and mother with children, grandchildren, parents and grandparents, to be the center and stability of human society, and acts that tear the family unit apart are abhorrent to Him. This is not just a section of rules to make people “be good,” it covers situations that disrupt God’s design and purpose for the human family.

Deu 27:21

**“Cursed is anyone who lies with any kind of animal.”** Sex with animals was strictly forbidden and was punishable by death (see commentary on Exod. 22:19).

Deu 27:22

**“Cursed is anyone who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother.”** This is also covered in Leviticus 18:6.

Deu 27:23

**“Cursed is anyone who lies with his mother-in-law.”** This is also stated in Leviticus 18:17.

Deu 27:24

**“Cursed is anyone who strikes down his neighbor in secret.”** Up until quite recent times, it could be relatively easy to kill someone and not get caught. But the murderer should not think that he or she would get away with it. God sees everything, and the person is cursed by God, which in the end is considerably worse than being caught by man.

Deu 27:25

**“Cursed is anyone who takes a bribe to kill an innocent person.”** Murder, or purposely putting someone’s life in danger such that they are killed is a serious crime and is punishable by death. People have the right to live in a safe society, and murderers make it unsafe, so God says to put them to death. There is a lot about murder and the punishment for it in the Bible.

[For information on murder, manslaughter, and the death penalty for murder, see commentary on Exod. 21:12. Verses that speak about murder and manslaughter include Exod. 20:13; 21:12, 28-30; Deut. 5:17; and Num. 35:9-34.]

Deu 27:26

**“Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by doing them.”** Deuteronomy 27:26 is quoted in Galatians 3:10. It is a summary verse that includes all the other verses about keeping the Law and pronounces a curse upon the people who do not keep the Law, which is everyone. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 in Galatians 3:10, and quotes Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12, to show that no one can be righteous in God’s sight by keeping the law, a point Paul makes in Galatians 3:11. No one can be righteous in God’s sight by keeping the Law because no person with a sin nature—and all humans since Adam and Eve have a sin nature except Jesus—can keep the Law. So everyone is cursed, and the wages of sin is death, so everyone is destined to die unless God has some remedy for it, which thankfully He does. God sent His Son Jesus to be a curse for us (Gal 3:13) and to die in our place for our sins (Rom. 5:6-11, 18-19). So anyone who accepts Christ dying in their place by confessing Jesus as Lord and believing that God raised him from the dead will be saved and live forever (Rom. 10:9-10).

Here in Deuteronomy 27:26, the Hebrew word translated “uphold” could also be translated “fulfill” or “confirm.”

**Deuteronomy Chapter 28**

Deu 28:1

**“listen, yes, listen.”** In a context like this, the word “listen” can also be used idiomatically and have the meaning “obey.” Some scholars refer to this as the pregnant sense of the word. Many Hebrew words are used with an idiomatic or pregnant sense (see commentary on Luke 23:42). Here in Deuteronomy 28:1, God repeats the verb “listen” twice in a row, with the verb in different cases, which is the figure polyptoton. The double use of “listen” is for emphasis, and thus means “listen intently” and then obey.

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

**“Yahweh your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth.”** In the Old Testament the Jews were not commanded to evangelize like Jesus’ disciples were (Matt. 10:5-7; Luke 10:1-10), and believers in the New Testament are (cf. Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:20). Instead, God said He would bless Israel as a nation and that would draw people to God. God designed Israel as a whole nation to be a “holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). If Israel obeyed the commandments of God the whole country would be blessed with rain in its season, abundant crops, no disease, and victory over its enemies (Deut. 28:1-14). Then people of other nations would notice and be attracted to Yahweh and His laws and way of doing things. At that point, if a person of another nation wanted to come to Israel and live among the Jews they could do that, and if they wanted to be assimilated into the Jewish population and be able to participate in the voting congregation and in the feasts such as Passover, with the exception of a couple enemy nations, they could do that too (Exod. 12:48).

The situation changed for believers after the resurrection of Christ. God does not work anymore through a “holy nation” like the Jews and Israel. Instead, God and the Lord Jesus Christ work in every believer individually to evangelize the whole world. Believers are to evangelize non-believers (Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:20), and have the ministry of reconciling others to God and Christ and the message to do it with (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Today believers live in every country and are to evangelize there, and every believer is blessed and equipped with the gift of holy spirit (Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:13-14) and has “Christ in them” (Col. 1:27). Due to the New Birth believers are guaranteed salvation and thus have a wonderful future hope to look forward to. That salvation, gift of holy spirit, and hope, combined with the blessings of God one gets when living an obedient life, is designed to make Christians so peaceful, joyful, and thankful that other people are drawn to them and then through them learn about Jesus Christ and the wonderful gift of salvation. In a very real sense, a major purpose for every believer is to make God and Christ look good so that people are drawn to them and accept Christ as Lord and get saved and have everlasting life.

[For more on the shift between the Old and New Testaments when it comes to evangelism, see commentary on Acts 1:8. For more on a Christian’s salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on the New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3. For more on how to get saved and how easy it is, see commentary on Rom. 10:9.]

Deu 28:3

**“Blessed.”** Here in Deuteronomy 28:3-6, God emphasized the word “blessed” by putting it first in the sentence just like Christ did in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-11). Starting a sentence in the same way over and over is the figure of speech anaphora, and it is done for emphasis.[[15]](#footnote-10638) God wanted Israel to know and clearly understand that if they would obey Him they would be blessed, in the same way that Christ wanted people to know that if they were humble and obeyed God they would be blessed. However, in the next verses, God uses the figure anaphora to emphasize to Israel that if they did not obey God they would be cursed (Deut. 28:16-19). It is worth noting that God pronounces seven blessings and six curses. Seven is the number of spiritual perfection, whereas six is the human number and is the number of imperfection and failure and thus the number of the antichrist is 666, the fullness of imperfection.[[16]](#footnote-28790)

[See figure of speech “anaphora.”]

Deu 28:5

**“kneading bowl.”** The kneading bowl was the bowl in which dough was placed and kneaded to make bread. The blessing is that if Israel obeyed God they would have an abundance of food, and bread was the staple of their diet.

Deu 28:6

**“when you come in...when you go out.”** This is the figure of speech polarmerismos, and it occurs when two opposite things are juxtaposed such that they refer to a complete whole. For example, a person gets up in the morning and goes out to do daily work, then comes in at night, so the phrase is an idiomatic way of referring to the totality of living life. In this case, “come in” (into your house or tent) at night is juxtaposed with “go out” in the morning, likely because the Hebrew day started and ended at sunset, not at midnight like our Western day does. So a person started their actual day by going in to where they lived and then went out of it the next morning.

[For more on polarmerismos, see commentary on Josh. 14:11.]

Deu 28:7

**“by seven roads they will flee before you​.”** The opposite of this will happen if Israel disobeys God (Deut. 28:25).

Deu 28:13

**“listen to.”** The Hebrew word “listen to” is often used idiomatically for “obey.” Here it means “listen to and obey” (see commentary on Luke 23:42). God says over and over again that His blessing upon Israel was conditional upon their being obedient to Him.

Deu 28:16

**“Cursed.”** Deuteronomy 28:16-19 has six phrases that start with “cursed,” which is the figure of speech anaphora and is done for emphasis (see commentary on Deut. 28:3). The city and the open field are really the only two places a person could be, so saying “city” and “field” together like this refers to being cursed where ever you are, thus there will be a continual curse upon you.

Deu 28:19

**“when you come in...when you go out.”** This refers to going into one’s house or tent at night, and going out of it in the morning. “Coming in” goes before “going out” because the Hebrew day started at sunset, so on any given day a person came in at night before they went out in the morning, which is the opposite of what we do in modern Western society. Here, “coming in” and “going out” is the figure of speech polarmerismos, where two opposite things are juxtaposed such that they refer to a complete whole. Some people in the southern United States use the expression, “That is the long and short of it,” meaning that is all of it, which is also polarmerismos. In effect, what God said was “You will be cursed throughout your whole life.” This text and others like it are the very words of God and need to be taken seriously because God was certainly serious when He said them.

[See figure of speech “merismos.”]

Deu 28:20

**“Curse, Confusion and Rebuke.”** The Hebrew text treats these three words as if they were real things, not just concepts. The JPS Torah Commentary notes, “all three terms are reified with the definite article, which can be expressed in English by capitalization.” The JPS commentary uses the uncommon word “reified,” which means to consider something abstract as a material or concrete thing.[[17]](#footnote-15059) Everett Fox[[18]](#footnote-31749) capitalizes the three words as if they were real entities, not concepts, and The JPS Torah Commentary does too. That Curse, Confusion, and Rebuke are treated as real entities may be as simple as that they were made to be real by the figure of speech personification in the same way that “Wisdom” and “Folly” are made out as real entities in Proverbs. However, it is also possible that Curse, Confusion, and Rebuke, refer to real demons who have those names or titles and they attack and afflict the people who ignore or disobey God.

Furthermore, God draws the attention of the reader to these three words because they rhyme. When an author purposely puts rhyming words together to catch the reader’s attention and/or to emphasize something, that is the figure of speech paronomasia. In Hebrew, the words are “*ha-me’era, ha-mehumah, ha-mig’eret”* (transliteration in the JPS commentary).

[For more on the figures of speech personification and zoomorphism, see commentary on Prov. 1:20. For more on the figure paronomasia, see E. W. Bullinger.[[19]](#footnote-15235)]

[See figure of speech “paronomasia.”]

**“Rebuke.”** The Hebrew word means a rebuke, which is basically telling the person they did something wrong or can’t do what they want to do. In other words, people are being told “no” to what they want to do. The NRSV, NAB, and ESV translate the word as “frustration,” which is certainly what being rebuked produces.

Deu 28:23

**“The heavens that are over your head will be bronze, and the earth that is under you will be iron.”** This is a graphic way of saying that there will be no rain from the sky and the earth will become hard as rock and unproductive.

Deu 28:24

**“Yahweh will make the rain of your land powder and dust​.”** One of the great lessons of the Bible is that the behavior of people affects the land that they live on. This lesson is throughout the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1, 12, 15, 22-25, 38-40; Lev. 18:24-25; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10). (See commentary on Lev. 18:25).

Deu 28:25

**“by seven roads you will flee before them​.”** This is the opposite of what God said in Deuteronomy 28:7. We see this played out many times in the Bible. When the people of God obeyed God, there were miraculous victories, but when they disobeyed there were stunning defeats (see commentary on Josh. 11:8).

Deu 28:26

**“Your dead body will be food for all birds of heaven and for the animals of the earth.”** In a culture where family tombs were common and family and community ties were strong, to not have family or friends bury one’s dead body was considered a terrible curse. In fact, many people believed (falsely, but it was a very widely held belief) that a proper burial was important for a comfortable existence in the afterlife. Thus the threat of not being buried but having one’s dead body eaten by animals and birds was a horrifying threat of unspeakable loneliness and rejection, both on this earth and in the afterlife.

[For more on the curse of not being buried, see commentary on Jer. 14:16.]

Deu 28:27

**“festering rash.”** The exact meaning of the Hebrew word in this context is unknown. Suggestions include “festering rash,” “festering sores,” and “scabs.” Whatever it is, it is not good.

Deu 28:28

**“madness.”** That is, insanity.

**“blindness.”** In this context, “blindness” likely refers to mental blindness. Not seeing the things that you need to see and understand in life. However, some scholars think that insanity, physical blindness, and confusion are symptoms of diseases that will come upon Israel if they disobey God. It has been suggested that people might have syphilis, the symptoms of which include insanity, blindness, and confusion, but those symptoms could be from other things as well, or as seems more likely, the blindness could be mental blindness, not physical blindness.

Deu 28:30

**“lie with her.”** Although it is not directly stated, these three curses are the opposite of what exempts a man from having to go to war, and therefore they strongly imply that this curse relates to being defeated by an enemy, especially in light of the next verse, which mentions the enemy taking and killing livestock (Deut. 28:31). According to Deuteronomy, a man was excused from having to go to war if he had built a new house but not yet lived in it, planted a vineyard but had not yet gotten to enjoy its fruit, or was pledged to marry a woman but had not yet gotten to consummate the marriage (Deut. 20:5-7). But this curse is exactly what would happen if Israel was attacked and conquered by another country. Ordinarily, the women would be raped and the men killed or captured and taken away into slavery. Israel had a choice: they could obey God and be abundantly blessed, or they could disobey Him and suffer terrible curses that were in many cases the opposite of the blessings.

Deu 28:32

**“but your hand will have no power *to do anything*.”** The Hebrew text is idiomatic, and more literally, “but your hand is not to God,” where “God” is used for strength or power. The phrase means you are powerless, in this case, powerless to do anything about the situation.

Deu 28:33

**“all *your* days.”** The text is more literally, “all the days,” and depending on whether or not the people repent and obey God, this oppression could be multigenerational.

Deu 28:35

**“knees and thighs.”** The specific reference to knees and thighs seems to be sexual and related to sex and childbearing. Although the reference to knees is somewhat obscure, the knees did have something to do with childbearing (cf. Gen. 30:3), and the “thigh” was commonly used as a euphemism for the sexual organs (see commentary on Gen. 24:2). So these boils were not just painful and “inconvenient,” they stopped one from having sex and bearing children, which may have something to do with why God calls them “evil.”

**“evil.”** Although the Hebrew is not often translated “evil” in the English versions, it is the Hebrew word “evil,” and if they prevented people from having children the boils were truly evil.

**“from the sole of your foot to the crown *of your head*.”** After saying the boils are on the knees and thighs and thus likely prevent childbearing, God says the boils will actually be over the entire body.

Deu 28:36

**“you and your king whom you have set over you.”** God anticipates that the people will decide to put a king over them, which they did, but not for over 400 years. It is a sad fact about fallen human nature that many people would rather have someone make decisions for them than make the decisions themselves, so the fact that Israel would one day want a king over them instead of an invisible God was predictable. God saw it coming and spoke of the day Israel would have a king. God spoke more about the king in Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

**“and there you will serve other gods of wood and stone.”** There is so much evil behind that statement. The people of Israel would turn away from Yahweh, who is loving and righteous, and follow “gods” of wood and stone, which are not gods at all but just man-made idols. But those lifeless idols have demons associated with them, demons that are very real and very evil, and so the idol gods are evil and cruel, and demand such things as human sacrifice and obedience to rules and regulations that are anything but righteous.

Deu 28:44

**“He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him.”** So the foreigners living in Israel will prosper and do well while the people of Israel will do poorly and have to borrow from the foreigners among them.

Deu 28:46

**“they will be for a sign and for a wonder.”** In Deuteronomy 28:1-14, God told Israel some of the many ways they would be blessed if they obeyed God. So it is appropriate that now He tells them that if they disobey Him and are experiencing the curses and problems that are mentioned in Deuteronomy 28:15-68, those curses and problems are to be signs to them that they are being disobedient and need to return to Him. Many times people disobey God in ignorance and do not realize they are disobeying God, so God tells Israel that if they are having the problems mentioned here in Deuteronomy, they should examine the Word and examine their lives and find out what they are doing that all these curses should be happening to them.

Deu 28:50

**“will not respect the elderly.”** The Hebrew text is idiomatic, and more literally, “will not lift up the face of the elderly.”

Deu 28:52

**“in all your gates.”** Here, “gates” is put by metonymy for the cities that have the gates, so the meaning of the text is “It [that enemy nation] will besiege you in all your cities.” Many English versions have “cities” or “towns” even though that translation is not literal. It is appropriate to put “gates” for “cities” in this context because the gate was the weakest point in any fortified city and was a major focus of any siege.

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

Deu 28:54

**“his eye will be evil.”** The “evil eye” is a Semitic idiom for being greedy and stingy. Deuteronomy 28 is revealing how the people of Israel will be cursed if they do not keep God’s Law. There will be such shortages that even the man who is tender among the Israelites will have an evil eye toward his family, that is, be stingy and selfish when it comes to even them. Biblically, an evil eye is greedy or stingy; while a “good eye,” or a “single eye,” is generous. This verse shows us that terrible times can cause people to turn against their families, and in the siege, the man will be stingy and will withhold good from his family and keep it for himself, which is the fallen human nature at its worst.

[For more on idioms involving the good eye, see commentary on Prov. 22:9. For more on the idiom of the evil eye, see commentary on Prov. 28:22.]

Deu 28:58

**“this book.”** The “book” is actually a scroll, and the Hebrew word means “writing, what is written, document.”

**“awe-inspiring.”** The Hebrew word is related to “fear” (the same word for “fear” used earlier in the sentence), and can mean “awe-inspiring” or “fear-inspiring.” The two concepts are related, and a good part of one’s awe for God should come from one’s recognition of God’s power, holiness, and righteousness, and that He is not to be trifled with but treated with some level of fear, much like electricity.

Deu 28:62

**“few in number.”** The implication in the Hebrew text is “few men” in number, meaning the strength and defense of the nation is gone.

Deu 28:63

**“plucked up from the ground.”** God uses vocabulary that compares disobedient Israel to an unwanted plant, a weed, that is plucked up from the ground and destroyed.

Deu 28:66

**“hang in doubt.”** People’s lives will be uncertain and hang in suspense as to what will happen next and what will happen to them. There will be constant anxiety and distress.

**“night and day.”** The Jewish day started at sunset, so “night and day” is how the Jewish day went.

Deu 28:68

**“in ships.”** The Hebrew vocabulary as we understand it today does not make any sense because Israel left Egypt and went overland to the land of Israel. The area is mostly wilderness and desert, and so it is not possible for Israel to return to Egypt the way they came out “in ships.” There is no water. It has been suggested that the text may be referring to sailing back to Egypt from the coast, but that would not fulfill the Scripture because Israel did not come out of Egypt that way. There is some evidence from the Ugaritic that the word may mean “at ease” or “casually,” and thus voluntarily, and that would make sense and certainly be a curse, but at this time there is no way to confirm that.[[20]](#footnote-11001)

**29:1.** In the Hebrew Bible the verse that is numbered Deuteronomy 29:1 is numbered Deuteronomy 28:69, and it is more logical that it is the end of chapter 28 because it points back to the covenant God made with Israel and the covenant promises. Also, the verse that is Deuteronomy 29:2 in the English versions is most naturally the start of a new subject.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 29**

Deu 29:1

**“These are the words.”** In the Hebrew Bible this verse, which is numbered Deuteronomy 29:1, occurs in Deuteronomy 28, and is numbered 28:69. That placement at the end of chapter 28 is more logical than making the verse Deuteronomy 29:1, because the verse points back to the covenant God made with Israel and the covenant promises. Also, the verse that is numbered Deuteronomy 29:2 in the English versions is most naturally the start of a new subject, and would have been more logically numbered as Deuteronomy 29:1.

**“the covenant that Yahweh commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel.”** This was not a new covenant, but a renewal of the covenant made when Israel first left Egypt (Exod. 24).

Deu 29:4

**“but Yahweh has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see and ears to hear, until this day.”** This verse is using the Semitic idiom of permission (cf. Exod. 4:21). It is not that God somehow blinded the people’s minds so they could not know what He was asking or hear His commands until this very time. For the 40 years of the wilderness wandering He had begged and pleaded with Israel to obey Him, and His commands were clearly communicated. In the same way that Pharaoh hardened his heart when he heard God’s commands, the people of Israel hardened themselves against God’s commands and did not want to know or obey them, and in the Semitic idiom that is stated as if God had not given them a heart to know Him. But now, at the end of the 40 years of wandering, this next generation that was about to go into the Promised Land was more willing to hear and obey, although many of them still held on to some idols and ungodly practices.

Deu 29:5

**“I have had you walk for 40 years in the wilderness.”** The Hebrew text is causative, and perhaps could even be translated “I made you walk.” *Young’s Literal Translation* is “I cause you to go.” Once God realized that the generation who came out of Egypt was not mentally prepared to go into the Promised Land, God had them live in the wilderness where He sustained them with manna until that generation died off and a new generation arose (Num. 13:1-14:38).

Deu 29:6

**“bread...wine...beer.”** Israel has not existed in the wilderness for 40 years on the ordinary staples in people’s diet, but on the manna that God has provided.

Deu 29:7

**“this place.”** Not that exact location in the plains of Moab where they were currently camped, but the Transjordan, east of Israel where Sihon and Og had their kingdoms.

Deu 29:9

**“So you are to keep.”** The connection between Deuteronomy 29:8 and 29:9 is not very obvious, but is that Sihon and Og were ungodly so they were struck down, “so you are to keep” God’s words or you will be struck down also. Sadly, over the years, Israel did not keep the covenant and they were eventually struck down.

Deu 29:10

**“You are stationed *here* today.”** The Hebrew is not the normal word for “stand,” but a more formal word that means “stationed,” meaning more like formally placed. Israel is where it is, stationed in the plains of Moab after having conquered much land in the Transjordan and now poised to enter the Promised Land because Yahweh is with them and has fought battles for them. They are not where they are by their own power, but by the power of God, and now they are stationed and ready for conquest. Note the formal mention of Israel’s society: “heads,” tribes, elders, officers, and men.

Deu 29:11

**“from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water.”** The foreigners who left Egypt with Israel and some who may have joined them along their journey were allowed to be with Israel and enjoy their protection and the manna they ate, but they were given the more menial tasks to do. However, no matter how menial the task was, the foreigner was still there and still was going to go over the Jordan with Israel and get to enjoy the covenant blessings of the Promised Land. The foreigners may have menial tasks to do, but they made the right choice by going with Israel and getting to know Yahweh.

Deu 29:12

**“for you to cross over into the covenant of Yahweh.”** This seems to be strange wording about crossing over into the covenant, but it is tying together the crossing over the Jordan River into the Promised Land with the covenant that God made with Israel. The covenant and oath included that God would be Israel’s God and Israel would be His obedient people, and God would bring them into the Promised Land. In this case, the “covenant” and “oath” are what God promised as part of the covenant and oath that He made with Israel; “covenant” and “oath” are a metonymy for what was promised in the covenant and oath. The word “cross over” figures prominently in the book of Joshua, especially the early chapters (cp Josh. 1:2), and it shows up here almost as a primer to what is coming (see commentary on Josh. 1:2).

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

Deu 29:13

**“and that he can be for you a God, as he spoke to you.”** This is a very deep statement because that Yahweh “can be a God” for Israel implies all the things that God (or even a god) is supposed to do for His people, for example, all the blessings in Deuteronomy 28. Being a God for people is certainly no figurehead position.

Deu 29:15

**“and also with the one who is not here with us today.”** This phrase is not referring to people who are not physically with the congregation of Israel that day due to physical uncleanness or temporary absence. It is referring to the future generations of Israel who will be affected by what this generation does. In the same way that that very generation was affected by what their fathers and mothers had done and had to grow up in the wilderness because of their parents’ disobedience to God, many future generations would be affected by what they did. For example, those future generations got to live in the land that they conquered, but those future generations also had to battle with the pagan peoples that they did not conquer for one reason or another. Every person is affected by what their ancestors did, and every generation affects some of what happens in the generations after them. Thus, living a godly and wise life is very important to God and to people.

Deu 29:18

**“a man or woman or clan or tribe.”** Due to the fallen nature of humankind, sin can spread if it is not checked, and what begins with one person can spread to an entire tribe.

**“lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood.”** Here the congregation is to watch out for people among them who ignore the covenant and worship idols. In Hebrews 12:15 the leaders are to watch for bitter roots among the congregation and deal with them, while here the congregation is to do that. The curse in Deuteronomy 28 is a curse on the whole nation, and it could be that some people could sin but if the rest of the congregation does not that the sinner would get the blessings of the congregation while personally living in sin. However, if enough people do that and sin, then the scales would start to tip and Israel would begin to experience some of the curses of Deuteronomy 28, so the congregation is warned to watch out for people who personally sin.

Deu 29:19

**“This will lead to the sweeping away of well-watered *land* and the dry.”** This is an idiomatic phrase that means that when part of the congregation sins and brings the curse of God on the congregation, that the innocent and guilty will both be swept away.

Deu 29:20

**“Yahweh will not pardon him.”** A person who sins and remains unsaved in the midst of an obedient nation may receive the blessings that the nation gets in this life, but will still be judged by God on Judgment Day and at that time he will be annihilated in the Lake of Fire and have his name blotted out of existence.

[For more on unsaved people being annihilated and not tortured forever see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“will crouch upon him.”** In this verse, the curse is portrayed as a crouching animal, just as it is in Genesis 4:7 when sin is portrayed as an animal crouching at the entrance of Cain’s tent. Portraying the curse or sin as an animal is the figure of speech zoomorphism. Actually, this zoomorphism can be much more accurate than a simple figure of speech because disobedience to God’s commands can open the door for demons who then come upon the sinner and afflict them.

[For more on the figures of speech personification and zoomorphism, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

Deu 29:21

**“the curses of the covenant.”** In the Hebrew text, the word “curse” is singular, but it is a collective singular where all the curses of the covenant are considered to be one giant curse and not a lot of different and unconnected curses. When a person breaks one part of the Law he is considered to have broken the whole Law.

Deu 29:23

**“Admah and Zeboiim.”** These are cities that were close to Sodom and Gomorrah and that were destroyed when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed (cf. Gen. 10:19; 14:2, 8; Hos. 11:8).

Deu 29:26

**“bowed down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**“and that he did not assign to them.”** This is the figure of speech tapeinosis (“belittling” or “deprecation”).[[21]](#footnote-10593) Although it is mainly used today for calling a person or thing by a derogatory name, classically tapeinosis was used to make a negative statement in order to magnify or intensify the opposite. A good example is Romans 3:3, which says, “What if some did not believe?” The truth is the opposite. Only “some” did believe, the majority did not believe. The understatement catches our attention and thus magnifies the actual situation. Here, it is not that God did “not assign” Israel pagan gods to worship, He absolutely forbade the worship of pagan gods, and the tapeinosis catches our attention and causes the reader to pause and consider the truth of the situation, thus magnifying it.

[See figure of speech “tapeinosis.”]

Deu 29:29

**“The secret things belong to Yahweh our God.”** The context of this verse is the Law, and how obedience or disobedience to it will affect the future of the nation of Israel and individually the people in Israel. Exactly how the future will play out—the secret things—will be determined by Yahweh, but the things that are revealed—the Law and how to obey it—are the responsibility of the people of Israel.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 30**

Deu 30:2

**“listen to his voice.”** In this context, the word “listen” also includes the idea of “obey.” If the people don’t obey, then they have not really listened.

[For more on this idiomatic sense of “listen,” see commentary on Luke 23:42.]

**“you and your children.”** In other words, each whole family; and since the “you” is plural, the whole nation of families. We will see as the history of Israel develops, especially in books such as Judges, that the elders often obeyed God but the children, the younger descendants, did not, and evil came upon them. God wants every entire family, and thus the entire nation, to obey Him.

Deu 30:3

**“restore your fortunes.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “turn your captivity,” but it is idiomatic and refers to restoring the blessings or fortunes of the people. Some English versions are more literal while some have the idiom.

Deu 30:5

**“your fathers.”** That is, your ancestors.

Deu 30:8

**“But you, if.”** The “if” is not in the text but is supplied from the context.[[22]](#footnote-14160)

Deu 30:15

**“I have set before you this day life...and death.”** The choice to live forever or die forever is a choice that God gives to every person. God is being genuine here. He has no reason to lie or trick people. God created people with free will and the choice is ours. Wise people humble themselves before God and choose life. There are times when God gives us this choice and it is more immediate; between living and dying on this earth (e.g., Jer. 21:8).

**“life.”** In the scope of Scripture, this is both “life” (a blessed, successful life) now and everlasting life later. Deuteronomy 30:15 is an example of the word “life” having two meanings—life now and life later. When a word has two or more meanings, or a meaning that is much more expansive than just the common dictionary definition (such as often happens when a word is used idiomatically) such as “life” and “good” have here, or “life” and “death” do in Deuteronomy 30:19, scholars sometimes refer to the word as having a “pregnant sense,” as if the word could have a baby that was like itself. In this case in Deuteronomy 30, the words “life,” “good,” and “death” have a pregnant sense in that they all refer to the here and now as well as the next life, the hereafter.

[For more on the pregnant sense of some of the words in the Bible, see commentary on Luke 23:42.]

**“good.”** “Good” in this context primarily refers to success and prosperity now, although it would include salvation and everlasting life later.

**“death.”** In the scope of Scripture, this is both a short life here on earth and everlasting death later.

[For more on “death” being actual death, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“evil.”** “Evil” in this context primarily refers to evil or bad things happening in this life: suffering and adversity and “bad things” of every kind, although it would also include everlasting death.

Deu 30:16

**“in that I command you this day.”** This phrase and the verse show how God has set before each person life, good, death, and evil. God sets life and death before us by giving us commandments and showing us how to live a godly life, and we choose what happens by either walking in God’s ways and obeying His commands or rejecting God’s ways and being rebellious against Him. Deuteronomy 30:15-16 are integrally connected, although many English versions break them into two sentences. God does not just say that He sets before us life and good and death and evil. He tells us He has done that by commanding us to love Him, walk in His ways, and follow His commands. Then the way we choose to live is the choice we make either to live or die. In a few verses (Deut. 30:19), God makes it explicit that we choose life or death (“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life”). On the Day of Judgment no one will be able to say, “I never made a choice,” because the way a person lives is their choice. In essence, Deuteronomy 30:15, 16, and 30:19 say, “Today I have set before you life and death in that I command you to love God, walk in his ways and keep His commandments—so choose life.”

In this same general context, Deuteronomy 30:19-20 says the same basic thing as Deuteronomy 30:15-16: that each person chooses life and blessing by making the decision to obey God.

Deu 30:17

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Deu 30:19

**“witnesses against you.”** The heavens and earth were not witnesses in a trial that very day, but rather, the heavens and earth were called to hear what God had done for Israel and to be willing to be witnesses against Israel should they ever accuse God of not giving them a choice between life and death, and of not encouraging them to choose life. In Ezekiel 33:11 God declares that He does not have any pleasure when wicked people die, and he urges the wicked to turn from their evil ways and live. On the Day of Judgment there will surely be some wicked people who are facing annihilation in the Lake of Fire who will accuse God of never giving them the choice to live forever.

The heavens and the earth will be around forever in one state or another, so they are a good witness for God—they won’t be absent on the day of the trial. Furthermore, God speaks to them about what He does (Deut. 32:1; Isa. 1:2) and says to the people that the heavens and earth will be His witnesses against them (Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28). Moreover, the very nature of the heavens and earth point to a creator. There is more and more evidence for intelligent design in the creation around us, and Romans 1:20 says that God’s power and divine nature can be understood from what He has made. That, combined with the innate ability that mankind has to know good from evil (Gen. 3:22), means that a person should know to find God and then obey Him. If a person chooses to ignore God, that is his choice and God will honor that choice, but it is a poor choice and will result in the person’s death.

The idea that inanimate things that would be around for a long time could be witnesses to an oath was common in the culture and occurs at different times in the Bible (cf. Gen. 31:52; Josh. 24:27; Mic. 6:2).

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“choose life so that you will live—you and your seed—.”** This is very similar to Deuteronomy 30:15-16 in that Deuteronomy 30:19-20 are one sentence and God asks each person to “choose life,” which we do by living a godly lifestyle and obeying God. Note that the sentence reads, “choose life so that you will live—you and your seed—by loving Yahweh your God, by obeying his voice and by holding fast to him.” God tells us exactly how to live a successful life here and now and have everlasting life later: love God, obey God, hold fast to God.

Deu 30:20

**“by loving.”** The Hebrew can be translated “by loving,” which makes very good sense in English (cf. CEB, *Geneva Bible* (1599), NAB, NASB, NRSV, TNK, The Schocken Bible). Deuteronomy 30:20 tells us how to make the choice to live (see commentary on Deut. 30:16; 30:19).

**“for he is your life.”** The parenthetical reminder is that Yahweh is the true source of life. No one should think that if they keep a certain set of rules and regulations they will live successfully here on earth and live forever later. All life comes from God, and obeying God and walking in His ways is not to be a rote mechanical process, but the outward demonstration of a living and loving relationship with the Living God. In Jesus’ day, the Pharisees kept the commandments of the Law but did not understand the heart behind the Law and thus omitted things that represented the heart of the Law such as love, mercy, and justice (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42).

The Hebrew text can also be translated “for THAT is your life,” instead of “for he is your life,” which makes the verse say that loving Yahweh, obeying Him, and holding fast to Him is the source and purpose of life. Although a number of English versions and commentators support that reading (NASB, NLT, NRSV, RSV), and although it is certainly possible that the Hebrew text was written such that it could have—and indeed might have—both meanings, it seems that the primary meaning is that God is the source of life and blessing. Omitting the relationship with God from obeying God can lead to Pharisaical behavior; just doing the action without the relationship. The parenthetical statement keeps God in the picture, and the YLT is another version that has the parenthesis.

**“the land that Yahweh swore that he would give to your fathers—to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”** God repeated the promise that He would give the land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants many times, and said it in slightly different ways. He told Abraham that he and his descendants would get the land (Gen. 12:7; 13:15-17; 15:7, 18; 17:8). He told it to Isaac (Gen. 26:3). He told it to Jacob (Gen. 28:13; 35:12; 48:4). Then over and over He told Israel about the promise or that He would give them the land (e.g., Exod. 6:4, 8; 12:25; 13:5, 11; Lev. 14:34; 20:24; 23:10; 25:2; see commentary on Gen. 15:18).

**Deuteronomy Chapter 31**

Deu 31:2

**“go out and come in.”** This is an idiom meaning live life. Technically, this is the figure of speech polarmerismos, where two extremes are put for the whole. A person “goes out” of his tent in the morning and “comes back in” at night, so the phrase referred to life throughout the whole day, from going out in the morning until coming back in at night. Now at 120 years old, Moses could no longer live like he used to and oversee all the children of Israel.

[See figure of speech “merismos.”]

Deu 31:9

**“Moses wrote down this law.”** Moses would most likely have written the Law on vellum (leather). He could have used papyrus, but it is not as likely that he had some papyrus since he would have had to have brought it along with them from Egypt and papyrus is quite brittle and likely would have broken up in the wilderness wanderings. Leather was much more durable than papyrus. Moses would not have written the Law on clay tablets. They would have been too heavy and clumsy in all the traveling Israel had to do.

**“gave it to the priests.”** This act quite officially designated the priests as “teaching priests.” The priests were not just to safeguard the scrolls, they were to teach them to the people so the people would know the Law and thus know what God wanted them to do to obey Him. The elders were also given the Law to communicate to the people.

Deu 31:10

**“the Feast of Booths.”** The Feast of Booths (Lev. 23:23-43; Deut. 16:13-17; also commonly known as the “Feast of Tabernacles” or among the Jews as “Succoth”) was a seven-day feast. However, because the eighth day was a special Sabbath when people could not work or travel, in effect the feast became an eight-day feast (Lev. 23:36).

Deu 31:11

**“appear before Yahweh your God in the place that he will choose.”** It would be a few hundred years, but that place would eventually be Jerusalem (see commentary on Deut. 12:5).

**“in their hearing.”** The Hebrew text is literally, “in their ears,” which is an idiom for in a way that they could hear it. Knowing the Law was so important that God commanded that it be read in its entirety to Israel, and read in a manner that they could hear it. Although there is no record in Scripture of this being done, it likely was even if all Israel did not gather to hear it. Getting to hear the Law would have gone a long way to getting Israel to think the same way about God and His commands, and also helped people know what to do to obey God and thus be blessed in this life and blessed with rewards on Judgment Day. It is sad in a sense that there is no such command for Christians, and many Christians go their whole lives without once reading the Law of Moses or the New Testament, and that is to their detriment. Not that “just reading it” is enough; if a Christian is to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength then they should learn His book and understand what it says, which takes some instruction and study.

Deu 31:14

**“the Tent of Meeting.”** The “Tabernacle” (“Dwelling Place”) is also referred to as the “Tent of Meeting” because it was the place where people met with God. The Hebrew phrase is *'ohel mo'ed*, in which *'ohel* (#0168 אֹהֶל) means “tent,” and is followed by *mo'ed* (#04150 מוֹעֵד or מֹעֵד) which means a “meeting” or a “place for a meeting.” Thus the *'ohel mo'ed* is the “Tent of Meeting” (see commentary on Exod. 27:21).

Deu 31:16

**“and will forsake me.”** Although this statement is prophetic, it is more that God knew the hearts of the people and that for the most part they had never followed Him and loved Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, but instead went after gods they could see and touch, and that offered things that appeased their fleshly desires.

Deu 31:18

**“hide, yes, hide.”** God warns Israel that if they sin He will not be among them and many evils will happen to them. God emphasizes that point with the figure of speech polyptoton, repeating the verb “hide”

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Deu 31:19

**“for yourselves.”** This likely refers to Moses and Joshua, who were with God and apart from the children of Israel at this time.

Deu 31:23

**“about which I swore to them.”** Moses is speaking, but he is speaking something God would have said, and did later say (cf. Josh. 1:5; 3:7), something Joshua would have known.

Deu 31:29

**“corrupt, yes, corrupt.”** For emphasis, God doubles the verb “corrupt,” using the figure of speech polyptoton to emphasize the fact that the Israelites would utterly corrupt themselves in their turning to other gods.

[For more on the use of polyptoton, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“making him angry.”** The NET text note on Deuteronomy 4:25 gets the sense of the text correctly when it says, “The infinitive construct [in the Hebrew text] is understood here as indicating the result, not the intention of their actions.” Although many English versions use the word “provoke,” the Israelites did not worship idols with the intention of provoking God. But the result of their idolatry was that God was angered. In everyday English, “provoke” means to do something to intentionally upset someone, and that is not what was happening with Israel’s idolatry.

**“by what your hands have made.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “through the work of your hands,” but the idea is that the idols were what the peoples’ hands had made, and the idols angered God.

Deu 31:30

**“Moses spoke in the ears of the assembly.”** The connection between Moses speaking the words of the song to the assembly and the song itself would have been easier to understand if Deuteronomy 31:30 had been the first verse of Deuteronomy 32 rather than the last verse of Deuteronomy 31. The words of God are God-breathed, but the punctuation and chapter and verse divisions are man-made and occasionally misplaced, and this is an example of a chapter division that could have been better placed.

**Deuteronomy Chapter 32**

Deu 32:1

**“And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth!”** “The context indicates the imperative form of the verb.”[[23]](#footnote-12901) The heavens and earth are good witnesses because they have been around to see the very start of humankind, and will still be around on Judgment Day.

Deu 32:2

**“like the raindrops.”** The exact meaning of the Hebrew word translated “raindrops” is not known, which explains the large variation among the English translations.

**“grass.”** The Hebrew word *eseb* (#06212 עֵשֶׂב), translated “grass” is hard to bring into English. It was the general word for the weeds that naturally grew in any field. The biblical world did not have “grass” as we know it today. It just had areas of weeds. Sometimes those weeds were long and thick, like a weedy field today, while in other areas people’s sheep, goats, and cows, kept the weeds eaten down, but they were still just weeds.

[For more on “grass” see commentary on Prov. 19:12.]

Deu 32:8

**“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance.”** Some scholars propose that Deuteronomy 32:8-9 teaches that there is another God, the Most High, who is above Yahweh. That is not true.

[See commentary on Deut. 32:9 for more information.]

**“he set the bounds of the peoples.”** When God chose Israel, He gave them a land with set boundaries.

**“sons of God.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads “sons of Israel,” but the Septuagint reads “sons of God,” and there is evidence from the Qumran Scrolls that that is the correct reading.[[24]](#footnote-21479) What Deuteronomy 32:8 seems to be saying is that when the nations formed, their boundaries were determined by God, the different nations were somehow kept separate by the spiritual powers associated with them.

Deu 32:9

**“Yahweh’s portion is his people.”** Some scholars propose that Deuteronomy 32:8-9 teaches that there is another God, the Most High (Deut. 32:8), who is above Yahweh, and who gives Yahweh Israel as his portion. That is not true for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the Scriptures are clear that Yahweh is God alone (Deut. 6:4), and that there is no other God except him (Isa. 44:6). So, there cannot be another God, the Most High, above Yahweh. Secondly, Yahweh is explicitly identified as the Most High (#05945 עֶלְיוֹן֙ *Elyon*) in multiple places in the Old Testament (Gen. 14:22; 2 Sam. 22:14; Psa. 7:8, 17). For example, Genesis 14:22 says, “Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have lifted up my hand *and sworn* to Yahweh, God Most High, creator of heaven and earth...’” Thus, Yahweh is not a different being from the Most High, the Most High is Yahweh.

Thirdly, the text can be understood perfectly fine without making the Most High into a different God. God has many names, and “Most High” is one of them. The name for God, “Most High,” comes from the fact that on the holy mountain of God in the spiritual world, God sits in the highest place. He is literally, “the Most High,” with all the other spirits on the mountain below him (see commentary on verses in Isa. 14:12-15 and Ezek. 28:13-16). The name “Most High” is related physically to the name “El Shaddai,” which according to most modern scholars means something like, “God, the One of the Mountain.” Again, God is said to be on a mountain, which made perfect sense to the ancient people who understood the spirit world (see commentary on Gen. 17:1). Being the highest one on the mountain, God was indeed “the Most High God.

Deuteronomy 32:8-9 teaches that the Most High (Yahweh) set the boundaries of nations based on the number of angels (See commentary on Gen. 6:2 for more information on angels being called “sons of God”). In other words, He put angels in place over each nation. Now, whether these are all righteous angels or perhaps some are fallen angels and some are righteous angels who were given dominion over certain nations, that is unclear. Yet, the point is that angels were given other nations as an inheritance. But for Israel, Yahweh himself is over them. Israel is his inheritance. So, Yahweh saw such significance and importance in the people of Israel that He himself is their overseer, there is no “son of God” or “angel” given this job.

Therefore, there is not another God, the Most High, above Yahweh, but Yahweh himself is the Most High God who sees His people Israel, and all those who are saved, as a prized possession (Psa. 135:4).

**“Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.”** Land areas were often divided up by casting lots, and in this verse, God is using that metaphor to show how He got Israel. Although God did not cast lots for Israel, expressing how He chose Israel in this way makes the point that what God did was legitimate.

Deu 32:10

**“pupil of his eye.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “the little man of the eye.” The pupil of the eye is referred to in Hebrew as “little man” of the eye. Historically, the “little man” got translated “apple,” but over time the meaning of the English idiom “apple of the eye” changed from meaning the pupil to meaning something that was very important, so the idiom “apple of the eye” no longer is accurate here.

Deu 32:13

**“honey from the rock.”** Historically it has been thought that this honey was date-honey (date syrup), but recently archaeologists have found evidence of ancient beekeeping in Israel, and honey from bees is mentioned in a number of places in the Old Testament, such as when Samson found honey in the carcass of a lion. So this could well refer to honey from bees.

**“oil from the flinty rock.”** The soil of Israel had a lot of flint, and olive trees do very well in the soil. So olive oil comes from the flinty rock.

Deu 32:14

**“breed of Bashan.”** Bashan was the area just east of the Sea of Galilee that was perfect for herds and flocks.

**“the blood of the grape.”** A graphic and poetic way to write about abundant grape juice. The phrase is first used in Jacob’s prophecy to his son Judah (Gen. 49:11).

Deu 32:15

**“Jeshurun.”** This is the first of four occurrences of Jeshurun, which C. F. Keil[[25]](#footnote-14299) translates as “Righteous-nation” (“Jeshurun” occurs in Deut. 32:15; 33:5, 26; and Isa. 44:2). Although the exact meaning of Jeshurun is debated, the general idea is not. “Jeshurun” is a term of endearment for Israel, translated as “beloved one” in the Septuagint. Here it is used in irony. Israel was God’s righteous nation, His beloved one, but they did not love God back and were not thankful for what He did for them. In Deuteronomy 33:5 it is used in a positive sense, but here it is used in irony.

C. F. Keil translates Jeshurun as “Righteous-nation” and says, “so much is certain concerning *Jeshurun*, that it was an honorable surname given to Israel; that it is derived from *yashar*, and describes Israel as a nation of just or right men… Because Jehovah, who is just and right (Deut. 32:4), had called it to uprightness, to walk in his righteousness, and chosen it as his servant (Isa. 44:2). … The epithet *Righteous-nation*, as we may render *Jeshurun*, was intended to remind Israel of its calling, and involved the severest reproof of its apostasy.”[[26]](#footnote-20834) *The* JPS Torah Commentary adds, “The epithet ‘Jeshurun’ (Heb. *yeshurun*, ‘the Upright,’ from *yashur*, ‘upright’) alludes to ‘Israel’ (*yisra’el*) and sounds something like it. …here it is used ironically, underscoring how Israel has failed to live up to its expected character.”[[27]](#footnote-25582) So God gave Israel the name Jeshurun, the Righteous-nation, but when used in the same sentence in which God says that Israel has kicked against Him and forsaken Him, it is irony and reproof, contrasting the glorious calling God gave Israel with the fallen and debauched state of Israel currently.

**“rejected.”** The Hebrew verb can mean “reject, scorn, treat lightly, “treated like a fool.”[[28]](#footnote-27123) The semantic range explains the variation in the English Bibles.

Deu 32:17

**“not to God.”** The Hebrew word Elohim, which is a plural form and can mean “God,” “god” or “gods,” makes determining the exact meaning of this phrase difficult. It can mean “not to God,” as in the REV, or it could mean more like “They sacrificed to demons—no gods—to gods they did not know,” (cf. ESV), basically saying that the demons were not actual “gods” in the positive sense of being aligned with the God of Israel, they were “no gods.”

**“did not fear.”** There is a debate among scholars as to the meaning of the Hebrew word translated “fear” and whether it basically means “fear” (i.e., worship) or “know,” and the English versions are divided. However, both meanings are true. Israel’s ancestors did not know or worship these new gods. Given that, why should Israel turn to them? Part of the answer is that these new “gods” were actually demons, and demons have a lot of power to manipulate people who have not made up their mind to follow God. We see that with Eve. She was unsure of the command of God and willing to satisfy her fleshly desires, so she was easily manipulated by the Devil. If believers are going to stay faithful to God they need to know who He is and what He wants and they must make up their minds to be faithful to Him. This verse is not saying that these gods were not around when Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in the land of Israel, but rather that those people did not “know” those gods the way Israel was now getting to know them, by getting involved in worshiping them.

Deu 32:18

**“birthed you.”** The Hebrew word contains the idea of being in labor and giving birth. This is not just a factual statement that God gave birth to Israel, it communicates that God went through labor and pain in giving birth to the nation of Israel. Peter Craigie translates the phrase that God “delivered you in pain.”[[29]](#footnote-25285) A lot of good people like Moses went through a lot of hardship in the birthing of Israel, in large part because of Israel’s stubborn disobedience. But instead of being thankful for what God had done, Israel forgot Him and ignored His commandments. This verse reminds us that although God is almost always associated with male imagery, occasionally He is described as having female characteristics.

Deu 32:21

**“made me angry.”** The NET text note on Deuteronomy 4:25 gets the sense of the text correctly when it says, “The infinitive construct [in the Hebrew text] is understood here as indicating the result, not the intention of their actions.” Although many English versions use the word “provoke,” the Israelites did not worship idols with the intention of provoking God. But the result of their idolatry was that God was angered. In everyday English, “provoke” means to do something to intentionally upset someone, and that is not what was happening with Israel’s idolatry.

**“a foolish nation.”** That is, a nation that does not recognize God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, and is therefore foolish.

Deu 32:22

**“in my nostrils.”** When a person gets angry, their nostrils flare. Here God indicates His anger by flaring nostrils.

Deu 32:24

**“crawling things of the dust.”** The Hebrew words of this description could fit snakes as well as things like scorpions, biting ants, etc.

Deu 32:26

**“I will cut them to pieces.”** This whole phrase is one verb in Hebrew, but it only occurs here and its meaning is uncertain, which explains the large variation in the English translations, as translators grapple with how to translate it.

Deu 32:27

**“Our hand is exalted.”** this is idiomatic for “our power has done this.” Israel’s enemy might gloat at Israel’s destruction and think that they had the power to destroy Israel, but it was because Israel abandoned Yahweh that they would have been destroyed.

Deu 32:30

**“How could one chase 1,000.”** This refers to Israel being defeated by their enemies after they sinned and Yahweh would not fight for them.

Deu 32:31

**“even though our enemies think so.”** The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain, and the way most English versions translate the verse is implausible. For example, the NIV reads, “as even our enemies concede.” But the enemies had just defeated Israel, so they certainly did not concede that Yahweh was better than their god. *The JPS Torah Commentary* says that a translation like that “does not fit the context: it is implausible that the enemy, having just routed Israel, would consider its own gods unequal to Israel’s.” Everett Fox translates the verse as: “For not like their rock is our Rock, though our enemies so-assess-it.”[[30]](#footnote-26101) The NRSV recognizes the problem and simply translates the uncertain phrase as “our enemies are fools.”

Deu 32:33

**“serpents.”** The Hebrew does not use the standard word for “snakes,” but a word used for sea monsters and dragons, which is why some versions say “dragons.”

Deu 32:36

**“vindicate.”** The Hebrew word is “judge,” but here it means “judge in favor of,” or “vindicate.” A number of English translations have “vindicate” (cf. CSB, ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV).

**“none remaining *to help*.”** There have to be people remaining, or else there would be no one for God to have compassion on. *The JPS Torah Commentary* gives evidence that the Hebrew idiom “has to do with power or help and means ‘neither supporter nor helper,’ as the Peshitta and the Talmud render it.” Especially in the context, which says, “their power is gone,” it makes sense that, rather than being no people at all, there were no people who could help.

**“slave or free.”** The Hebrew is unclear. Different scholars have different opinions about exactly what that means, and so the English versions differ in their translations. Given the culture, and the fact that slaves were restrained or confined by their circumstances while free people were “loose,” the translation “slave or free” made sense. However, the more usual meaning of the second noun, often translated “free” more generally means “abandoned,” “forsaken.” The verse may mean that no one was left to help Israel, not even the slaves or abandoned people were left to help Israel.

Deu 32:38

**“ate the fat of their sacrifices.”** This is a powerful word picture using a kind of personification, picturing the pagan gods, who were made of metal, stone, and wood, as if they were alive and ate the sacrifices made to them and drank the drink offerings. God is mocking them and the people. Basically, God is saying, “They ate your food and drank your wine and oil, why aren’t they helping you?”

Deu 32:39

**“There is no god with me.”** God is not saying that no other “gods” exist. Many verses in the Bible attest to the fact that they do. God is saying there is no other being who is His equal, and specifically in this context, God has no other god “with” Him in what He does, helping Him out. God wants people to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength and does not want the worship due to Him being divided up among He and other gods. He alone is the creator and source of everything, and desires and deserves singular recognition. The entire Old Testament is filled with admonitions for God’s people not to worship other gods, and 1 Corinthians 8:5 says there are many “gods.” Of course, it is also the case that a number of so-called “gods” do not exist, but that is not the point of this verse.

**“I kill and I make alive.”** This is a general statement about God’s power to give and take life, and statements like this occur at other places in the Bible. However, they intrinsically also point to God’s ultimate power to raise the dead into everlasting life. What is the point of God giving life if it always only leads to death? Thus, for example, C. F. Keil writes: “These words do not refer to the immortality of the soul, but to the restoration of life of the people of Israel, which God had delivered up to death (so 1 Sam. 2:6; 2 Kings 5:7; cf. Isa. 26:19; Hos. 13:10; Wisd. 16:13; Tobit 13:2).”[[31]](#footnote-17909) Isaiah 26:19 and Hosea 13:10 in Keil’s list are very clearly about the resurrection from the dead at the Resurrection of the Righteous. If the Sadducees had paid closer attention to the Pentateuch and the purposes of God, they would not have come to the sad and purposeless conclusion that there was no resurrection from the dead (Matt. 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38). The Old Testament has a number of verses about God raising the dead in the future (cf. Deut. 32:39; Job. 19:25-27; Ps. 71:20; Isa. 26:19; 66:14; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2, 13; and Hos. 13:14).

[For more about the Sadducees and the resurrection, see commentary on Matt. 22:23.]

Deu 32:40

**“lift up my hand.”** One way a person swore a solemn oath was to raise his hand and swear. See commentary on Genesis 14:22.

Deu 32:43

**“O heavens, together with him; bow down to him, all you sons of God.”** This is the reading of a Qumran manuscript of Deuteronomy, and the Septuagint agrees with much of it.[[32]](#footnote-22578) The Masoretic Hebrew text reads, “Rejoice, O nations, with his people.” This is a less likely reading because the adversaries on whom God will take vengeance are from the nations. The fuller text of the Septuagint reads, “Rejoice, you heavens, with him, and let all the sons of God worship him; rejoice, you nations, with his people, and let all the angels of God strengthen themselves in him.” The fact that Hebrews 1:6 agrees closely with the Qumran manuscript is good supporting evidence that it is original.

This is one of the texts that shows that it is not just humans who are affected by evil and whose lives are made uncomfortable by it, but God’s faithful spirit beings as well. Angels rejoice along with humans when God takes vengeance on His enemies and brings them to justice.

**“you sons of God.”** The “sons of God” in this context are the created spirit beings of God. This includes angels but also other spirit beings God has created, so the translation “angels,” while getting people to think in the right direction about the text, is too limited. When Hebrews 1:6 refers to this verse, the “sons of God” are referred to as “angels.”

[For more on the meaning of “sons of God,” see commentary on Gen. 6:2.]

**“He will repay those who hate him.”** This line is not in the Masoretic Hebrew text but is in both the Septuagint and the Qumran text.

**“and will make atonement for his land *and* for his people.”** The Hebrew word translated “make atonement for” is *kaphar* (#03722 כָּפַר), and its meanings include, make an atonement, make reconciliation, cover, purge, cleanse, purify, etc. The English versions reflect this range of meanings, e.g., “make atonement for” (CJB, NET, NIV); “atone for” (NASB); “cleanse” (CEB, ESV, NLT); “purify” (CSB, NJB); “purge” (NAB); and “makes expiation for” (ASV, JPS, RSV).

The exact meaning of *kaphar* here in Deuteronomy 32:43 is likely a combination of the above definitions. For example, God will “purify” the land and people, and He will do that by making atonement for them, so both “purify” (or “cleanse”) and “make atonement for” are accurate.

Deu 32:44

**“Hoshea.”** “Hoshea,” was Joshua’s name before Moses changed it (Num. 13:16). It is unclear why the text uses it here.

Deu 32:46

**“Take to heart.”** The Hebrew expresses the idea differently: “Set your heart,” but we would say “take to heart.”

Deu 32:49

**“this mountain of the Abarim *range.*”** Moses was down in the area of the Jordan River in the plains of Jordan across from Jericho, but God did not want him to die there, but in a place from which Moses could see the Promised Land. God told Moses to go up the Abarim Range to Mount Nebo to see the land. “Abarim” basically means “regions beyond” or “regions across,” and it was across the Jordan from the Promised Land. Abarim refers to the high plateau region of the Transjordan, which was over 3,000 feet above sea level and the highest elevation of which is Mount Pisgah (also referred to as “Nebo”).

Deu 32:50

**“Aaron your brother died.”** Aaron, Miriam, and Moses died the same year, the last year of the wilderness wandering (Deut. 10:6). Miriam died in the first month of the year (Num. 20:1).

**Deuteronomy Chapter 33**

Deu 33:1

**“This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel.”** In Genesis 27:27-40, Isaac blessed his sons, Jacob and Esau, with a prophetic blessing. In Genesis 49, Jacob blessed his twelve sons with a prophetic blessing. Here Moses acts as the father of Israel and blesses his “children” with a prophetic blessing. Interestingly, in this blessing the tribe of Simeon is left out, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are blessed together under “Joseph,” the actual son of Jacob. Simeon may have been left out because historically he more or less disappeared, having taken his territory inside the territory of Judah. Eventually, Judah swallowed up Simeon.

It may be because Moses started to father Israel in Egypt that this chapter of blessing opens with God coming from Sinai to deliver Israel, and Moses became the leader (or “father”) of the people at that time. Also, while Jacob fathered twelve tribes, it was in the wilderness and under Moses’ leadership that God made a covenant with Israel and they became a nation of His people.

Deu 33:2

**“Yahweh came from Sinai.”** This verse is poetically describing Yahweh coming to deliver Israel when they were slaves in Egypt. They met him on Mount Sinai after coming out of Egypt (Exod. 19:1-2), so this verse describes God as coming from Sinai and the area of Edom to deliver them from slavery.

**“At his right hand there was flaming fire for them.”** The meaning of the Hebrew text is uncertain, and the versions differ greatly. “At his right hand was a fiery law for them” (ASV); “his warriors were next to him, ready” (CEB); “with flaming fire at his right hand” (ESV); “at his right hand advanced the gods” (NAB); “At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them” (NAS); “from the south, from his mountain slopes” (NIV); “At His right hand are springs for them” (YLT). Whatever the text means, it is clear that it refers to God supporting and fighting for Israel, His people.

Deu 33:3

**“All his holy ones are in his hand.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “All his holy ones are in your hand.” Some versions leave the literal Hebrew while others make the pronouns the same, either “his” or “your.”

Deu 33:5

**“Let there be a king in Jeshurun.”** Peter Craigie explains the translation: “The translation here assumes a simple *waw* plus verb (as is normal in poetry), rather than a *waw* consecutive.”[[33]](#footnote-18675) God was to be the king in Israel, but sadly over time, God was rejected by the people.

**“Jeshurun.”** “The Upright,” or “Righteous-nation.” This is a reference to Israel that also occurs at the end of the prophecy (Deut. 33:26).

[For more on Jeshurun, see commentary on Deut. 32:15.]

Deu 33:6

**“Let Reuben live.”** Moses’ prophetic blessing starts with Reuben, Jacob’s oldest son, just like Jacob’s prophetic blessing over his children began with Reuben (Gen. 49:3). Jacob’s blessing began in birth order: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. In contrast, Moses begins with Reuben, but then has Judah, then Levi, and then, interestingly, leaves Simeon out completely, likely because they were more or less assimilated into Judah.

**“but let his men be few in number.”** This is a strange but true prophetic blessing. The tribe of Reuben is foretold that it will not die off even though its men will be few in number. Also, however, the prophecy that his men would be few in number may refer to how they would participate in Israel. Although they did survive and are mentioned in the book of Revelation, we see very little of them in the text of Scripture. They are not mentioned much in Scripture, and, for example, they did not participate in the war in Judges when they could have helped defeat the Canaanites (Judg. 5:15-16). This all accords with Jacob’s prophecy over Reuben, that he would not excel (Gen. 49:4). Some translations have “nor let his men be few,” but that does not seem to be the meaning of the text.

Deu 33:8

**“About Levi he said.”** In Moses’ blessing of Levi here in Deuteronomy 33:8-11, Levi’s role as priest to Israel is clearly set forth. Having the priesthood was a new development for Levi that occurred at the incident of the golden calf, and so this blessing is decidedly different from the blessing on Levi that Jacob gave (Gen. 49:5-7).

**“Thummim and Urim.”** These were stones in the breastplate of the High Priest by which the judgment of God was determined.

[For more on the Urim and Thummim, see commentary on Exod. 28:30.]

**“your godly one.”** This could be translated as “your pious one.” It referred to the High Priest. He was the only one who had the Urim and Thummim.

Deu 33:9

**“I have not seen them.”** The Levites were to keep the Law of God and guard His covenant even when it meant turning away from their fellow Israelites who turned away from the Law.

Deu 33:10

**“in your nose.”** The literal Hebrew, “in your nose,” is very graphic and may well allude to the fact that the golden altar of incense is immediately in front of the Holy of Holies where God dwells and thus the smoke and smell of the incense goes right up God’s nose, so to speak. The Levites have the privilege of being that close and intimate with God, while the other tribes are not allowed into the Holy Place, the room before the Holy of Holies.

Deu 33:12

**“The beloved of Yahweh.”** Although the text does not state why Benjamin was called the beloved of Yahweh, and there may be several reasons for it, it is noteworthy that when God assigned the tribal territories, the territory of Benjamin was in central Israel and the place that God chose to dwell and set up the Temple was in the territory of Benjamin.

Deu 33:13

**“by the deep *waters* crouching beneath.”** The reference seems to be to the deep waters below the ground that were the source of springs, rivers, and that filled wells. So Joseph would get the rain and dew from heaven and water from the earth to grow crops and sustain life.

Deu 33:15

**“best.”** The Hebrew word translated “best” is literally *ro'sh* (#07218 רֹאשׁ), which means “head” and usually when used of a mountain means “top” or “summit.” *The JPS Torah Commentary* says, “The translation ‘best’ is suggested by the parallel ‘bounty.’ *Ro'sh* has this meaning in the idiom *ro'sh besamim*, ‘finest spices,’ but it is not a common idiom…it may have been chosen here to form a double entendre. Some think the clause is elliptical for ‘with the bounty of the tops of the ancient mountains.”[[34]](#footnote-17281)

Also, much of the tribal areas assigned by Joshua to Ephraim and Manasseh, the two tribes descended from Joseph, were mountainous, adding weight to the idea that Moses’ prophecy about Joseph getting the “best” (“top”) of the ancient mountains is likely a double entendre. That Moses would prophesy about the area given to the tribes of Joseph being mountainous is one more piece of evidence of God’s authorship of Scripture. No human can foretell the future like that.

Deu 33:16

**“the good will of him who dwelt in the *​burning* bush.”** The reference is to God meeting Moses in the burning bush and telling him to go and bring the Israelites out of Egypt (cf. Exod. 3:1-10). It is worth noting that before the vowel points were added to the Hebrew text, in the old consonantal Hebrew text, the word translated “bush” could have been understood as “Sinai,” and the verse could read that Joseph had the favor of the one who dwelt at Sinai, where Israel met God (Exod. 19, 20). In this poetic prophecy, Joseph is blessed, and that blessing comes from God.

Deu 33:17

**“The firstborn of his herd, majesty is his.”** Deuteronomy 13:17 must be read and understood in the context of the whole verse and history. Joseph’s firstborn son was Manasseh, who was never as prominent as his second son, Ephraim. Here, the “firstborn” is used of Ephraim in poetry, not based on birth order, but based on prominence, as is clear from the end of the verse. The ten thousands of Ephraim that will gore the enemies refer to the military might of Ephraim.

Deu 33:18

**“Zebulun...Issachar.”** The tribes of Zebulun and Issachar were given small tribal areas next to each other to the southwest of the Sea of Galilee. They are mentioned together in other places, for example, in the blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:13-15) and in Deborah’s song (Judg. 5:14-15).

Deu 33:19

**“for they will draw out the abundance from the seas, the hidden treasures of the sand.”** Although neither Zebulun nor Issachar were by the Mediterranean Sea, and the tribal territory of Asher was between them and the sea, it seems that they still somehow got abundance from the sea, perhaps by going there to fish, and by trade. The phrase “hidden treasures of the sand” could just be a poetic way of referring to the wealth of the sea, or it could refer to things like the dye made from shellfish.

Deu 33:20

**“and tears the arm, yes, *​and* the crown of the head.”** The tribe of Gad got its territory in the Transjordan, east of the Jordan River, and fought for its territory and also helped the other tribes of Israel conquer the Promised Land. Apparently good warriors, they tore the arm of the enemy making him unable to fight, and even the crown of the head (which may also include a veiled reference to killing the enemy leaders).

Deu 33:21

**“best.”** This is more properly a first part, premier part, but it can be understood in this context as the “best” part.

Deu 33:22

**“Dan is a lion’s cub that leaps out from Bashan.”** Dan is compared to a lion’s cub, meaning he is powerful but immature and learning. Joshua assigned Dan a territory in central Israel, but the tribe failed to displace the Canaanites there, and much of the tribe decided to move north (Josh. 19:40-48) and became the northernmost tribe of Israel. That turned out to be a very poor decision for them because they became the first tribe attacked by every army that came from the north: Syria, then Assyria, then Babylonia, then Persia, then Greece. They were effectively wiped out by the Assyrians around 725 BC, and archaeological surface surveys of the Galilee show very little organized occupation for many years after the Assyrians came through.

The analogy to “a lion’s cub that leaps out from Bashan” must be understood from the natural geography. Dan never controlled Bashan, the area to the east of the Sea of Galilee, and did not attack Laish from there to gain its northern territory. Rather, Dan is compared to the lions that live in Bashan, because Bashan is mountainous and had many lions during Old Testament times. C. F. Keil writes, “...the regions of eastern Bashan, which abound with caves, and more especially in the woody western slopes of Jebel Hauran, many lions harboured, which rushed forth from the thicket, and were very dangerous enemies to the herds of Bashan.”[[35]](#footnote-12512) Lions are mentioned many times in the Old Testament and were abundant in Israel until Roman times when they were captured and used in gladiator arenas. Lions disappeared from Israel during the time the Romans controlled Israel.

Deu 33:23

**“take possession of the sea and the south.”** The Hebrew word for “sea” (or “lake”) is *yam* (#03220 יָם), which literally means “sea,” but was also the word used in the Bible for “west” because west of Israel was the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, *yam* came to mean “sea” or “seaward” (west). In Moses’ prophecy here in Deuteronomy 33:23, *yam* seems to mean “sea” rather than “west” because Naphtali was not on the west side of Israel and did not have a border on the Mediterranean Sea, but had its territory in north-central Israel and included the west and south side of the Sea of Galilee. If the Hebrew text does mean “west” and “south,” then it would refer to Naphtali having the territory west and south of the Sea of Galilee.

Deu 33:24

**“Most blessed of sons is Asher.”** Leah’s slave Zilpah gave birth to Asher, who was Jacob’s eighth son (Gen. 30:12-13). The word “Asher” means happy, which is related in meaning to “blessed.” Although the KJV and a few other versions have the translation, “Let Asher be blessed with children,” that is not the meaning of the Hebrew.[[36]](#footnote-19770)

**“Let him be favored among his brothers.”** That is, favored by God.

**“Let him dip his foot in oil.”** The territory assigned to the tribe of Asher by Joshua (Josh. 19:24-31) was very fertile and also had many olive trees. That Asher would “dip” its foot in oil is a hyperbolic reference to the large amount of olive oil produced in the region.

Deu 33:25

**“Your bars will be iron and bronze.”** The “bars” refer to the bars that keep the gates of the city closed to the enemy. This is a prophecy of secure cities. For Asher to enjoy the prosperity God spoke of, the people would have to enjoy peace and security.

Deu 33:26

**“Jeshurun.”** “The Upright,” or “Righteous-nation.” This is a reference to Israel that also occurs at the beginning of the prophecy (Deut. 33:5).

[For more on Jeshurun, see commentary on Deut. 32:15.]

**“who rides through the heavens to your help.”** It is not known if the Israelites had any clear concept of how God flew through the heavens. By the time of David, more than 400 years later (c. 1000 BC), God revealed Himself as riding on a cherub (2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10). However, by the time of Daniel and Ezekiel (c. 600 BC), Scripture gives us a much more complete description of cherubim, and shows them powering God’s chariot-throne (Ezek. 1:4-28). Given the fact that God reveals more and more about Himself through the Scriptures, it is likely that the more complete description of God riding on His chariot-throne through the sky is what Deuteronomy 33:26 is referring to, even though it seems that was not revealed to Israel at the time Moses wrote. In Daniel 7:9, Yahweh is sitting on a throne that has wheels, and it could possibly be the same chariot-throne that is in Ezekiel.

Deu 33:27

**“He thrust out the enemy from before you and said, ‘Destroy!’”** Deuteronomy 33:26-27 shows God riding through the heavens to help Israel, and fighting for Israel, but it also shows by the word “destroy” that God expects Israel to fight for themselves, using His support to bring them victory. When we pray for God’s help, we should not think that life will be easy after that. We should not think that our problems will just go away when God helps us. God was there to help Israel conquer the enemy in the Promised Land, but the Israelites still had to fight, and fight hard to win it, and in some cases, they did not have the mental resolve to complete the job God gave them and drive the enemy from their land. Even with God’s help and support, believers should still be prepared to fight hard in the spiritual battle.

Deu 33:29

**“you will trample on their high places.”** The Hebrew word *bamah* (#01116 בָּמָה, the plural is *bamot*) can refer to a literal high place or to a local shrine. Because cities and their associated shrines or holy places were often located on hills, in this context *bamot* likely refers to both.

In ancient times, “high places” gave the ones who controlled them a distinct advantage in war. They were generally secure and hard to attack. Cities were built on high places whenever they could be, as were Jerusalem and Samaria, the capital cities of Judah and Israel. For Moses to include in his blessing that Israel would trample on the high places of the enemy was a way of expressing that no enemy would be able to withstand them.

The cities built on the heights also usually had shrines to pagan gods that would have an altar, idols or representations of the gods, and sometimes a temple. In God’s victory, He would trample on the hilltop cities, and also trample on the pagan shrines and the gods there that the people worshiped. The pagan gods could not protect the people from the wrath of Yahweh. The double meaning of *bamah* here in Deuteronomy 33:29 as a high city and as a pagan shrine is why the Amplified Version puts both meanings in the verse by using brackets: “And you will tread on their high places [tramping down their idolatrous altars].”

When reading the blessings in Deuteronomy 33, the reader is expected to understand that they are conditional on Israel obeying God and worshiping Him. They are not “unconditional blessings” that would occur with or without God’s blessing and help. If Israel wanted to be blessed, they would have to understand that they were being blessed by God, who expected obedience and worship from them, which was part of their covenant agreement. Sadly, Israel did not fully obey God, and as a result, did not fully receive many of the blessings promised in Deuteronomy.

[For more on *bamah* referring to shrines, see the REV commentary on Num. 33:52.]

**Deuteronomy Chapter 34**

Deu 34:1

**“the Pisgah range.”** In this context, “Pisgah” with the definite article most likely means “the range” or the “ridge” (sawtooth ridge). Thus the text can be understood to be saying that Moses went “to the summit (top, highest point—thus Mount Nebo) in the sawtooth range opposite (across from) Jericho.”

Deu 34:2

**“and all the land of Judah to the western sea.”** From Mount Nebo it is impossible to see in detail the places listed here in Deuteronomy 34:1-3. God could have shown Moses all that land by augmenting what Moses saw by revelation, or what Moses saw was the horizons of those places, where they were generally located in the Promised Land across the Jordan from where Moses was. While it is true that the atmosphere would have been clearer in Moses’ time than it is now, the western mountains in the Promised Land would have blocked the view of the territory that was beyond them.

Deu 34:3

**“City of Date Palms.”** The palm trees in Israel were date palms, not coconut palms or other varieties of palm trees. Jericho was also known as the “City of Date Palms,” especially after it was destroyed by Joshua.

Deu 34:4

**“but you will not cross over there.”** Moses was mentally prepared for this because God had told him that before (cf. Deut. 3:27; 4:21-22; 32:52). We can understand that Moses was as willing as he was to obey God’s command about not crossing the Jordan because he so strongly held the Hope of resurrection and being in the land in the future when the Messiah ruled the earth. Eighty years earlier he had refused his position as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter because he had such a strong hope (Heb. 11:24-26), and now Moses, the willing servant of God, did as God commanded.

[For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom and his rule on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Deu 34:5

**“Moses the servant of Yahweh.”** Here God honors Moses with the title “the servant of Yahweh” because he truly was that, even to his death. Moses willingly gave up his life, the text makes it clear that he did not die of disease or because his body wore out, even though he was 120 years old.

Deu 34:6

**“He buried him.”** God Himself buried Moses; and no human knows where. Moses truly was a servant of Yahweh, and Yahweh had watched over him and directed him from an early age. Moses’ life is a testimony that doing the will of God and living a righteous life does not guarantee that life will be easy. Moses’ life was anything but easy. But doing the will of God and living righteously will guarantee great rewards in the future.

Deu 34:7

**“vigor.”** This is usually understood to refer to his sexual force, which was taken as a sign of full health.

Deu 34:8

**“The children of Israel wept for Moses...for 30 days.”** In biblical Israel, it was customary that people were allowed to weep and mourn for 30 days when someone died (cf. Num. 20:29; Deut. 21:13). However, there is a difference between a time of mourning prescribed by custom, usually when normal work would stop, and the time a person would personally mourn the loss of a loved one: there is no time given in the Bible for that, and different people process loss differently (see commentary on Rom. 12:15).

Deu 34:12

**“great terrifying deeds that Moses did.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “the great terror that Moses did,” but in this context, “terror” is put by the figure of speech metonymy for the deeds that cause terror, or “terrifying deeds.” The Hebrews and others were afraid of many of the powerful works that Moses did. Also, the word for “terror” can also refer to “awe-inspiring,” and some translations go that way, for example, the NIV 2011 has “awesome deeds,” and the GW has “awe-inspiring deeds.” However, often the Israelites were more afraid of the powerful acts of God than inspired by them, so “terrifying deeds” seems the better choice here.

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

**“in the sight of all Israel.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “before the eyes of all Israel.”

1. Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT], 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-13845)
2. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30261)
3. Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-31175)
4. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20774)
5. Cf. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-24003)
6. Horatio B. Hackett,  *Illustrations of Scripture*, Chap. 1, para. “Terrors of the Desert,” Kindle. [↑](#footnote-ref-13280)
7. See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 263, 394, “repetitio.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11109)
8. Merrill Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-22915)
9. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18465)
10. Merrill Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-31187)
11. BDB, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27960)
12. Walter Kaiser, Jr, *Walking the Ancient Paths: A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-19757)
13. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-19216)
14. Cf. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 416. [↑](#footnote-ref-13669)
15. See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 199, “anaphora.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10638)
16. E. W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, “Six hundred and sixty six,” 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-28790)
17. See also, S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy* [ICC], 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-15059)
18. Everett Fox, T*he Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31749)
19. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 307, “paronomasia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15235)
20. Cf. Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-11001)
21. See Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 159, “tapeinosis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10593)
22. Cf. E. Fox, *The Schocken Bible: The Five Books of Moses*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14160)
23. Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-12901)
24. Cf. Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-21479)
25. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 474. [↑](#footnote-ref-14299)
26. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 474-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-20834)
27. Jeffrey Tigay, *JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-25582)
28. Cf. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27123)
29. Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-25285)
30. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible: The Five Books of Moses*. [↑](#footnote-ref-26101)
31. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 489-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-17909)
32. Cf. Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-22578)
33. Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT], 392. [↑](#footnote-ref-18675)
34. Jeffrey Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17281)
35. Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 510. [↑](#footnote-ref-12512)
36. Cf. Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 511. [↑](#footnote-ref-19770)