

TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT  
COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 5



DEUTERONOMY

Dedicated to Jenny, Emma, Cathy and Megan

# TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 5

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CONSULTING EDITOR: TREMPER LONGMAN III

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## DEUTERONOMY

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

EDWARD J. WOODS



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## GENERAL PREFACE

The decision completely to revise the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries is an indication of the important role that the series has played since its opening volumes were released in the mid-1960s. They represented at that time, and have continued to represent, commentary writing that was committed both to the importance of the text of the Bible as Scripture and a desire to engage with as full a range of interpretative issues as possible without being lost in the minutiae of scholarly debate. The commentaries aimed to explain the biblical text to a generation of readers confronting models of critical scholarship and new discoveries from the Ancient Near East, while remembering that the Old Testament is not simply another text from the ancient world. Although no uniform process of exegesis was required, all the original contributors were united in their conviction that the Old Testament remains the word of God for us today. That the original volumes fulfilled this role is evident from the way in which they continue to be used in so many parts of the world.

A crucial element of the original series was that it should offer an up-to-date reading of the text, and it is precisely for this reason that new volumes are required. The questions confronting readers in the first half of the twenty-first century are not necessarily those from the second half of the twentieth. Discoveries from the Ancient Near East continue to shed new light on the Old Testament, whilst emphases in exegesis have changed markedly. Whilst remaining true to the goals of the initial volumes, the need for contemporary study

of the text requires that the series as a whole be updated. This updating is not simply a matter of commissioning new volumes to replace the old. We have also taken the opportunity to update the format of the series to reflect a key emphasis from linguistics, which is that texts communicate in larger blocks rather than in shorter segments such as individual verses. Because of this, the treatment of each section of the text includes three segments. First, a short note on *Context* is offered, placing the passage under consideration in its literary setting within the book, as well as noting any historical issues crucial to interpretation. The *Comment* segment then follows the traditional structure of the commentary, offering exegesis of the various components of a passage. Finally, a brief comment is made on *Meaning*, by which is meant the message that the passage seeks to communicate within the book, highlighting its key theological themes. This section brings together the detail of the *Comment* to show how the passage under consideration seeks to communicate as a whole.

Our prayer is that these new volumes will continue the rich heritage of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries and that they will continue to witness to the God who is made known in the text.

David G. Firth, Series Editor  
Tremper Longman III, Consulting Editor

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

When I commenced my very first solo student pastorate at North Auburn Baptist Church in Sydney, in 1968, I decided to begin my pastoral ministry by preaching through the book of Deuteronomy. Now, in the final year (2010) of my official working life as Senior Lecturer in Old Testament at the Bible College of Victoria, I have found myself completing a five-year project, writing a replacement for the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary on *Deuteronomy* written by Dr John Thompson in 1974. In so doing, I believe that Deuteronomy has provided a kind of bookend to my life's story.

Deuteronomy is rich in spirituality, and is arguably Old Testament preaching at its best. What struck me most about the book were the powerful and rhetorical echoes of the burning bush narrative from Exodus 3. Thus, in Deuteronomy God continually speaks to Israel *from out of the fire*, as a way of eliciting an appropriate *fear* and obedience to his word that would serve and bless them for ever (5:29; 10:12–13). This in no small way drives the narrative throughout, for Yahweh, Israel's sovereign God, continues to *burn* with jealous love and judgment towards his people to the very end, and expects his people to *love* him with equal passion (6:4–5).

Writing a commentary of this kind cannot be undertaken in a vacuum. Acknowledgment and thanks are here made for the many commentaries, monographs and articles that I have consulted in the preparation of this work. My special thanks are also directed to David Firth, for his helpful and patient editing of the manuscript throughout its preparation.

Finally, I would like to pay special tribute to my former lecturers with whom I began my spiritual journey and training at The Baptist Theological College of New South Wales (now known as Morling College), in Sydney from 1966 to 1970. These include Principal B. G. Wright (Theology), Rev. N. P. Andersen (Dean and Lecturer in Church History and Religious Education), Rev. E. R. Rogers (New Testament and Greek) and Rev. Dr V. J. Eldridge (Old Testament and Hebrew). These godly men ought never to be forgotten, for, like Moses in Deuteronomy, they have seen the Promised Land from afar, and have shared its lasting glory with generations of their grateful students.

E. J. (Ted) Woods

## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABR</i>	<i>Associates for Biblical Research</i>
<i>AnBib</i>	<i>Analecta Biblica</i>
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament</i>
<i>AOTC</i>	<i>Apollos Old Testament Commentary</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>Bsac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR:BS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
FB	Focus on the Bible
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
HBS	Herder biblische Studien
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society of America
<i>JPT</i>	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>

JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplementary Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>LNTS</i>	<i>Library of New Testament Studies</i>
<i>MAARAV</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Northwest Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
MAL	Middle Assyrian Laws
NAB	New American Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NIB	New International Bible
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
PBM	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
SBAB	Stuttgarter biblischer Aufsatzbände
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TBT</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
<i>VE</i>	<i>Vox Evangelica</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
VTE	Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

**Texts and versions**

4QDeut (j, q)	Fragmentary texts from Deuteronomy from Qumran
4QMMT	Six fragmentary texts (Halakhot) from Qumran
ET	English Text
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
SamP	Samaritan Pentateuch
Vg.	Latin Vulgate



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## INTRODUCTION

### Importance of the book

Deuteronomy is a pivotal book for the entire Bible. To begin with, its importance relates to the beginning of a *canonical* process (Deut. 31:24–26) that has produced the Hebrew Bible (Christensen 1991: 51–55). In this way, it has left its *theological* mark upon the content of all three divisions of the Old Testament (Law, Prophets and Writings). This includes the Psalms, whose *fivefold* structure may be patterned on the five books of the Pentateuch, concluding with Deuteronomy.

Perhaps it is not strange that the three books that appear in the largest number of manuscripts at Qumran – Psalms (36), Deuteronomy (29) and Isaiah (21) – are also the three quoted most frequently in the New Testament (VanderKam 1994: 32). Deuteronomy figures prominently in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and was the *first* Old Testament book directly quoted by Jesus after his baptism during his wilderness temptations by the devil (Matt. 4:4 = Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:7 = Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:10 =

Deut. 6:13). Jesus also made Deuteronomy 6:5 a primary demand for his followers (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). In Matthew 22:34–40, he reminded his audience that the *whole* of the Law and Prophets (= the entire Old Testament) rested upon the twin pillars of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Luke saw in Jesus the prophet *like Moses* who must be listened to and obeyed (Deut. 18:15, 18–19; Acts 3:22–23), and he patterned the early Christian community on Deuteronomy's vision (Acts 4:34; cf. Deut. 15:4). It was Paul who made the most use of Deuteronomy in his writings, especially Deuteronomy 30:11–14 (Rom. 10:6–10) and chapter 32 (Rom. 10:19 – 11:26; 1 Cor. 10; 2 Cor. 6:14–18). Finally, in Deuteronomy we have, for the first time, a reflective attempt to systematize belief in Israel.

## 2. Title

Deuteronomy begins, *These are the words* (v. 1). The name 'Deuteronomy' derives from the Greek rendering of 17:18, where the king who is to rule over Israel is commanded to prepare *a copy of this law*. In its context, it is unclear whether this means a copy of this law of the king (Deut. 17:14–20), or a copy of the full law code of Deuteronomy in which it is now contained. However, regardless of this point, the Greek Septuagint (LXX) mistakenly rendered this phrase as *to deuteronomion touto*, literally translated as a 'second law'. Subsequently, the Latin Vulgate followed suit and rendered the Greek noun *deuteronomium* ('second law'). The book's contents were therefore regarded as a 'second law', quite apart from the original meaning of 17:18. On the one hand, the translation 'second law' is somewhat misleading, since the book is not a 'second law' as such, but rather a renewal and recapitulation of the law given at Sinai in *preached* form (Deut. 29:1). This is the new element with these laws. Yet, the description of the Septuagint (LXX) is apt if it was based on the observation that the book of Deuteronomy contained 'new laws' *in addition* to those found in Exodus to Numbers (Deut. 29:1). But this does not mean with Weinfeld (1991: 19) that Deuteronomy should be seen as the 'law proper', *replacing* the Book of the Covenant. Rather, Deuteronomy restates about half of the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22 – 23:19) in order to account for 'centralization' and changes in 'economic' and 'social relationships',

while preserving much of the wording of the original law (Nelson 2002: 5). The reader is reminded yet again of the dramatic staging of Deuteronomy as an address delivered on the verge of entry into the land. Also, if, by the translation ‘second law’, the Septuagint (LXX) could mean *repeated law*,<sup>1</sup> or *completed law*,<sup>2</sup> then this, in some measure at least, aligns with the suggestion that Deuteronomy is a re-presentation of the law of Sinai, in the form of an exposition or expansion of Mosaic law. The phrase ‘second law’ reminds readers that God’s law is not a matter given once and for all (Fretheim 1996: 153). Law was integral to life before Sinai (e.g. Exod. 16:23), and develops after Sinai in view of the needs of new times and places.<sup>3</sup> The phrase also indicates the authoritative role that Deuteronomy has in interpreting the Sinai law. But this is achieved only in association with Moses. Deuteronomy is therefore best understood as a *covenant renewal* document and not an initial statement of covenant establishment (Merrill 1994: 52). It seeks to *anticipate fully* changes that would be brought about by the entrance and settlement into the land of Canaan.

### 3. Authorship, date and provenance

The question of the authorship, date and provenance of Deuteronomy continues to gravitate between two poles. The first is represented by pre-critical Jewish and Christian tradition in almost unanimously attributing Deuteronomy to Moses, at least in its basic form.<sup>4</sup> The second position relates to the new direction taken by De Wette in 1805, who argued that the *Book of the Law* found by Hilkiah the high priest (2 Kgs 22:8), and used by Josiah (2 Kgs 22–23), was

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1. Suggested by Thompson (1974: 12) involving *reinterpretation* and *reapplication* in legal and religious traditions.

2. E.g. Exod. 20:22–23:19 expounding Exod. 20:1–17.

3. Notably with the situation of Zelophehad’s daughters (Num. 27:1–11 and 36:1–13).

4. With some arguing for post-Mosaic additions such as Moses’ death at 34:5–12, e.g. the reservations of Spinoza in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (pp. 121–124, 128–132).

none other than the recently written book of Deuteronomy (possibly going back to Hezekiah). This was developed by Wellhausen (1885), who argued that a *prophet* wrote the specific chapters (12 – 26) just prior to Josiah's reforms around 622 BC. They then became a kind of manual for reform, targeting the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem and the removal of the 'high places' in the land. The prophet hid the book in the temple in such a way that it would be found. Thus Hilkiyah's discovery of the book, and Shaphan's reading of it to the king, became the basis for the various reforms. Eventually Deuteronomy was added to the other four books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers) to create the Pentateuch, in line with Wellhausen's evolutionary view of the *documentary* sources and history of the Pentateuch. Since then, the viewpoints expressed by De Wette and Wellhausen have provided the hinge point on which basic questions relating to the origin and date of the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy) have turned.

In current scholarly debate and research, Wellhausen's central thesis connecting Deuteronomy with Josiah's reforms (seventh century BC) continues to be assumed (in different forms) by most higher critical studies. But as Clements (2003: 508) has put it, the most recent work has tended to view the link between Josiah's reform and the date of Deuteronomy very differently, by recognizing that a *lengthy process* of composition best explains Deuteronomy's final form. However, as Block (2001: 388–390) has pointed out, this does not mean that scholars have always agreed in their explanations of the book's origin. For example, von Rad (1953: 60–69) argued that Deuteronomy was written by country Levites from the north, who came to Judah after the fall of Israel in 721 BC, and preserved their traditions shortly before 701 BC. Nicholson (1967: 119–124) and Clements (1965: 300–312) have adopted a similar approach, with a northern circle of either prophets (Nicholson) or reformers (Clements) fleeing south and composing their work in Jerusalem, hoping to reform Judah and the Jerusalem cult in line with the distinctive teaching of Deuteronomy (e.g. centralization, ark and 'name' theology). On the other hand, Weinfeld (1991: 44–50) argues that northern prophecy (especially seen in Hosea) has influenced Deuteronomy. During the periods of Hezekiah and Josiah in the south, Deuteronomy was eventually

formed as a manual for the king and the people by a scribal school, which also reflects the wisdom tradition (Deut. 4:6). Lohfink (1977: 12–21) anticipates Weinfeld (1991: 44–50) in seeing a southern provenance for Deuteronomy, arguing that it was composed in several stages, chiefly as a protest against a growing Assyrian hegemony over Judah that went back at least as far as Hezekiah's father, Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:10–16).<sup>5</sup> However, Clements (1998: 278–280) locates the background to the composition of Deuteronomy with the surrender of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 598 and 587 BC, resulting in the destruction of the temple and the removal of the last of the Davidic kings from the throne. In this situation, Israel stood at the borders of the land, with Deuteronomy providing a magnificent response to the political and religious crisis.

Thus we begin to see that there is anything but a consensus with regard to the authorship, date and provenance of Deuteronomy in its *final* form.<sup>6</sup> Hamilton (2005: 373) says there are really only two options: the classical position or some form of De Wette *redivivus*. For Clements (1998: 279; 2003: 508–516), the Babylonian exile has deeply influenced the demand for cult centralization, the greatly weakened role of the king, the desacralizing of several aspects of the cultus, and loyalty to the covenant based upon a written law for guidance. But one could argue that each one of these areas can equally suit the classical position of Israel anticipating its new life within the Promised Land. Jerusalem is not explicitly mentioned in Deuteronomy 12:5–14, and the 'name theology' suggests that Yahweh is taking *possession* of the land, awarding Israel her initial land-grant.<sup>7</sup> This includes the destroying of the names of the foreign gods, followed in 12:5b by the command to seek Yahweh at

5. Nelson (2002: 7) and especially Mayes (1993: 29–30) have followed Lohfink in understanding Deuteronomy as a reaction to this Assyrian 'culture shock', also deriving from Assyria the idea of a contract relationship (but see fn. 24, p. 45).

6. Hamilton (2005: 373) expresses the view that it is unlikely that any future monograph will ever silence all contrary views.

7. Hill (1988: 399–406). Hess (1997: 63–76) also sees this applied in the boundary lists of the book of Joshua (chs. 13 – 21).

the place where he chooses to place his name. Also, it is difficult to argue that the law of the king (Deut. 17:14–20) is meant to *supplant* the historic monarchy in Israel. The request for a king at 1 Samuel 8:5 presumes Deuteronomy 17:14–20, and a further clue may be offered by 1 Samuel 10:25 (cf. 2 Kgs 11:12, 17–18). Further, if the instruction of Deuteronomy 27:1–8 and 31:9–13 was carried out faithfully by Joshua (Josh. 8:30–35), with its further link back to Joshua 1:7–8, then a strong early connection with a canonical form of Deuteronomy may be supported (cf. 2 Kgs 23:2–3).

From a literary and structural perspective, the book of Deuteronomy comes closest to the earlier law codes in particular, and also to the Hittite suzerainty/vassal treaties of the second millennium BC. The later Assyrian treaties of the first millennium BC did not at first include the historical prologue (see fn. 24, p. 45) or the blessings part of the blessings and curses (sanctions), nor as a rule did they include border descriptions.<sup>8</sup> This fact points to an earlier date for Deuteronomy, possibly somewhere within the Late Bronze period (1400–1200 BC).<sup>9</sup>

In addition, we may also observe within Deuteronomy a twofold witness to its own authority, which speaks of *not adding to or subtracting from* this law (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). Joshua's consistent reference to the 'Book of the Law/of Moses' must refer to a *canonical* form given to written materials from the time of Moses, which, in all likelihood, incorporated most of the book of Deuteronomy in its final form (Deut. 30:10, 19; 31:9, 24, 26). This does not exclude the possibility of further minimal editing or rearrangement of the book, possibly by Joshua himself (cf. Josh. 24:25–26), or in conjunction with the book of Joshua, some time beyond in the period leading up to the monarchy.

Finally, the great diversity of views on the authorship of Deuteronomy reveals the difficulty of tying the book down to one particular group with one particular aim. Also, if scholars are prepared to concede that the direct link between the book of Deuteronomy and Josiah's reform is tenuous, then the main reason

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8. Singer, cited in Hoffner (2004: 183).

9. Kitchen (2003: 289–291).

for confidently dating Deuteronomy in the seventh century BC as a *fixed point* of historical criticism is correspondingly diminished. Thus, the date of origin becomes a much more open question (Wright 1996: 7). Already we have noted that scholars have seen Deuteronomy as the product of diverse groups, including prophetic, priestly, elders, scribal and wisdom circles. Some scholars have even proposed a combination of these views acting together (Miller 1990: 5–10; Nelson 2002: 7). However, as Wright (1996: 7) and Block (2001: 389) aptly conclude, such diversity causes one to wonder if the reverse direction of influence is not more probable, and certainly simpler, as an explanation: namely, that Deuteronomy (and Moses) precede the development of these movements, and it is *these* which have influenced them.

In the end, the *internal* witness of Deuteronomy itself offers the strongest clue about its original authorship, date and provenance (Moab/Mount Ebal/Shechem), but leaves open-ended the issue of its final editing and canonical form. Deuteronomy's testamentary character, acting in tandem with the movement from oral (1:5) to written tradition (31:9–13, 24–30) in one complete process, places this book squarely with Moses in the plains of Moab before Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. Finally, within the period of the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BC) Millard (1998: 179) says, 'There was literary activity in the Levant covering a wide range of texts and the scribes were clearly capable of producing books.' On this basis, there are no compelling reasons against locating the *origins* of Deuteronomy during this period.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. Some literary features of Deuteronomy

##### *a. Deuteronomy and the divine Torah*

Deuteronomy has been aptly described as 'preached law', and not

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10. For a good outline of the arguments for the early and late dates of the exodus, see Hill and Walton (2009: 105–108). While recognizing the difficulties in both points of view, this commentary favours the early date for the exodus (1446 BC), on the basis of a literal reading of 1 Kgs 6:1 and Judg. 11:26. See Wood (2008: 97–108).

codified law as such (von Rad 1953: 15). This may readily be seen when compared with much of the common material found in the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22 – 23:19), and also with the Holiness Code (Lev. 17 – 26), which replicates the parenetic (expository) style of Deuteronomy. However, Deuteronomy stands alone within the Pentateuch in calling itself ‘Torah’ (*tôrâ*), or ‘instruction’, relating more specifically to ‘covenantal law’ (Dumbrell 2002: 66). In the first section of Deuteronomy it is called *this law* (1:5; 4:8; 17:18, 19; 27:3, 8, 26), revealing its development from oral exposition (1:5) to writing (27:8). Thus, ‘Torah’ relates to the *exposition* of the law, as well as to its written form, that all Israel might learn and know God’s will. In fact, at the midpoint of these references (17:18, 19), the king himself is to become an exemplary student and practitioner of Torah within Israel. In the final section of Deuteronomy, it is called *this Book of the Law* (28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26), which finally comes together with *this law* at 31:24–26. Its place alongside the ark of the covenant suggests that the Ten Commandments within the ark are central, and that Deuteronomy is an important elaboration and a witness against Israel. This means that law in Deuteronomy is an expression of the will of God, which must be obeyed, if Israel is to love and serve the Lord with all their heart (10:12–13; 26:16–19).

As such, the law is found in apodictic (absolute = ‘Thou shalt not’) and casuistic forms (‘If ... then’), related to a people redeemed from the slavery of Egypt, and standing in covenant relationship with God and with one another. Throughout Deuteronomy, the command to keep the commandments is found within parenetic (expository) sections, which only serves to highlight the final importance placed upon the *keeping* of law for understanding the exposition itself, leading to success and well-being within the land (e.g. 6:13–19; 20–25; also 11:16–21). Indeed, the laws of Deuteronomy were not a burden to be borne, but Yahweh’s gracious gift of life to his covenant people (30:15–20).

Deuteronomy employs various technical terms to describe its laws. At 4:44–45 *law* or ‘instruction’ (*tôrâ*) is further defined by the term *stipulations* or ‘testimonies’ (*‘êdût / ‘êdôt*) in verse 45, and is used only here and in 6:17, 20. In Exodus 25:16 it is used of the Ten Commandments kept in the ark of the covenant. As such, this new

term may refer to the Decalogue at 5:6–21 (McBride 1987: 233–234), which represents the particulars of the covenant requirements. This is followed at 4:45 by the terms *decrees* (*ḥuqqîm* = written down or inscribed) and *laws* or ‘statutes’ (*mišpāṭîm* = rulings of a judge), as more explicit ways of defining the *stipulations/testimonies*. On only one occasion do *stipulations* and *decrees* come together as an exclusive pair (6:17). This serves as a parallel to the exclusive use of *all these decrees* at 6:24, which may emphasize the final inscriptional form of the Torah (cf. 31:9–13, 24–29). But more precisely, *law* (*tôrâ*) is defined as *testimonies, decrees* and *statutes* (4:45; 6:20). The historical and theological meaning of these terms is then spelled out within the first catechism of the book at 6:20–25, in answer to the children’s question about the meaning of the laws. The answer begins with Israel’s ‘slave’ status in Egypt, followed by Yahweh’s miraculous deliverance of them from Egypt through mighty signs and wonders *before our eyes*, leading to Yahweh’s giving Israel the land sworn on oath to the forefathers. Finally, Israel’s *righteousness* (right covenant standing) before Yahweh and *life* and *prosperity* within the land will depend upon their obedience to all of these laws and their *fear* of God (cf. 34:10–12).

The pair *decrees* and *laws/statutes* are found only in the frame passages of 4:1, 5, 8, 14, 44–45; 5:1, 31; 6:1, 20; [7:11]; 11:32; 12:1; 26:16–17, and never between 12:1 and 26:16–17. The historical facts of Yahweh’s redeeming activity are set out in some detail in chapters 1–3. The first appearance of *decrees* and *laws/statutes* comes in chapter 4 (also as a frame), as an exhortation to obey the law, serving as a reading guide for the rest of the book. The basic demands and principles of the covenant are then outlined in chapters 5–11, framed by *decrees* and *laws/statutes* (5:1 and 11:32). Finally, chapters 12–26 unpack the Ten Commandments of chapter 5 in order to meet the practical demands of life within the Promised Land, again framed by the pair *decrees* and *laws/statutes* (12:1 and 26:16–17).

In this way, Deuteronomy understands the divine Torah (*tôrâ*) as the whole body of teaching, from oral exposition (1:5) to the written form (27:8), showing the people of Israel the way to live in fellowship with Yahweh and with one another. That life, especially encompassed by the *decrees* and *laws/statutes*, would enable Israel to enjoy the blessings of the covenant to the full.

### *b. The 'thou' and 'you' sections*

Within Deuteronomy it has been long observed that the text alternates between the second-person singular ('thou') and plural forms ('you'), with regard to verbs, pronouns and suffixes. Attempts to account for the alternation of second masculine singular ('thou') and second masculine plural ('you') forms in Deuteronomy present two basic options. The first is that the two forms of address simply represent the style of diverse *sources* underlying the book. Steuernagel (1894: 22–28) argued that the plural forms were first used by Moses at Sinai, and the singular forms were later addressed to the generation who undertook the conquest. On the other hand, Noth (1981: 17) thought that the addition of plural passages to the original singular ones (in chs. 5–30) may have arisen from the practice of reading the law aloud and following it with sermon-like introductory remarks and expositions. Minette de Tillesse (1962: 29–87) followed this up by arguing that it was the Deuteronomistic historian himself who added the plural passages in chapters 5–30. But against this view, the removal of the plural forms would dislocate many texts, especially chapter 12, where verses 1–12 (pl.) complement and prepare for the argument of verses 13–28 (sing.). The second option is to suppose that the presence of plural and singular reflects deliberate choices made in the book's composition. Lohfink's (1963: 239) earlier work represents the most sustained attempt to explain the phenomenon on *stylistic* grounds, to emphasize a particular point. He claims that the change from singular to plural is more significant than the change from plural to singular. The singular-to-plural change usually occurs in the verb, while the plural to singular usually occurs in the suffix. In the narrative, the plural is normally used, unless the context demands the singular. Thus, the mixing of the numbers seems to be governed by the form. Mayes (1979: 36–37) supports Lohfink's point about style, particularly for 4:1–40, where source divisions are not present. Lenchak (1993: 13–16) has argued that the change in address between singular (nation) and plural (individuals), rather than a matter of style, is part of the author's rhetorical attempt to convince the audience that all Israel (both collective and individuals) must live lives that are radically devoted to Yahweh. Christensen (2001: ci) notes that the first two instances of the *Numeruswechsel* (number change) in Deuteronomy are found at 1:21 (sing.) and 1:31

(from sing. to pl.), forming a structural frame around the account of Israel's rebellion (1:22–30). For Christensen, this frame probably represents some kind of parallel musical structures within the text, which he claims are found in most cases of *Numeruswechsel*. Sometimes they act as structural markers, especially of boundaries between rhythmic units of the text, and sometimes as the centre or turning point within specific structures (e.g. 7:6 has the sing. form, and 7:4b–5 and 7:7–8 encasing it have the pl. form). Finally, McConville (2002: 19–36) argues that the singular is used deliberately in Deuteronomy for both rhetorical and theological reasons. Like the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22 – 23:19), the law in Deuteronomy differs from Ancient Near Eastern law codes in adopting the singular form of address. The fact that the singular is also a feature of the Ancient Near East's treaty tradition (e.g. Hittite treaties), rather than its laws, provides further grounds for thinking that the singular may have been adopted into this law code as part of the theological contention that law has its place within Israel's covenant with God. From a rhetorical point of view, McConville also argues that the singular can move between individual and community, which has the effect of placing the individual in the larger context, while at the same time differentiating between them. Even the plural in 29:9–21 addresses individuals within the whole. Therefore, the second-person address, both singular and plural, is governed by rhetorical and theological considerations. This leads McConville to conclude that Deuteronomy *innovates* in its relations to Ancient Near Eastern forms, notably the treaty form, in which case the structure of suzerain-vassal relationship is put to the revolutionary use of expressing the relationship between deity and people (not deity and king). In the case of the singular, the same is true. Indeed, it is the crucial point at which treaty and law were forged into a powerful new concept. This was already in place in the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22 – 23:33), but is more developed in Deuteronomy. Rather, the use of the singular in Deuteronomy is part of its carefully conceived attribution of ultimate political authority to the people of Israel, rather than to the king.<sup>11</sup> It follows

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11. With McConville (2002: 33), it is best to regard the singular 'thou' in

that the use of the singular is best understood in the context of a programme that is quite distinct from the centralized monarchical agenda of the Josianic reform.

Finally, the distinction between the *commandment* (sing.) and the *decrees* and *laws* (pl.) in chapters 5 and 6 may also provide a conceptual parallel of the phenomenon of *Numeruswechsel*. Rather than a case of different sources, the use of singular ('thou') and plural ('you') throughout Deuteronomy can best be understood as primarily rhetorical and theological in intent, also involving issues of style, context and structure (including repetition).

### *c. Distinctive vocabulary and style within Deuteronomy*

The language of Deuteronomy is distinctive, and the style is marked by stereotyped words and phrases.<sup>12</sup> Weinfeld (1972: 320–359) relates this language to *nine* different areas, including (1) the struggle against idolatry (e.g. 'to go after other gods': 6:14; 8:19; 11:28; 13:3; 28:14); (2) centralization of worship and 'name' theology (e.g. 'the place that the LORD will choose [to place] or make his name dwell there': 12:5, 11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2); (3) exodus, covenant and election (e.g. 'remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt': 5:15; 7:18; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:9, 18, 22; 'a holy people and a treasured possession': 7:6; 14:2; 26:18–19); (4) the monotheistic creed (e.g. 'you shall know/to know that Yahweh alone is God': 4:35, 39; 7:9; cf. 10:17); (5) observance of the law and loyalty to the covenant (e.g. 'to fear Yahweh always / as long as you live': 4:10; 6:2; 14:23; 31:13; cf. 10:12–13; 'to keep the commandment(s)/statutes/testimonies/judgments' (twenty-three times); 'to do that which is evil in the eyes of Yahweh': 4:25; 9:18; 17:2; 31:29); (6) inheritance of the land (e.g. 'which Yahweh, your God, is giving you as an inheritance [to possess it]': 4:21; 15:4; 19:10; 20:16; 21:23; 24:4; 25:19; 26:1; 'to dispossess nations': 4:38; 7:17; 9:3, 4, 5; 11:23; 18:12; 'the good land/ground': 1:35; 3:25; 4:21–22; 6:18; 8:10; 9:6; 11:17); (7) retribution and

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16:18 – 18:22 as corporate Israel, although this may not exclude individuals as representatives of the whole (e.g. elders; 27:1).

12. See Weinfeld (1972: 320–359) and Driver (1996: lxxvii–lxxxv) for comprehensive lists.

material motivation (e.g. 'to destroy/perish/dispossess *quickly*': 4:26; 7:4, 22; 9:3; 11:17; 28:20; 'so that it may be well with you': 4:40; 5:16, 26; 6:3, 18; 12:25, 28; 22:7; (8) the fulfilment of prophecy: 'as this day' (e.g. 2:30; 4:20, 38; 6:24; 8:18; 10:15; 29:28); (9) rhetoric and parenetic phraseology (e.g. 'Hear, O Israel': 4:1; 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9; 'thus you shall purge the evil from your midst/from Israel': 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7; 'something detestable to the LORD': 17:1; 18:12; 22:5; 23:18; 25:16; 'take care lest you forget Yahweh': 4:9, 23; 6:12; 8:11; 'know therefore (this day)'; 'know it in your heart': 4:39; 7:9; 8:5; 9:3, 6; 11:2; cf. 29:3).

Furthermore, it is not enough that the law be obeyed. Obedience must come from the right motives (Driver 1996: xxvi). These are especially set out in chapters 5 – 11, chief of which is the *fear* of God (4:10; 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24; 10:12–13, 20; 14:23; 17:19; 28:58; 31:12–13; cf. Jer. 32:39–41). This will enable true gratitude, *love*, and 'heart-service' of God, either as a consequence of keeping God's laws (11:13), and/or enabling the keeping of them (especially relating to the *divine fire* of Horeb; 4:10–12; 5:4–5, 22–29).<sup>13</sup> Finally, Israel is repeatedly challenged to obey the law so that it might fully enjoy the benefits of the land (4:1, 40; 5:31–33; 6:1–3, 24; 11:8–9, 22–23; 16:20; 23:20; 25:15; 30:20). This might suggest that *fear* of God also needed reinforcing through the divine sanctions of blessings and curses (11:26–28).

## 5. Structure

The structure of Deuteronomy has been described as complex (Nelson 2002: 2), and yet so rich in content and texture that, like a rich fruit cake, it can be sliced in various ways (Wright 1996: 1–2). In spite of its complexity, it is possible to move beyond themes and content, to speak of an underlying structure/s, which can provide vital clues about its meaning. Above all else, Deuteronomy is

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13. Sprinkle (2004: 242–243) points out that the *fear of God* (Exod. 20:18–21) lies at the chiasmic heart of the covenant made with Israel at Sinai (Exod. 19:3 – 24:11), to stop Israel from sinning. Deuteronomy has followed this up at 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24, and with its first major conclusion at 10:12–13.

self-conscious about being a *literary* and *theological* work.

### *a. Superscriptions and speeches*

To begin with, Olson (1994) breaks fresh ground in finding *five* headings (1:1; 4:44; 6:1; 29:1; 33:1) as the key for grasping the book's overall literary shape and the interrelationship of its parts. This schema allows Olson to argue that Moses' death is not only present in each part in different ways (e.g. chs. 1 – 4; 5; 6 – 28; 29 – 32; 33 – 34), but is strategically placed in such a way that it unites all the parts together. However, while Moses' death and Joshua's succession are an important part of Deuteronomy's structure, especially in the outer frames of chapters 1 – 3 and 31 – 34, this is not especially apparent in Olson's 'blueprint' for chapter 5, and also in chapters 6 – 28. For Olson, Torah best defines the form of Deuteronomy, which he translates as a programme of 'catechesis' (instruction). On the other hand, McBride (1987) follows a series of four editorial superscriptions (1:1–5; 4:44–49; 29:1; 33:1), but follows Josephus (*Against Apion* 2: 145–186) in defining Torah as *politeia* (an Israelite 'polity' or political 'constitution'). As such, the 'Book of the Torah' is a new literary genre without parallel in the Pentateuch (cf. Lev. 17 – 26) or in the Ancient Near Eastern world. In support of his theory, McBride (1987: 239) finds a five-part structure to the laws of chapters 12 – 26, with 17:14 – 18:22 providing the *constitutional* centre.

A more standard outline (also followed by this commentary) follows only three superscriptions (1:1; 4:44; 29:1), isolating the book into three major speeches of Moses:

1:1 – 4:43	Historical review followed by exhortation
4:44 – 28:68	The heart of covenant faith, followed by exhortation to covenant loyalty, law, covenant renewal, blessings and curses
29:1 – 30:20	Recapitulation of the covenant demand

This is then followed by a kind of epilogue (31:1 – 34:12), including Joshua's commissioning, the Song and Blessing of Moses, and Moses' death.

Because these speeches are presented as coming immediately prior

to Moses' death, they give the book a *testamentary* character that enhances the seriousness of its challenge to Israel (Wright 1996: 2).<sup>14</sup> Earlier, von Rad (1966: 22) had noticed that Deuteronomy is composed in the style of a *farewell speech* by Moses, comparing it with the 'laying down of an office' (Josh. 23; 1 Sam. 12; 1 Chr. 22, 29). Von Rad also linked Deuteronomy with a likely covenant renewal feast at Shechem, especially suggested by 26:16–19. But it is more likely that Deuteronomy is a renewal of the covenant originally made at Horeb/Sinai, presented as a *prophetic farewell speech* following the pattern of the farewell speech of Jacob to the twelve tribes of Israel at the conclusion of Genesis (49:1–28). This is especially suggested by the inclusion of the blessing of Moses upon the tribes at 33:1–29, framed by the notice of his death at 32:48–52 and 34:1–12.

Finally, Polzin (1980: 25–72), in a literary study of the speech form of Deuteronomy, distinguishes three narrative 'voices' within the book: God, Moses and the voice of the narrator or implied author of the book.<sup>15</sup> Within this scheme, the narrator's voice finally wins out over the other voices, and the reader is thus prepared for *this* voice throughout the remainder of the Deuteronomistic history in Joshua to 2 Kings. But, even if Polzin is correct in identifying this new narrator with the 'prophet like Moses' (Deut. 18:15), it is highly unlikely that this new 'voice' ever supplants the authority of Moses (Deut. 34:10–12). The same can be said for the 'Book of the Torah' (Deut. 31:9, 26), or supremely that of the fire and *voice* of God (Deut. 4:9–14, 32–40; 5:22–29; 29:29; 32:39; Olson 1994: 180). However, the general point can be made that, in the end, it is the narrator's point of view that determines the permanent *canonical* meaning of the text (Block 2001: 392).<sup>16</sup> But, in issuing this

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14. Weinfeld (1991: 4) says that the form of 'testament' (or farewell speeches) given to the book looks peculiar, but has its antecedents in the Egyptian method of diffusing moral teaching.

15. Polzin (1980: 29) sees the narrator's voice in fifty-six verses, but Block (2001: 392) counts sixty-four verses.

16. Although the use of the third person is used by speakers relating to themselves in the divine speech at Exod. 34:6–7 and also in the Hittite treaties (Hallo 2000: 93–100).

statement, Block makes this claim for only sixty-four verses within Deuteronomy, mainly located within the framing chapters of 1–4 and 27–34, which also take in the four superscriptions of 1:1; 4:44; 29:1; and 33:1.

### *b. Concentric literary patterns*

Whereas the previous section concentrated on the more traditional forms of literary criticism in terms of isolating sources, voices and layers connected with the redactional history of Deuteronomy, newer scholarly approaches have explored the literary skill and artistry of the book. Christensen (2001: lviii) has argued that Deuteronomy may also be described as a five-part concentric design in which points are repeated with a movement ‘in’ towards the centre, and then back ‘out’ to the frame again. This may be seen as follows:

- A. THE OUTER FRAME: A look backward (Deut. 1–3)
- B. THE INNER FRAME: The great peroration (Deut. 4–11)
- C. THE CENTRAL CORE: Covenant stipulations (Deut. 12–26).
- B'. THE INNER FRAME: The covenant ceremony (Deut. 27–30)
- A'. THE OUTER FRAME: A look forward (Deut. 31–34)

The outer frame (Deut. 1–3 and 31–34) is held together by the figure of Joshua, who is found only in these sections. The two parts of the inner frame (Deut. 4–11 and 27–30) are joined together by the reference to blessings and curses, connected with a cultic ceremony on Mounts Gerizim and Ebal (Deut. 11:26–32 and 27:1–13). At the centre (Deut. 12–26) lies the law code, which McBride (1987: 239) has arranged concentrically in ‘a remarkably coherent five-part structure’, with 17:14–18:22 as the *constitutional* centre. There is much to commend this literary view of the book, which accommodates difficult passages such as chapter 27 as an integral part of the overall structure of Deuteronomy. It also underlines the significance of Moses’ death and Joshua’s succession at the frames as an important theme of the book.

Within the overall structure, Olson (1994: 40–48) has drawn attention to chapter 5 (the Decalogue) as the ‘blueprint’ for the book.

Lohfink's (1994: 248–264) work on the Decalogue (5:6–21) has shown that the concerns of the entire Decalogue are concentrically drawn together in the command to keep the Sabbath day, which he has termed a 'Sabbath Decalogue' (see commentary). Because the Sabbath command is located centrally within the Decalogue (5:12–15), it is linked to one's relationship to Yahweh before it (vv. 6–11), and to human relationships after it (vv. 16–21).<sup>17</sup> At the heart of the Sabbath command (5:14–15) is the expression: *so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do* (5:14b). This is based on Israel's prior 'slave status' in Egypt, from which the Lord had miraculously and graciously delivered them (5:15). The 'Sabbath principle' is later reiterated within the central law section in chapter 15, especially verses 12–15.<sup>18</sup> In this way, we see something of the structural importance of social justice within the book of Deuteronomy, which begins within the heart of the Decalogue itself.

### *c. Covenant form*

Ever since the seminal work of Mendenhall (1954: 50–76), a flood of treaty/covenant studies have been applied to the structure of Deuteronomy.<sup>19</sup> Several scholars have followed Mendenhall in believing that Deuteronomy has patterned its work after the Hittite treaty model.<sup>20</sup> Some scholars reflect the covenant and treaty nature of Deuteronomy in their structural outline of the book. However, they acknowledge at the same time that the book also reflects the genre of narrative, itineraries, exhortation (parenesis), hymns and other poetic material, with the whole thing coming together as a farewell address (Merrill 1994: 27–32). Earlier, von Rad (1966:

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17. Preserving the essence of the greatest commandment of Jesus, namely love for God, and neighbour as oneself (Matt. 22:34–39; Mark. 12:28–34; Luke. 10:25–28).

18. So Hamilton 1992: 107–113; contrast Lohfink (1994: 260).

19. See McCarthy (1981), who argues for the long-standing presence of treaty language in the ancient world which did not suddenly arrive with the Assyrians.

20. Notably Kline (1963); Thompson (1964); Kitchen (1966; 2003); Wenham (1969).

22–23) described the book as a typical farewell speech, and he was one of the first also to acknowledge its *covenant* features (with its strict covenant formulary now lost). But he appeared to stop short of discussing it in the light of the Ancient Near Eastern treaties, although his outline anticipates such an approach. He argued that the book falls structurally into four sections:

1. The events of Sinai and hortatory material (including ‘basic principles’ in chapters 4–11) connected with these events (Deut. 1–11)
2. The reading of the law (‘detailed stipulations’) (Deut. 12:1–26:15)
3. The sealing of the covenant (Deut. 26:16–19)
4. Blessings and curses (Deut. 27–28, also 29–30)

It is clear that Deuteronomy is not in itself the text of a treaty (Wright 1996: 2). Further, its treaty and covenant-like language has solid links with its own social, religious and political past, founded on *kinship* ideals. As Cross (1998: 11) puts it: ‘Often it has been asserted that the language of “brotherhood” and “fatherhood,” “love” and “loyalty” is “covenant terminology”.’ This is to turn things upside down. The language of covenant (kinship-in-law) is taken from the language of *kinship*, ‘kinship-in-flesh’ (e.g. 1 Sam. 20:14–20). Also, since all these terms are integral to biblical monotheism, Cross argues that they must be located in the era of the tribal league in covenant with Yahweh. Certainly the *blessings* and *curses* were already built into the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. Num. 22–24; Lev. 17–26) as an early statement of its monotheistic faith.

But as Thompson (1964: 36) has pointed out, it is clear that certain aspects of the Old Testament covenant language were rooted in the wider Near Eastern environment. For example, the term ‘love’ has an Akkadian equivalent with the verb *rāmu* in the Amarna letters of the fourteenth century BC to express the relationship between the Pharaoh and his vassals (Moran 1963: 77–87).<sup>21</sup>

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21. Although Weeks (2004: 105) argues that even the Amarna evidence, with its vassal and treaty-like language, does not contain a single example of

In terms of covenant and treaties, Weeks (2004: 174–182) has argued that each major culture developed its own distinctive approach. Therefore, it is much more likely that each derives ultimately from a *common source*, rather than that one ‘borrowed’ the other’s treaty form and then added its own distinctive forms.<sup>22</sup> Added to this, there is no fixed treaty form, even within one society at one particular time. Rather, there is a clustering around a typical pattern (or template) by those who have a *concept* of relationships, especially of the loyalty due to a suzerain and of the beneficence he bestows. Modified formats then came into being to secure the goal defined by those concepts about relationships. Thus, the explanation of the commonality of the Ancient Near Eastern treaty/covenant is a combination of ‘original inheritance and stimulus diffusion ... directed into particular forms in local centres’. As a final caveat to this discussion, it must be stressed that Yahweh himself knew perfectly well how to communicate in culturally relevant ways within the ancient society in which Israel found itself. Therefore, it comes as no real surprise that the typical ancient treaty form should also impose itself upon the book of Deuteronomy. This signified the fact that Israel had now exchanged one overlord (Pharaoh) for another (Yahweh) as its new suzerain and conquering king, to whom love and loyalty were due, sealed through mutual oath (26:16–19; 29:9–15).

Thus it can be maintained that the core of Deuteronomy is envisaged as a book concerned with *covenant renewal*, defining the relationship between God and Israel (29:1, 9–15; 31:10–13). It binds Israel to be God’s loyal and loving subjects, promising them prosperity if they are obedient, and punishment if they go their own way.

It therefore comes as no surprise that its structure also bears the marks of the regular form of Ancient Near Eastern treaty texts, as

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a treaty/covenant, due to the different ways in which the vassal saw the relationship and the way the Pharaoh saw it.

22. Likewise in the area of law codes, Wells (2006: 85–100) has rejected the view of Wright (2003: 11–87) that the Covenant Code (Exod. 20:22 – 23:19) reveals direct dependence on the Law of Hammurabi.

well as law codes and boundary stones. It is probably best to see the structure of Deuteronomy as a cross between a law code and a treaty, as set out in the following table (slightly modified) by Wenham (2003: 125):

### Deuteronomy's structure as a cross between a law code and a treaty

Law code e.g. Hammurabi's 1750 BC	Deuteronomy	Near Eastern Treaties e.g. Hittite treaties 1500/1400–1200 BC
	Preamble (1:1–5)	Titulary/preamble
• Historical prologue	Historical prologue (1:6 – 3:29)	Historical prologue
• Laws	Stipulations: (a) Basic (4:1 – 11:32) (b) Detailed (12:1 – 26:15)	Treaty stipulations: (a) Basic (b) Detailed
• Document clause	Document clause (27:1–26; 31:9–13)	Document clause <sup>23</sup>
		God's witnessing treaty
• Blessings	Blessings (28:1–14)	Curses
• Curses	Curses (28:15–68)	Blessings
	Recapitulation (unique): (29:1 – 30:20) Witnesses (heaven/earth): (30:19; 31:28; 32:1; cf. 4:26)	

Deuteronomy is law-code-like in that: (1) It seeks to make the inscribed words of the law 'clear' (1:5; 27:8; cf. the Epilogue of the Code of Hammurabi, *ANET*, p. 178). As such, it takes up earlier laws (e.g. the Covenant Code of Exod. 20:22 – 23:19), explains them, and applies them to Israel's new situation. (2) The words of Deuteronomy 4:8, *What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?*, may have

23. McCarthy (1981: 66, 84) notes that the document clause (inscription/reading/deposition of tablet) may have been non-essential and therefore lacking in most of the Hittite treaties.

served as a polemic against the claim of the ‘just laws’ of ancient law codes and the boast of the kings who made them (see the Prologue and Epilogue of both the Lipit-Ishtar law code, *ANET*, pp. 159–161, and especially the Code of Hammurabi 4:9–10; 24:1–5, 26–31; Weinfeld 1991: 202). (3) The detailed stipulations of Deuteronomy 12:1 – 26:15 have been compared with the specific stipulations section found in treaties. But the instructions in Deuteronomy read more like law (more precisely, ‘preached law’) than treaty stipulations (e.g. dealing with mutual protection measures between suzerain and vassal, as with the treaty between Muršiliš II [1339–1306 BC] and Duppi-Teššub of Amurru, *ANET*, pp. 203–205). Also, chapter 5 of Deuteronomy has been understood as an exposition of the Decalogue, maintaining its link with law. Thus the treaty/law code combination is justified for this section. (4) Finally, Deuteronomy follows the law code pattern by concluding chapter 28 with *blessings* followed by *curses*. The treaty pattern is *curses* followed by *blessings*.

On the other hand, Deuteronomy is treaty-like, in that: (1) Its chief concern is to establish Israel as the Lord’s loyal vassal, and Yahweh as its loving and benevolent Suzerain and King. With this in mind, Israel is to love the Lord with all her heart, soul and might, and have nothing to do with the gods of Canaan or their worshippers (6:4–25). (2) As with the treaties, the historical prologue of Deuteronomy (1:6 – 3:29) reviews the recent history between the parties concerned.<sup>24</sup> And even though Deuteronomy’s preamble (1:1–5) does not introduce Moses as the ‘great king’ with other royal titles, as with the king in the preamble of the treaties, it does begin with the same words: ‘These are the words ...’ (1:1), emphasizing

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24. Circumstances at the end of the Empire led the Assyrians to start appealing to history and to their goodness to the vassal (Weeks 2003: 47–54). But this was probably a convergence to the biblical and earlier models. Also, it is most unlikely that Israel would have adopted the rare and late form of treaty used by a deadly enemy to express its relationship to God. Interestingly, the Hittites are mentioned at the head of the list of nations to be destroyed at 7:1 and 20:17, with whom Israel was to make no ‘treaty’ (7:2b). But here the issue appears to be the corrupting influence of the worship of their gods (7:3–6; 20:17–18; cf. 29:16–18).

the Lord's supremacy and that of Torah. Then in the treaties (Hittite), the suzerain boasts of his kindness in allowing the vassal to remain king, despite the previous *rebellion* of his family (*ANET*, pp. 203–205). In a similar way, Deuteronomy reminds Israel of God's goodness to them despite their *rebellion* in the wilderness (1:19–45). (3) The general stipulations in the treaties emphasize the principle of *loyalty*, which will also ensure the throne succession for the vassal's heir. One treaty concludes: 'But you, Duppi-Tessub, remain loyal towards the king of the Hatti land ... *Do not turn your eyes to anyone else*' (*ANET*, pp. 203–205). This comes close to the first commandment: *You shall have no other gods before me* (5:7), and its follow-up at 6:4–5 with the Shema, all within the general stipulations section of Deuteronomy (4:1 – 11:32). (4) The document clause makes provision for the treaty to be written down and stored in a sanctuary, and then read publicly at regular intervals to remind the vassal of his obligations (27:1–26; 31:9–13, 24–29). But its presence is unclear in several Hittite treaty texts (see fn. 23). More important for treaty texts is the loyalty oath inscribed on the tablet, generally included with the curses and blessings in the treaties (Deut. 26:16–19; 29:14–15).<sup>25</sup> Finally, a god list does not appear in Deuteronomy, for the obvious reason that Israel was to acknowledge only one God (4:35–39; 5:7; 6:4). The concept of witness is still taken up in the book in terms of God's creative order, but it is clearly found only in Deuteronomy's unique *recapitulation* of the covenant (30:19; 31:28; 32:1; cf. 4:26).

We can therefore conclude this section on covenant by saying that Deuteronomy is at least a unique cross between law code and treaty, possibly with other genres like boundary stones tossed in as well. Its treaty-like structure has admirably suited its covenantal and monotheistic concerns, serving *both* religious and political ends, whereas secular treaties generally appeared to serve only political ends (but see fn. 24). It has some resemblances with the Hittite treaties, but these also break down within Deuteronomy's unique

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25. Weinfeld (1991: 9) says, 'The covenant of God with Israel is not to be paralleled to political pacts between states in the Ancient Near East, but is to be compared with the *loyalty oaths* of vassals and their suzerains.'

structure. Also, the use of treaty/law-code ideas and structure does not begin with Deuteronomy. They have a partial echo and precedent in the book of Exodus, especially within the Sinai covenant of chapters 19 – 24 (19:3–8; 20:1–17; 20:22 – 23:19 [law code]; 24:3–8; Thompson 1964: 21–22). Then following Deuteronomy, the renewal of covenant at Shechem by Joshua himself (Josh. 24:1–27) follows a treaty-like pattern on a small scale. This cumulative evidence indicates that treaty/law-code concepts were not only part of the Lord's own way of communicating his covenant with Israel from the beginning, but were most likely part of a common stock of treaty/law-code language within the Ancient Near Eastern world.

***d. Chapter 4 as 'reading instructions' and chapter 5 as 'blueprint' for the rest of the book***

Chapter 4 forms a 'bridge' between the historical review of chapters 1 – 3 and the beginning of Moses' exposition of the law in 5:1. As such, it also concludes Moses' first address (chs. 1 – 4), while also serving as 'reading instructions' for the rest of the book (Nelson 2002: 60). This includes a summary of past, present and future history, especially as this will relate to future idolatry within the land, eventual exile and return, made possible by God's grace (vv. 25–31).<sup>26</sup> This passage anticipates 30:1–10, especially with the language of return *with all your heart and with all your soul* (4:29; cf. 30:2, 6, 10). Christensen (see b. Concentric literary patterns, above) has already drawn attention to the concentric 'inner frames' of chapters 4 – 11 and 27 – 30, in which the theological ideas of these chapters match each other in reverse order (e.g. 4 matches 30, and 11 matches 27). Further, appeal is made in chapter 4 to the covenant made with Israel at Horeb in terms of the Decalogue or 'ten words' (vv. 10–14), which form the basis of the 'statutes and ordinances' for the rest of the book. Chapter 5 then links back to chapter 4, but also looks forward by providing the specific details or 'blueprint' for the

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26. Olson (1994: 40–48) notes that ch. 5 parallels ch. 4 in viewing history past, present and future, but ch. 5 (as 'blueprint') limits the discussion to the Sinai covenant, and its commandments and laws.

Decalogue (5:6–21). These become the basis for all the subsequent *commands, decrees and laws* (5:31; 12:1 – 26:15).

In summary, chapter 4 returns to Horeb, where the God ‘so near’ and the law ‘so righteous’ (4:7–8) are experienced through the spoken and written word by means of the voice that *spoke to you out of the fire* (4:10–20). Within this experience Israel is reminded twice that they saw *no form* (thus excluding idolatry); there was only a *voice* (4:12, 15). This is immediately followed by the notice of Moses’ death, indicating its importance for the book, together with a warning against making an idol, for the Lord is a *consuming fire* (4:21–24). In fact, Moses’ death is framed by the sin of making idols (4:15–20 and 4:25–31), suggesting that Moses was an example of one who maintained his integrity at this level as well as God’s approval, especially with the golden calf episode (9:7–21). As the chapter draws to a close, the *voice of God speaking out of fire* occurs twice (4:33, 36), in order to emphasize the double monotheistic statement about God (*there is no other*) of 4:35 and 4:39 (cf. 5:7; 6:4; 32:39). These are offered as a final reason for keeping the covenant laws so that Israel could enjoy God’s blessing within the land *for all time* (4:40).

Chapter 5 then presents the core text (Decalogue) of the law ‘so righteous’ (4:8) as a written text (5:22). But it also develops the idea of the Lord ‘so near’ (4:7), in terms of speaking to each successive generation of Israel (5:2) *from out of the fire* of Horeb (5:4, 22, 23–27; cf. 10:4). This is achieved by now turning the Lord’s question at 4:33 into a response by the people (5:26), leading to their commitment to obey all of God’s commands (5:27). Following this, 5:29 offers an important *key* to Israel’s ability to keep the law. Heart inclination to *fear* the Lord and keep all of his commands *always* (see fn. 13, p. 37) is rhetorically linked in Deuteronomy to Israel’s ability continually to encounter Horeb and the voice of God speaking to them *from out of the fire* (i.e. what is ‘seen and heard’). Chapter 4 shows this revelatory provision to be crucial in resisting the temptation to *draw near* to idolatrous images (4:28). Chapter 5 indicates that this provision is vital in resisting the tendency for Israel to *draw away* from God’s word, reducing it to past inscriptions which have no further relevance for Israel’s present or future (5:22, 23–31). Thus Israel is saved from a *subjective* understanding of the law (e.g. 29:19–21), and also an approach that viewed the law as of no relevance for present

or future generations (5:2–3; 10:4; 17:18–20; 29:29; 30:11–14; 31:9–13, 24–26).<sup>27</sup>

Within the commentary, see comment on 4:11 for a presentation of the view that the expressions *ablaze with fire* (also 5:23 and 9:15), and hearing the Lord's words from *out of the fire* relate back to the burning bush at Exodus 3:2. This also becomes the sign of things to come when Israel returns to this mountain (Exod. 3:12). Thus, for Deuteronomy, Horeb replicates the burning bush of Moses for Israel (cf. 33:16). This becomes the starting point of Israel's call and vocation in the light of Exodus 19:1–6 (Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:18–19). Therefore, Israel must constantly return to Horeb in order also to understand her calling as a holy people and the Lord's *treasured possession*, closely linked to the shunning of idolatry and obedience to covenant law (4:11–24). Later, the people request that Moses alone should *go near*, and hear God's voice from this blazing fire (5:27a). But the people's willingness to obey all that the Lord tells Moses (5:27b) is a rhetorical reminder that Horeb (like Moses' burning bush) is still very much alive for them. In the covenant renewal ceremony at Moab (29:1, 9–15), the Lord reminds Israel of the disasters of disobeying the covenant, either at a personal or corporate level (29:16–28). If this happens, the Lord's anger will *burn* against his people, and the land itself will become a *burning waste*, according to the curses written in *this Book of the Law*. Finally, Horeb will be worked out through the *prophet (like Moses)* as the spokesman of God's word to all Israel (18:14–22), culminating with Moses himself (34:10–12).

### *e. An expanded Decalogue*

Already we have drawn attention to Olson's point that chapter 5 (the Decalogue) may be seen as a 'blueprint' for the rest of the book,

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27. Moore (1992: 75–92) notes the important links between chs. 4 and 5 in terms of the God 'so near' and the 'law so righteous' (4:7–8). These twin concepts are related to the voice from *out of the fire* (4:10–15; 5:2–33; 10:4), made available to each generation in terms of the spoken and written law (5:2–4; cf. 18:16–20; 34:10). This is an important underlying theme for Deuteronomy.

in which the Ten Commandments find their exposition in roughly the same order within chapters 12 – 26.<sup>28</sup> After a long and impassioned plea in chapters 5 – 11 to keep the statutes and laws, framed by the need to place them upon/in *your hearts*, and to *teach* these laws to your children (6:4–9, 20–25; 11:18–21), chapters 12 – 26 finally begin their *specific* exposition.<sup>29</sup> But even this section is also framed by the need to keep the laws (*decrees* and *laws*) within the land, *with all your heart and with all your soul* (12:1; 26:16–19). The specific exposition of the Ten Commandments (chs. 12 – 26) then follows the order of the ancient treaties, coming after the general stipulations (chs. 5 – 11). They also have a precedent with the Covenant Code (Exod. 20:22 – 23:19) in the book of Exodus, as an exposition of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–17), though not in the same order.

Most important for understanding the structure of Deuteronomy is the logic of organization related to the specific stipulations section (chs. 12 – 26). In 1979 came a breakthrough in the landmark article of Stephen Kaufman (1978/9: 105–158), suggesting that chapters 12 – 26 could be divided in such a way as to correlate with the Ten Commandments in the following way:

### Stephen Kaufman's application of the Ten Commandments

Commandment	Deuteronomy's application
1–2. No other gods	12:1–32 No worship at Canaanite shrines
3. Do not take the Lord's name in vain	13:1 – 14:27 No association with Canaanite worship
4. Observe the Sabbath	15:1 – 16:17 Holy years and holy days
5. Honour of father and mother	16:18 – 18:22 Respecting authorities
6. No murder	19:1 – 22:8 Respect for human life
7. No adultery	22:9 – 23:18 Adultery and illicit mixtures
8. No theft	23:19 – 24:7 Property violations
9. No false witness	24:8 – 25:4 Fair treatment of others
10. No coveting	25:5–16 Coveting wives and property

Walton (1987: 213–15) sought to establish the validity of Kaufman's suggestion by expanding this correlation to include chapters 6–11 in seeking to address 'the spirit of the law'. Thus the legal material suggests four general topical issues of authority, dignity, commitment, and rights and privileges. Commandments 1–4 address these four issues as they relate to God, and commandments 5–10 address them as they relate to relationships among human beings.

### John Walton's application of the Ten Commandments

Issues	Regarding 'God'	Regarding 'man'
Authority	Commandment 1 (5:6–7) (chs. 6–11)	Commandment 5 (5:16) (16:18–18:22)
Dignity	Commandment 2 (5:8–10) (12:1–32)	Commandments 6–8 (5:17–19) 6th: (19:1–21:23) 7th: (22:1–23:14) 8th: (23:15–24:7)
Commitment	Commandment 3 (5:11) (13:1–14:21)	Commandment 9 (5:20) (24:8–16)
Rights and privileges	Commandment 4 (5:12–15) (14:22–16:17)	Commandment 10 (5:21) (24:17–26:15)

However, Braulik (1993: 321–322) has argued that chapters 12–18 (the first four commandments, following the Lutheran/Roman Catholic ordering) correspond to the Decalogue only in a vague and generalized way. But beginning with chapter 19 (following Kaufman), one can discern more exact correspondences from the fifth through to the tenth commandments. Finally, it must be kept in mind that the Decalogue is being 'preached' within chapters 12–26, which means that it is more interested in showing the *trajectory* of

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28. The importance and primacy of the Decalogue (5:6–21) may be seen at 10:1–5, where it alone is placed within the ark.
29. Although some scholars see this process already at work in chs. 6–11, as an outworking of the first commandment (Driver 1996: xx; Walton 1987: 213–225; Harman 2001: 12–14).

concepts for each commandment in terms of implications and principles, than in repeating the letter of the law. Further, the commandments are not as discrete in their meaning as we sometimes assume. In other words, there is a certain *overlap* between commandments (e.g. between 1–3 and 6–10). Therefore, it will come as no surprise if the exposition of a particular commandment links up with another commandment. For example, in the revised outline below, the third commandment (5:11) has been linked with 14:1–21 because of the connection with Leviticus 21:5–6 in the same order. But it is also clear that the third commandment is linked to the concerns of the first two commandments found in chapters 12 and 13 before it (relating to God and man). In these chapters the temptation is present for Israel to take the names of other gods upon their lips in oath-taking and worship (cf. 6:13; 10:20; 12:3; 13:2–3; cf. Josh. 23:7). But the third commandment (5:11) also has an important link with the judicial context of the sixth commandment (e.g. 19:15–21), and especially with the ninth commandment (24:8–25:4) relating to false witness between men (cf. 5:20). Furthermore, as in ancient law codes, there is often a *transitional* passage between the exposition of individual commandments, anticipating the next commandment or section. In this commentary, the following outline of the Ten Commandments has been followed, slightly modifying the first four of Kaufman's commandments, but following his assessment of commandments five to ten:

### Revised outline of the exposition of the commandments

Commandments	Application in 12 – 15	Notes
1–2. (5:7–10)	No other gods and idols (12:1 – 13:18)	Commandments 1 and 2 are reflected here in terms of purity of worship and exclusion of all foreign idols and gods.
3. (5:11)	No misuse of God's name, especially within the cult of the dead (14:1–21). (Note that 14:1–21	Similar concerns are reflected at Lev. 21:5–6 (in the same order) in which the <i>name</i> of the Lord is profaned. Israel

- parallels the structure and themes of 12:1–31.) Also the word *detestable* links chapters 12 – 14 in close proximity (12:31; 13:14; 14:3).
4. (5:12–15) Sabbath observance (14:22 – 16:17) Sabbath underlies this section in terms of ‘rhythms’ of life and care (social justice) for all.
5. (5:16) Honour of parents (16:18 – 18:22) Provides the foundation for respect towards legitimate human authority, focused on judge, king, priest and prophet.
6. (5:17) No murder (19:1 – 22:8; with 22:5 as transitional) (Note: the longest of the commandments with seventy-two verses relating to issues of physical life and death within the land) Forms the beginning of five terse commandments (5:17–21) joined by the word ‘and’, and set apart from the former by their thematic relationships with one’s neighbour.
7. (5:18) No adultery (22:9 – 23:18; with 23:15–16 as transitional) Though the word ‘adultery’ is clearly alluded to only once (22:22), the laws on improper ‘mixtures’ point in the same direction, together with issues of a lack of purity in sexuality.
8. (5:19) No stealing (23:19 – 24:7) Applied to a range of problems in ancient society, including

marriage (divorce) and war, in which people could be robbed of security, and concluding more directly with 'stealing' at 24:6–7.

9. (5:20)                      No false witness  
(24:8 – 25:4)
- This section is loosely connected with the ninth commandment, prohibiting false witness within the land. The reference to Miriam (24:9) is linked directly with the concept of false witness. Other laws that follow address the 'rights' of different groups which, if not honoured, is tantamount to disobeying the Torah, or false witness against it.
10. (5:21)                      Do not covet  
(25:5–16)  
(Note: the option of not taking on the role of the *levir* was no doubt driven by economic rationalism and the protection [or coveting] of one's own property)
- Within this final commandment, the prohibition on coveting wives may lie behind the rules on levirate marriage and brawls (25:5–12). Finally, the concluding example of the two sets of weights and measures (vv. 13–16) implying coveting fittingly brings these laws to an end.

Even though scholars have not agreed on the precise identification of particular sections with specific commandments, the general outline of the sequence of the Ten Commandments in chapters 12–26 appears to be *broadly* convincing, especially in drawing out the ‘spirit’ and ‘ethos’ of the law (Walton 1987: 213–225). Thus, chapters 12–18 deal primarily with cultic concerns, serving as an explanation of the first five commandments. Chapters 19–25 focus more on issues in the judicial and secular spheres, broadly addressing the concerns of the sixth through to the tenth commandments.<sup>30</sup>

## 6. Theology

As we have seen, Deuteronomy is self-conscious of being a *literary* work. But it is also self-conscious of being a *theological* work built around a number of important themes. We will look selectively and briefly at the four areas of God, people, land and worship.

### a. God

It is appropriate that the study of the central theological themes of Deuteronomy should begin with the doctrine of God. Vogt (2006) has argued that at the heart of Deuteronomy is the *supremacy of Yahweh* that is to be acknowledged by all generations of Israelites through adherence to Torah. Deuteronomy’s literary shape, following the ancient treaty form, provides an important clue as to its basic theology. Yahweh, the God of Israel, appears as the great Suzerain of the covenant. He is also Creator, Judge and Warrior, who delivers and protects his special people from Egyptian bondage and oppression, and is deeply concerned about their present and future social, political and religious well-being. Chapter 4, as ‘reading instructions’ for the rest of the book, presents God as one ‘so near’ to Israel through *righteous laws* (4:5–8). This is focused on Israel’s assembly at Mount Horeb, where the Lord spoke to them *out of the*

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30. With the important caveat that different traditions and scholars divide the Ten Commandments differently. See the table in Olson (1994: 43) for the Jewish, Lutheran/Roman Catholic and Reformed division of the Ten Commandments. In this commentary we follow the Reformed division.

fire, and they heard only the sound of words, *but saw no form* (4:10–15). Thus the Lord was to remain a God of communication through his law, and not one who could be manipulated and controlled through idols of different kinds (4:16–24). For Israel to do so would undermine Yahweh's transcendence, invisibility, power and especially his uniqueness and sovereignty, over both the nations and Israel herself. The rationale is then given at 4:24: *For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God* (emphasis added; 4:24; 6:15; cf. Josh. 24:19 connected with God as *hobly*). This language can be understood as God's 'jealousy', protecting his own covenant commitment towards his chosen people, even in giving them the land (9:3). Finally, this side of God will lead to Israel's exit from the land (4:25–31; cf. 32:21), to serve idols which *cannot see or hear or eat or smell* (4:28; cf. 32:37–39). But the possibility of finding a 'merciful' God is also held out to Israel if they look for him *with all your heart and with all your soul*. This in turn will enable a fresh obedience to Torah, based upon Yahweh's preparedness not to forget the covenant he confirmed to the forefathers by oath (4:29–31). The final section (4:32–40) repeats these points, drawing attention to the *voice of God speaking out of the fire* at Horeb, as well as Yahweh's miraculous intervention in Egypt (both repeated in this section). But, as a new element, both sets are framed by the statements, *so that you might know that the LORD is God; beside him there is no other* (4:35), and *the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other* (4:39). Both statements speak of the uniqueness and incomparability of Yahweh, and are clearly monotheistic. The statement at 4:19 does not acknowledge the valid status of the sun, moon and stars as deities worthy of worship, for, after all, they fall under Yahweh's jurisdiction and sovereignty created for other purposes (cf. Gen. 1:14–18). The reference to idols at 4:28 mentions their 'man-made' status, as does 4:16–24. And so within this chapter of 'reading instructions' for the rest of the book, Vogt's thesis is clearly demonstrated, where Yahweh's sovereignty is proclaimed *in heaven above and on the earth below* (4:39) as a chief motivation for Israel to keep the law (4:40), which is linked to Israel's prospect of prosperity and long life within the land, serving as a frame to the whole chapter (4:1 and 40).

Chapter 5 as 'blueprint' for the rest of the book continues the

theme of God speaking *from out of the fire* by his *voice*,<sup>31</sup> but now makes contemporary the Horeb experience and covenant for each and every generation as though each were there (5:2–3). It also makes specific the Ten Commandments of which the first, *You shall have no other gods before [or beside] me* (5:7), is especially developed in the general stipulations of chapters 6 – 11. This section begins with the Shema at 6:4: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one* (see commentary).<sup>32</sup> However, 6:5 also requires an exclusive relationship of *love* to be expressed to Yahweh ‘alone’ as Israel’s ‘one and only’ object of affection (adverbial use), supported by 6:13–15. This can be seen as reciprocating the Lord’s prior redemptive *love* towards Israel at 4:37–38, framed by 4:35, 39. The conclusion to chapters 6 – 11 is reached at 10:12–22. Within this passage, Yahweh’s cosmic sovereignty as *God of gods* and *Lord of lords* (v. 17) is linked to his nature as a Judge *who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving them food and clothing* (v. 18). Israel is called to *love* the alien as Yahweh loves them, remembering that they too were aliens in Egypt (v. 20). Thus the doctrine of God in Deuteronomy has both a vertical and a horizontal dimension to it in terms of what it means to *love* God.

Finally, chapter 12 introduces two further issues about God, with far-reaching theological implications. Both relate to the *name* of God within the sanctuary of the Promised Land.

The first relates to *the place the LORD your God will choose ... to put his Name there for his dwelling* (12:5; cf. Exod. 20:24). Von Rad (1953: 37–44) has argued that Deuteronomy represents a *theological corrective* to earlier and cruder ideas that God was somehow present in Israel’s shrines. Thus, Deuteronomy is presented as ‘demythologizing’ the divine presence, so that what is present is not God himself (for he dwells in heaven), but his *name* (understood as ‘name theology’). Von Rad links this process to the ark tradition, and its ultimate fate,

31. See ‘5 (d) Structure’ for the further development of God speaking *from out of the fire*. Also see commentary on 4:11.

32. The Song of Moses (32:1–43) not only affirms the monotheistic statements of 4:35, 39 at 32:39, but discusses Israel’s adopted gods as *idols* who were in the end pronounced as *no gods* (32:21–22).

which in Deuteronomy has also undergone a process of ‘demythologization’, in that it is now only a receptacle for the law. This he distinguishes from the priestly tradition, which associates Yahweh speaking from the ark when he has appeared in ‘glory’ (*kābôd*; Exod. 25:22; Num. 7:89). In response to the above, theological context has determined how Deuteronomy has decided to present each of these points, rather than a highly speculative history of traditions coupled with form criticism. To begin with, Richter (2007: 343) has argued that the translation ‘to place his name’ is better understood as a loan adaptation of the common Akkadian idiom relating to an inscribed monument, with the connotation of claiming the monument as one’s own. In cases of victory stela, the claims of ownership frequently extended to the region to which they pertained. This is also supported by the Amarna evidence from the fourteenth century BC, in which king Abdu-Heba ‘set his name in the land of Jerusalem’, expressing both ownership and conquest. In Deuteronomy, where the emphasis is on possessing the land and Israel’s covenant relationship with God, God’s *name* reminds the nation of his victory, ownership and supremacy within the land. Thus, instead of relegating his real presence to heaven, the placing of his *name* affirms his real presence in terms of covenant ‘nearness’ (4:5–8) and commitment to his people. Further, Wilson (1992: 403–406) has persuasively argued that the expression ‘before Yahweh’ signifies Yahweh’s real presence. It is applied specifically in its literal sense to the chosen place at which the *name* of Yahweh is present in the legal section of the book, thus locating the Deity within the sanctuary (e.g. 12:7, 12, etc.). In a later study, Wilson (1995: 45–71) also demonstrates that Yahweh’s presence is located ‘in the midst of the fire’ within chapters 4 and 5. This speaks of his ‘near’ presence in Deuteronomy. As far as von Rad’s ark is concerned, it has suited Deuteronomy’s theological purpose to present it as a container for the Ten Commandments. In this way, it draws attention to the primary importance of these laws as a ‘blueprint’ for the book, whereas the *Book of the Law* was placed beside the *ark of the covenant* as a continual witness against Israel (31:24–26). Thus, it could be argued that Yahweh would continue to address Israel from the ark as his covenant people. Further, Deuteronomy is not unaware of the *glory* of God as this relates to the *voice from the*

fire at Horeb (5:24; cf. Exod. 24:17). Again, it is *this* aspect of Yahweh's *glory* which has suited Deuteronomy's theological purpose.

The second issue with regard to the *name* at 12:5 involves Israel in the total destruction of all the altars, cult-symbols and sanctuaries of the gods formerly worshipped within the land (12:2–3; cf. 7:5–6). In doing this, the *names* of the idols must also be wiped out from the land (12:3b), for the simple reason that Yahweh by his *name* is now claiming ownership, presence, sovereign rule and worship within the land (12:5), as a restatement of the first three commandments (5:7–11). Further, Israel is to *seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling* (12:5).

### **b. The people of God**

If the doctrine of God represents the foundation of the faith of Deuteronomy, then certainly it is the doctrine of Israel that stands as the fullest complement to it (Clements 1989: 55). Here we may make the following points:

1. Israel as a nation has been the object of divine and sovereign choice (or election), not because of size or virtue, but because of Yahweh's prior *love* both to the fathers (4:37) and to present Israel (7:6–12).

2. On the basis of Yahweh's *covenant of love* with Israel and the forefathers (7:12), Deuteronomy continues to stress the impending gift of the land, made on *oath* with the forefathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) as a recurring theme throughout (some twenty-eight times).

3. On the basis of the covenant made at Horeb (Sinai) (4:10–14; 5:2–4), each generation of Israel now stands in a covenant relationship with God, which requires the 'loving' commitment of both parties. As far as Israel is concerned, this is not only a love and loyalty that can be commanded, as with the ancient treaties, but a love that is driven from the *heart*, involving one's total being.<sup>33</sup> Thus

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33. McCarthy (1981: 43, 81) points out that treaty oaths were supposed to be an emotional (involving the 'feelings') as well as a juridical attachment. Clearly in Deuteronomy, Yahweh reveals his *affection* (*ḥāšaq*) and *love* (*āhab*) towards Israel (7:7–9; 10:15; cf. 21:11), which was no doubt meant to be reciprocated by Israel at 6:5.

Israel's *love* for God (6:5; 10:12–13; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20) can be seen as a response to Yahweh's prior *love* for Israel (4:37; 7:7–9, 12–13; 10:15; 23:5; 33:3).

4. An important *motivation* for Israel's love of God and fellow Israelites, including the alien, is defined by her own alien (10:19; 23:7) and 'slave' status from the land of Egypt (5:15; 7:18; 8:2, 18; 9:7, 27; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:9, 18, 22; 25:17; 32:7).

5. The covenant is then *renewed* in Moab (29:1, 9–15), in language similar to the covenant made at Horeb (29:14–15; cf. 5:2–3).<sup>34</sup> Significantly, the God who speaks *from out of the fire* at Horeb (5:22–27) will continue to *burn* in his wrath against Israel and make the Promised Land a *burning waste* for any violation of covenant law, especially relating to the first three commandments (29:16–28). The battle is either lost or won at the level of the *heart*, incisively pointed out at 29:18 (cf. 8:2). In fact, a genuine response of love and obedience by Israel is understood as requiring nothing less than a *circumcision of the heart* (10:12–16; 30:6; cf. Jer. 4:4; 9:25–26; 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–27). Also, in light of Moses' words at 31:24–29, it is clear that Israel will fail as she has repeatedly done in the past. Yahweh's revelation of the Torah is insufficient for obedience (cf. 9:7 – 10:11). What is needed is the Torah written *on the heart* (6:6; 11:18; cf. Jer. 31:33–34; Barker 2004: 191).

6. At 7:6 Israel is reminded that she is a people *holy* to the Lord your God, as well as his *treasured possession* (14:1–2; cf. 26:18–19 in reverse order). This is first stated within the context of the practice of the ban (*hērem*; 7:1–2), and Israel's need to eliminate all external forms of idolatry from the land (7:5). In Deuteronomy, holiness is not only a status conferred upon Israel as a consequence of her election, but it also carries with it certain responsibilities (14:1–3; cf. 23:14), including the positive keeping of all the Lord's commands (26:18–19; 28:9). Then all the peoples of the earth will see that Israel is called by the *name* of the Lord (lit. 'upon you'), leading to their *fear* of Israel (28:10; cf. 4:5–8). This carries

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34. Moab is the renewal of Horeb, and not its replacement. As such, there is a fusing of horizons between the law and generations of both places.

the idea of Yahweh's exclusive ownership and claim upon Israel (paralleling that of the land) as his *holy* (separate) people and *treasured possession*, who are thus measured in terms of covenant loyalty and faithfulness, with implications for the peoples of the earth.

7. In Deuteronomy the idea of ritual impurity is explicitly applied to the land only at 21:22–23 (cf. 24:1–4), and to the practices of Israel at 14:1–21 (cf. 26:14) and 23:9–14. Instead of an impurity that defiles, we find in Deuteronomy an 'abomination' (*tô'ebâ*), that is, intolerable filth, both physically repulsive and morally disgraceful. It is an obligation which holiness imposes upon the children of God (Regev 2001: 249). There are sixteen references to this term in Deuteronomy in relation to the following prohibitions: (i) different forms of idolatry, *molech* cult, sorcery and magic (7:25–26; 12:31; 13:14; 17:4; 18:9, 12; 20:18; 27:15; 32:16); (ii) animals which are unworthy for eating (14:3) or sacrificing (17:1), also bringing 'the fee of a whore and the pay of a dog' into the sanctuary in fulfilment of any vow (23:18); (iii) prohibition of a remarriage to a previous wife (24:4); (iv) male's garments (*ke'li*) on a female, a prohibition that perhaps refers to pagan cults (22:5); (v) the use of dishonest scales (25:15–16).

Thus, the definition of 'abomination' in Deuteronomy is wide-ranging, and includes worship of idols (ten times), 'non-kosher' food, unworthy sacrifices, deception, and certain sexual behaviour.<sup>35</sup> However, it is somewhat misleading with Regev (2001: 249) to say that these acts do not really affect the sacred or endanger the holy in Deuteronomy. While Deuteronomy's 'abomination' may not be presented as a powerful polluting and defiling force as such (but cf. 21:22–23; 23:9–14; 24:4), it is nevertheless presented within the context of a covenant relationship that affects Israel's standing before God and life within the land. For example, the consequences of 13:14 at 13:15–18 relate to the Lord's *fierce anger* against idolatry, with severe penalty for all concerned (cf. 4:24; 6:13–15). Further, the expression, *you must purge the evil [ra'] from among you* (13:5; 17:7, 12;

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35. But in Leviticus refers only to forms of unlawful sexual relations (18:22, 26, 27, 29, 30; 20:13).

19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7),<sup>36</sup> can be found in the same or associated contexts as the word 'abomination' (e.g. 13:5, 14; esp. 17:4–7). This suggests that *purging evil* implies a kind of cleansing within the land, as *evil* refers to deeds that contaminate society and damage its relationship to Yahweh (Nelson (2002: 171). Nelson also suggests that *evil* can be seen as posing an objective, almost material danger, which requires an act of sweeping away as though it were excrement (cf. 23:9–14; 1 Kgs 14:10).

8. In Deuteronomy, obligations that apply to the priests alone (Lev. 21:5; 22:8) are directed to all the people (Deut. 14:1–2, 21). This suggests that Israel's holiness can now be viewed as a national separateness to the Lord that also embodies the *moral* qualities of Israel's priesthood (also see commentary on 32:5–6). It is in this sense that Israel may be seen as a 'kingdom of priests' unto the Lord in Deuteronomy, not in terms of function, but dictated by the requirements of what it means to stand in covenant relationship with God as his *holy* people. The absence in Deuteronomy of the phrase 'kingdom of priests' with regard to Israel as a nation is intriguing, since the other two terms, *holy* people and *treasured possession*, are used from Exodus 19:5–6 (7:6; 14:2; 26:18–19). This may relate to Tigay's (1996: xvii) observation that 'Deuteronomy's aim is to spiritualize religion by freeing it from excessive dependence on sacrifice and priesthood.' For example, the individual's handling of the tithe in grateful worship is no longer the exclusive preserve of the Levites (Num. 18:21–32), but may be eaten by the owner, and shared with the resident alien (*gēr*), the orphan, the widow and the Levite (Deut. 14:22–29; cf. 26:12–14). Also in Deuteronomy, the Levites receive special attention as those who are guardians and teachers of the law, offer sacrifices and bless the nation, possibly because of their zeal in standing against idolatry in the golden calf story (33:8–11). In this way, they remain the true 'priestly' tribe within Israel without equal, chosen by the Lord to stand and minister in his name *always* (18:1–8). Furthermore, it is the priestly tribe of Levi who will model total

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36. Also carries a wide range of meanings beginning with idolatry (13:5; 17:7), contempt of court (17:12), false witness (19:19), rebellious son (21:21), sexual sins (22:21, 22, 24), kidnapping (24:7).

dependence upon Yahweh to the rest of the nation. As the recipients of the firstfruits of grain, new wine and oil, they are a spiritual barometer of the Lord's blessings upon the other tribes. McConville (2002: 155) also notes that the term *treasured possession* (*sĕgullâ*), applied to Israel at 7:5–6, is used in treaty texts to describe the *vassal* status of the conquered people of the king. Therefore he argues, 'The idea of priesthood as a metaphor of dedication to God did not suit Deuteronomy's idea of the whole people as an integrated entity before God, in which the priest is not set up as the ultimate model of holiness.' But against this view, it is more likely that the treaty/covenant concept of the book of Deuteronomy has determined its use of *holy* people and *treasured possession*, finding a *kingdom of priests* unsuitable. As indicated above, Israel as a whole is now called to embody the *moral* qualities of Israel's priesthood, while the tribe of Levi has been recognized as the true priestly tribe, who alone model the kind of *zeal* for the law that has enabled them to be chosen as guardians and teachers of the law (33:8–11). On the other hand, McConville (2002: 19–36) argues that the use of the singular in the laws supports its theology of the responsibility of the people for the keeping of the law. This is in contrast to the idea of the king as sovereign, especially in the administration of law, which Deuteronomy opposes. But even though the king's powers may be somewhat curtailed in specific areas in Deuteronomy, its main purpose is to present the king as an exemplary student of the law, who is thereby presented to the nation as a model of Torah-keeping towards his *brother* Israelites (17:18–20).

9. Finally, Israel is presented as a family writ large.<sup>37</sup> The term *brother* is frequently used in referring to fellow Israelites, in commands suspending debts, making loans, releasing slaves, dealing with perjury, forgoing interest, kidnapping, slave-trading and avoiding excess legal penalties (15:2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12; 19:18–19; 23:20–21; 24:7; 25:3). Israel's leaders or representatives (judges, kings, Levites, prophets) are leaders among brothers (16:18–18:22), presumably appointed by the people of Israel (16:18).

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37. The following information, with some modification, is largely indebted to Goldingay (1995: 136–139).

Deuteronomy's pre-eminent concern is for *justice* among the people (1:9–18), with judges at the top of the list of leaders at 16:18–20. Israel is to look to the needs of various groups who might have no sure means of livelihood, especially those possessing no land (Levites, widows, orphans, aliens, the poor and slaves). This concern mirrors the concerns of Yahweh himself, guarding them from exploitation and taking practical steps to see that they have enough to eat (10:18–19; 14:28–29; 24:17–22; 26:12–13; 27:19).

Deuteronomy also emphasizes *women's* privileges and responsibilities over a wide range of areas. It stresses attitudes towards mothers, wives and daughters, as well as fathers, husbands and sons. Where both mother and father act together in providing proof of their daughter's virginity to the elders at the gate, it is the girl's *father* who speaks to the elders and receives any fines due. But if the charge is true, the daughter is brought to the door of her *father's* house, because of sins committed while still in her *father's house* (22:13–21). Thus it is assumed that where a family dwells together, the male is recognized as head of the house. Also, both mother and father have a right to a son's obedience and an obligation to see to the punishment of his rebelliousness (21:18–21). A wife has the right to marital security or to freedom, even if she is a foreigner (21:10–14). Her son may receive the extra inheritance if he is the eldest, even if his father prefers the child of another wife (21:15–17). A daughter or female slave has the same right to share in worship and Sabbath rest as a son or a male slave (5:14; 12:12, 18; 16:11, 14), and a female slave has the same right to freedom as a male slave (15:12; cf. Exod. 21:2–11). Daughters, as well as sons, are protected from intermarriage and from being offered in sacrifice (7:3; 12:31; 18:10). Finally, Deuteronomy especially directs its concerns toward a proper *family order* with regard to the responsibility of children to parents and parents to children (4:9; 5:16; 6:7, 20–25; 11:19; 21:15–21; 27:16; 32:46). The assumption here is that children need their parents' instruction, and parents need their children's care. The various laws about sex outside of marriage are intended to establish the issue of paternity and linear descent. In fact, such illicit sex is called a *disgraceful thing*, which *evil* must be purged from Israel by capital punishment (22:21). Such sexual disorder threatens the structured arrangement of marriage and the

social unit of the family, affecting issues of *name* and *land inheritance*.<sup>38</sup>

The natural right of a person to have children is part of the concern of laws about levirate marriage and sexual assault (25:5–12), and also relates to a newly married man's exemption from military or other public service (20:7; 24:5). Finally, a man may not marry or have intercourse with his father's wife or stepmother (27:20; cf. 22:30), half-sister (27:22) or mother-in-law (27:23), out of a desire to preserve a proper order even within the extended family. Goldingay (1995: 139) concludes by suggesting that the same aim possibly underlies the expectation that a bride shall be a virgin (22:13–21, 28–29).

### *c. Land*

The land is a major theme in Deuteronomy, with the land promise appearing in every chapter except 14 and 22, and it is commonly linked to the *promise* made on *oath* with the forefathers some twenty-eight times (1:8, 35; 4:31; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:8, 12, 13; 8:1, 18; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 13:17; 19:8; 26:3, 15; 28:9, 11, 13; 30:20; 31:7, 20, 21, 23; 34:4). From the outset (1:8), this suggests that the Lord was intent on fulfilling this aspect of the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to their descendants after them (Gen. 12:1–3, 7; 15:18–19; 17:8). Thus, the promise of the land is linked to Israel's election and nationhood, as already *given* to them (1:8), but the land must also be *taken* by Israel (7:1–2, 24; 9:1–3). The two notions of Yahweh's *giving* and Israel's *taking* are brought together in the expression *the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess* (3:12, 19; 5:31; 12:1; 15:4; 19:2, 14; 25:19; cf. 1:39; 4:1; 17:14; 26:1). Possession of the land is not on account of Israel's own achievement, but is Yahweh's gracious 'gift' (6:10–13; 8:10–18). Therefore, the land is not given to Israel as a reward for uprightness, but because of the *wickedness* of the Canaanites (cf. Gen. 15:16), which would enable Yahweh to fulfil his covenant promise to the fathers (9:4–6; cf. 4:37–38). In

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38. See the case of Zelophehad's daughters with regard to *name, land inheritance*, and keeping the land within one's own tribe (Num. 27:1–11; 36:1–13). Undoubtedly the law also paves the way for women's rights in Deuteronomy.

fact, Israel has no righteousness or integrity to boast about; they are a *stiff-necked* people who fail to learn (9:6). But Yahweh has standards that apply as much to Israel as to the Canaanites, as far as living in the land is concerned. His commitment to them is not unconditional (6:17–19; 8:1; 11:8–9, 22–25), and he can reveal himself to them as *a consuming fire, a jealous God*, if they do not *fear* the Lord and *serve* him only (4:24; 6:15; cf. Josh. 23:16; 24:14–27; Judg. 2:10–23). And even though Israel was to engage the inhabitants of the land in Holy War, or the ‘ban’ (7:1–2), this could easily turn against them, leading to their own annihilation and loss of land, with the few survivors condemned to worship empty images (4:25–31). Thus, life within the Promised Land is integrally linked to covenant law and Israel’s ability to keep it; otherwise the land can be forfeited if they do not obey (4:25–26, 32–40; 5:28–33; 6:17–19; 8:1, 6–20; 11:8–12; 28:15–68; 29:24–29; 30:15–20; cf. Josh. 1:6–8). For this reason, the whole law corpus (12:1) is set in relationship to living in the land (12:1 – 26:15). In some cases, disobedience to the law brings defilement or guilt upon the land itself (21:23; 24:4). There is no link between the land and God himself, as if the land itself were divine. Rather, it is governed by a sense of history sworn on *oath* to the forefathers (26:3, 5–10). Therefore, it is also called a *good* land (1:25, 35; 3:25; 4:21–22; 6:18; 8:7–10; 9:6; 11:17; cf. Gen. 1:1 – 2:4a), painted in abundant and idealistic terms with the expression *a land flowing with milk and honey* (6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20). It is an ideal land resembling Paradise/Eden, in which Israel will eat and be full (8:7–9), with the blessings of the land expected to be shared among the entire community. But here Deuteronomy’s vision also distinguishes between the *ideal* and the *real* (15:4, 11). Unlike Egypt, it is a land that *drinks rain from heaven*, and the Lord *cares* for it throughout its agricultural seasons (11:10–12). Both these texts present this Eden-like land as a sanctuary (cf. Exod. 15:17), in which the boundaries are always carefully defined (1:6–8; 3:27–28; 34:1–4; cf. Gen. 15:18–21; Josh. 1:4).

Furthermore, God will give *rest* within the Promised Land from all enemies (3:20; 12:10; 25:19). As a sanctuary, the land becomes the place where Israel also offers her *firstfruits* in worship (26:5–9). Since the land is seen as a *sanctuary*, it is appropriate that a central shrine should be appointed where the twelve tribes come in regular

pilgrimage to recognize Yahweh's rule (12:1–14). Finally, since the land is Yahweh's, it could not be sold, and thus the rights to the land were to be preserved by rules determined by tribal allotment and land tenure (1:35–36 cf. Josh. 14:6–15; 15:1–21:45; cf. Num. 27:1–11; 36:1–13). Also, it is clear that the allocation of land *east* of the Jordan, given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, was considered part of the Promised Land *given* to them by God (3:12–20; cf. Josh. 13:8–33), although Moses reserves the word *good* only for the land west of the Jordan (esp. 3:25; 4:21–22).

### Additional note on the Holy War (*hērem*) principle

The verb 'completely destroy' (*hēram*; Hiphil) and the related noun 'set apart for destruction' (*hērem*) have a complex history of interpretation. The verb (*hēram*) found at 7:2 also occurs at 2:34–35 and 3:6, related to wars against Sihon and Og on the eastern side of the Jordan, as a paradigm for the taking of the land on the western side of the Jordan (31:3–5; cf. 6:10–12). It is also found at 13:15 with regard to the destruction of an Israelite town (never to be rebuilt), including both people and cattle, because of idolatry within the land. Finally, the verb appears at 20:17 as a repeat of 7:2, with its rationale being the common theme of the dangers of idolatry for Israel within the land of Canaan only (20:16–17).<sup>39</sup>

The verb largely follows the meaning of its very first usage back at Exodus 22:20 within the context of idolatry. But the concept of 'devote to the ban' (Moberly, Hess) or 'to consecrate to/through destruction' (Lohfink, Stern) have also been suggested as a translation of the difficult Hebrew verb. Wright (1996: 109) prefers the idea of an absolute and irrevocable 'renouncing' of things or persons, indicating a refusal to take any gain or profit from them. Thus, in obedience to this command, things or persons can be renounced, without necessarily being destroyed. In this respect, within contexts that do not have to do with war, the Hebrew noun *hērem* refers to something that is *devoted* to God for his exclusive use,

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39. These terms are not used with regard to warfare against nations outside the Promised Land (20:10–15).

without the possibility of recall or redemption, thus making it *holby* to the Lord (Lev. 27:21, 28–29; Num. 18:14).<sup>40</sup> However, this idea is also extended to the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 6:17–25), involving the gravity of Achan’s sin in taking goods which were dedicated to the Lord for destruction (Josh. 7:1–26; cf. 1 Sam. 15:1–34). But this has already been anticipated with the use of the noun (*hērem*) at 7:26 as a frame to the verb (*hēram*) at 7:2, and likewise the use of the noun at 13:17 as a frame for the verb at 13:15.

Finally, Deuteronomy continues to make the point that Israel’s possession of Canaan was sworn on oath to the Patriarchs many centuries before. This made the taking of the land a *religious* task, and not just a defensive one. The primary qualifications for such a task were faith, obedience and courage. Little real fighting needed to be done, as it was the Lord himself who would give the victory (i.e. 7:1–2, 17–24), even through religious ritual (Josh. 6:1–27). But what about the ethics of Yahweh’s wars? From the time of the original promise given to Abraham, a divine timetable was at work. This included a four-hundred-year period in Egypt, followed by a deliverance that would coincide with the *sin of the Amorites* reaching its full measure in the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:13–16, 17–21; cf. Deut. 9:5). That war may not have ultimately belonged to the Lord’s good purposes is suggested by Numbers 31:19–20, where the killing or touching of the dead in war made the soldiers ritually unclean (cf. David at 1 Chr. 22:8). Also, within the book of Joshua, the examples of Rahab (Josh. 2:1–21; 6:22–25) and the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:3–27) may well raise the question of what *may have been* the situation if other peoples within Canaan had also made a *treaty of peace* with the Israelites (Josh. 11:19), and Israel herself would suffer a reverse Holy War if she did not obey the Lord in carrying out his commands (7:1–6).

It is important to note that Israel’s taking of the land *at this time* was very much *context specific*, relating only to this particular time and

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40. Leading Lilley (1993: 169–177) to suggest that this was the *primary* meaning of *hērem* relating to persons or things. This was then understood in a weakened or secondary sense through the use of the verb (*hāram*) as ‘utterly destroy’, although retaining the connotation of ‘devoted’ as in Joshua and Deuteronomy.

place, and therefore to no other. Admittedly, such a taking of the land took a lengthy period of time, culminating with David's great victories much later on. But modern attempts to justify all kinds of so-called 'holy wars' (e.g. the crusades, jihad, etc.) on the basis of these early texts are entirely out of context, inappropriate and totally unjustified. The Old Testament envisages a time when all the nations will go up to Zion in order to be instructed in the Torah, and the Lord will *settle disputes* for many peoples, and *war* will be no more (Isa. 2:2–4; Mic. 4:1–3; cf. Joel 3:10).

In the New Testament, warfare is given a radically new dimension. It is taken entirely out of the physical plane of the Old Testament into the spiritual realm of principalities and powers in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12). This involved the death of God's only begotten Son upon a cross (the symbol of curse) for the sin of *all* peoples (Col. 1:19–22), at the same time disarming the powers and authorities, triumphing over them by the cross (Col. 2:13–15). In the light of this great truth, *all* peoples are now urged to enter the new Canaan of *rest* by faith in God's Son (Heb. 4:1–11).

#### ***d. Worship***

Last but not least, worship defines Israel as *holy* (or separated) unto God (7:6). For this reason, the central altar law dominates chapters 12 – 26. This has already been anticipated by the conclusion at 10:12–22, where Israel is to *fear* the Lord, and *love* and *serve him with all your heart and with all your soul*, including love of the fatherless, widow and alien, for the Lord is Israel's *praise*. Balentine (1999: 190–202) argues that in the Decalogue (5:6–21) it is concern for the *Sabbath* which centres all commitments towards God and humankind on the importance of worship. But in chapters 12 – 26 this is reversed. Here it is worship that provides the frames and context for the intervening stipulations that order social behaviour, beginning with the summons to worship (12:1 – 13:18), framed by the proper goal of worship (26:1–15). In between, we have the issues of social justice and the 'Sabbatical principle' (14:22 – 16:17), followed by the judicial structure and its administrators (16:18 – 18:22), and concluding with the practical details of social justice (19:1 – 25:19). The above frames on worship parallel the beginning and end of the Covenant Code (Exod. 20:22–26 and 23:14–19), which may have

provided the inspiration for Deuteronomy's presentation. Finally, we may observe that chapter 12 itself opens (vv. 1–4) and closes (vv. 29–31) with a polemic directed against false worship and Canaanite gods. For Deuteronomy, it is at this point that Israel's worship is most likely to fail within the land.

Deuteronomy repeatedly describes Israel's worship at *the place the LORD your God will choose to put his Name* (12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23–25; 15:20; 16:2, 6, 11, 15; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 26:2). This has been commonly seen as a move towards 'centralization', put into effect during the period of Josiah's reforms, representing the Jerusalem priesthood's victory over rivals from other sanctuaries. But such a move is not reflected in the book of Deuteronomy for four good reasons: (1) Jerusalem is not named in the book. (2) As Richter (2007: 342–66) has previously pointed out, the 'placing of Yahweh's name' involving the inscription of one's name, often on victory stelae, connotes the act of making both monument and region one's own. (3) The emphasis is upon Yahweh's 'choice' of place, and not on the place itself (McConville 1984: 31–32). (4) If Deuteronomy were limiting worship to Jerusalem alone, then the altar at Ebal/Shechem (27:1–26) would make little sense. It is probably the case that the expression in 12:5, *from among all your tribes*, does not mean that a number of shrines were operating together at the same time. Rather, only one single shrine operated at any given time in conjunction with the presence of the ark of the covenant, and the Tent of Meeting, which finally ended up at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1–2; cf. 1 Sam. 4:3). Therefore, the final contrast is between a multiplicity of *places* where the Canaanites worshipped as they chose (12:1–3), and the *place* that God would choose (12:5; McConville 1984: 29–38). In this sense, one can therefore speak of a 'central' sanctuary in preference to a sole sanctuary, and 'purity' of worship rather than exclusive worship, made possible by a greater degree of control over the place of worship.

However, worshipping God at the place he had chosen and in the way in which he had prescribed was but one part of Israel's covenant allegiance, reflecting at a national level Israel's *holy* status as God's *treasured possession* (7:6; 14:2; 26:18). To begin with, in 12:1–28 Moses presents seven aspects of corporate worship: (a) acceptable (vv. 1–4); (b) unifying (v. 5); (c) sacrificial (vv. 6–7); (d) joyful (vv. 7, 12); (e) family oriented as 'households' (vv. 7, 12); (f) compassionate (vv. 12,

19); (g) consistent (vv. 20–28). Following this, the laws of chapters 12 – 26 also reflect other contexts in which worship is a major theme. These include *tithes* (14:22–29); ‘the seventh year principle’ involving debtors and slaves (15:1–18); *firstborn male of your herds and flocks* (15:19–23); ‘three major festivals’ (16:1–17);<sup>41</sup> ‘Asherah poles and stones’ (16:21–22); ‘difficult law cases’ (17:8–13); ‘the king as a model Israelite in Torah study and obedience’ (17:14–20); *offerings for priests and Levites* (18:1–8); *exclusions from the assembly* (23:1–8); ‘improper offerings’ (23:17); *firstfruits and tithes* (26:1–15). Also, outside of chapters 12 – 26, mention can be made of the *altar, law*, and *curses* on Mount Ebal (27:1–26), and the seven-year reading of the law at the chosen place (31:11).

Finally, we have observed that Israel’s worship of God is to be motivated by *love* and is to be ‘wholehearted’ (6:5). Israel are constantly warned not to *forget* the Lord (e.g. 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19). The answer provided at 6:13 is that Israel should (1) *fear* the Lord (cf. 5:29; 10:12; 14:23); (2) *serve* him only; and (3) take their *oaths* in his name (10:12–22; cf. Josh. 23:7–8). Israel’s worship is also defined by her ability to keep the law. This is especially so at 12:1 and 26:16–19, which provide an outer frame to the inner worship frame of 12:1 – 13:18 and 26:1–15 surrounding the specific laws of chapters 12 – 26. With regard to the past, Israel was especially called upon to *remember* (*zākar*) Yahweh and his acts of kindness, especially the deliverance from Egypt and her *slave* status (5:15; 7:18; 8:2, 18; 9:7, 27; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:9, 18, 22; 25:17; 32:7). This remembrance by future generations would also enable Israel continually to participate in the great acts of redemption, stimulating both gratitude and love in every age. Finally, as Israel brought her sacrifices and gifts to the sanctuary in order to *eat* them before the Lord, she was reminded that this was done *so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always* (14:23; cf. Ezek. 18:5–18). Abundance and its enjoyment are here presented as a variation to the *voice from the fire of Horeb*

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41. McConville (2002: 62) interestingly suggests that Moses’ speeches might be seen as a preparation for the first Passover that Israel would celebrate in connection with the conquest of the land. See commentary on 16:1–17 (cf. Josh. 4:19; 5:10–12).

engendering *fear* (5:29). It was not so much the gifts and sacrifices that mattered, as the attitude of the offerer. The cult was an aid to worship, but was not the essence of worship, for true worship lies hidden in the recesses of the human heart and flows out to God as a result of the worshipper's love, gratitude and reverence (Thompson 1974: 77).

## 7. Purpose

Deuteronomy may be described as Moses' prophetic farewell speech, or last will and testament, given to all Israel on the plains of Moab, just before their entrance into the Promised Land. As such, it is patterned after Jacob's farewell (blessing) speech (Gen. 49:1–28), just before the announcement of his death at Genesis 49:29–33, noting also that the blessing of Moses at Deuteronomy 33 concludes the book, followed only by the notice of his death at 34:1–12. Further, the transition from Moses to Joshua has been anticipated at Numbers 27:12–23. Deuteronomy now awaits Moses' death, so that the people may enter the land under Joshua (31:23; 34:9). Deuteronomy's immediate purpose is that of 'covenant renewal' (29:1, 9–15), but not as a replacement of the Horeb covenant. As an exposition of the Decalogue, its main concern relates to life within the land, lived before God and one another. The sin of idolatry will be Israel's greatest danger and undoing within the land about to be possessed (4:25–31; 32:21). In order to counter this, Deuteronomy urges Israel to *fear, love* and *serve* the Lord alone with all their *heart* and being, and to keep all of his commandments (6:4–5; 10:12–13). This alone will ensure their success and well-being within the land they are about to possess. But Deuteronomy is equally sure that Israel will 'fail', and as a consequence, *this Book of the Law* will become a witness against them (31:24–29; cf. Josh. 1:8). However, when the blessings and curses have run their course, in that order (30:1), leading to Israel's eventual exile from the land, then God in his grace and mercy will enable them to *return* to him as they seek him afresh with *all [their] heart and with all [their] soul* (4:25–31; 30:1–10). In the meantime, Deuteronomy's final word is: *Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ... For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* (30:19–20).

## ANALYSIS

### **I. FIRST ADDRESS OF MOSES: RETROSPECT – WHAT GOD HAS DONE (1:1 – 4:43)**

- A. General introduction: setting the scene (1:1–5)
- B. Historical retrospect and prospect: God’s mighty acts between Horeb and Beth Peor (1:6 – 3:29)
  - i. At Horeb (1:6–8)
  - ii. Organization of the people (1:9–18)
  - iii. From Horeb to Kadesh Barnea (1:19–46)
  - iv. The journey through the hill country of Seir and Transjordan (2:1–25)
  - v. The conquest of Transjordan (2:26 – 3:11)
  - vi. The distribution of land to the Transjordan tribes (3:12–17)
  - vii. Preparations for the invasion west of the Jordan (3:18–29)
- C. The practical consequences for Israel (past, present and future) of God’s past actions (4:1–43)

## 2. SECOND ADDRESS OF MOSES: WHAT GOD COMMANDS FOR THE FUTURE (4:44 – 28:68)

- A. Introduction to the second address of Moses (4:44–49)
- B. The foundation and nature of Israel's covenant faith: the Decalogue and its demand for total allegiance to Yahweh (5:1 – 11:32)
  - i. The heart of the covenant faith (5:1 – 6:3)
  - ii. The heart of Israel's faith and confession (6:4–25)
  - iii. Israel's election and its implications (7:1–26)
  - iv. Lessons from the wilderness for the Promised Land: the provision of manna (8:1–20)
  - v. Further lessons from the wilderness for the Promised Land: the golden calf incident (9:1 – 10:11)
    - a. Conquest: the outcome of Yahweh's will, not of Israel's righteousness (9:1–6)
    - b. The stubbornness of Israel in the golden calf incident (9:7–29)
    - c. Covenant renewal (10:1–11)
  - vi. A call to commitment: 'What does the LORD your God require of you?' (10:12 – 11:32)
    - a. 'What does the LORD your God require of you?' (10:12–22)
    - b. An appeal to the past: the relation of obedience to blessing (11:1–12)
    - c. The Shema and future blessing (11:13–21)
    - d. 'See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse' (11:22–32)
- C. The Law of God: the detailed covenant stipulations (12:1 – 26:19)
  - i. The law of the central sanctuary: no other gods and idols (12:1 – 13:18; cf. 5:7–10)
  - ii. Purity laws and the misuse of God's name (14:1–21; cf. 5:11)
  - iii. The rhythms of life and Sabbath observance (14:22 – 16:17; cf. 5:12–15)
  - iv. The honour of parents and leaders (16:18 – 18:22; cf. 5:16)

- v. A respect for life (19:1 – 22:8, with 22:5 transitional; cf. 5:17)
- vi. Unholy mixtures and adultery (22:9 – 23:18, with 23:15–16 transitional; cf. 5:18)
- vii. No stealing or exploitation of any kind (23:19 – 24:7; cf. 5:19)
- viii. Ten laws relating to false witness (24:8 – 25:4; cf. 5:20)
- ix. Coveting and its antidote (25:5 – 26:15; cf. 5:21)
  - a. Miscellaneous laws (25:5–16)
  - b. Unfinished business with the Amalekites (25:17–19)
  - c. First declaration: Israel's presentation of firstfruits and confession of what Yahweh has done for her (26:1–11)
  - d. Second declaration: Israel's obedience to the third-year tithe (26:12–15)
  - e. Third declaration: Yahweh and Israel as willing partners of the covenant (26:16–19)
- D. Covenant renewal in the Promised Land (27:1–26)
  - i. The inscription of the law and witness of the elders (27:1–8)
  - ii. The ratification of the covenant and witness of the Levitical priests (27:9–13)
  - iii. The divine sanctions as a response to oath taking (27:14–26)
- E. Declaration of the covenant sanctions: blessings and curses (28:1–68)
  - i. The blessings (28:1–14)
  - ii. The curses (28:15–68)

### **3. THIRD ADDRESS OF MOSES: RECAPITULATION OF THE COVENANT DEMAND AND THE CALL TO CHOOSE GOD AND OBEY (29:1 – 30:20)**

- A. Israel exhorted to accept the covenant (29:1–15)
- B. Punishment for disobedience (29:16–28)
- C. Secret and revealed things (29:29)
- D. Repentance and restoration (30:1–20)
  - i. Future blessing as a spur to present obedience (30:1–10)
  - ii. God's covenant accessible to all (30:11–14)

- iii. Choose life so that you may live (30:15-20)

#### 4. THE TRANSITION FROM MOSES TO JOSHUA

##### (31:1 - 34:12)

- A. The threefold witness of law, song, and heaven and earth (31:1 - 32:47)
- i. Moses to the people, on Joshua's succession (31:1-8)
  - ii. Moses to the Levites, on the 'reading' of the Book of the Law (31:9-13)
  - iii. Yahweh to Moses and Joshua, on the succession and song (31:14-23)
  - iv. Moses to the Levites, on the 'deposit' of the Book of the Law (31:24-29)
  - v. Moses to the people, about the song (31:30)
- B. Moses' Song of Witness (32:1-43, 44-47)
- C. Moses prepares for death and blesses the people (32:48 - 33:29)
- i. Moses commanded to ascend Mount Nebo (32:48-52)
  - ii. The blessing of Moses (33:1-29)
- D. The death of Moses (34:1-12)

# COMMENTARY

## 1. FIRST ADDRESS OF MOSES: RETROSPECT – WHAT GOD HAS DONE (1:1 – 4:43)

### A. General introduction: setting the scene (1:1–5)

#### *Context*

The opening five verses build a dynamic relationship between the two major vantage points of Moab (present) and Horeb (past), relating to the law God had given to Moses. Deuteronomy has been aptly described as a book ‘on the boundary’, which addresses the possibilities of life ‘beyond the Jordan’ as dependent upon acknowledging Yahweh’s supremacy and the keeping of the law (Vogt, 2006).

#### *Comment*

**1–2.** The opening verses present a concentric structure to introduce the book’s main purpose as *the words Moses spoke to all Israel* in the desert east of the Jordan (v. 1):

A These are the *words* Moses *spoke* (v. 1a)

B *East of the Jordan* (v. 1b)

C *Eleven days’* journey from Horeb (v. 2a)

D *Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that Yahweh had commanded him* (v. 3b)

C *After he had defeated Sihon and Og* (v. 4)

B' *East of the Jordan* (v. 5a)

A' *Moses began to expound this law* (v. 5b)

This structure highlights the movement from verse 1a to verse 3b at the centre (Yahweh's words to Moses), concluding with verse 5b. It also anticipates the prophetic authority of Moses at the centre (18:17–22) and outer frame of the book (34:10–12), authenticating his own words and serving as a model for all true and future prophets as exponents of Yahweh's words alone.

The words *opposite Suph* (v. 1b; cf. v. 5a) may describe the Arabah east of Jordan, which extends from lower Paran northwards to the plains of Moab (cf. v. 2). The reference to *eleven days*<sup>1</sup> could also be a vivid reminder to Israel that a journey that should have taken them *eleven days* had already lasted *forty years* (1:3, 46; 2:1, 14). This judgment was originally proclaimed at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 14:34). Further opportunities for taking the land should not be squandered, nor the debacle of Kadesh repeated.

3–4. Rebellion had delayed the promise's realization until the *fortieth year* after the exodus from Egypt (Num. 14:34). Moses then spoke to the Israelites *all that Yahweh had commanded him* (v. 3b; cf. 29:1–15 [ET]; MT 28:69–29:14). A second historical context is fixed by reference to the defeat of Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan (v. 4; cf. Num. 21:21–35). These victories validate Israel's claim to certain territories *east* of the Jordan (Clements 1992: 293), and show that an obedient Israel can also win great victories *west* of the Jordan. Moreover, the reference to *after* the Lord had defeated Sihon and Og (v. 4) would commend Torah obedience on the exodus model (Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6).

5. 'Beyond' (NRSV) or *east* (NIV) of the Jordan is here defined as *in the territory of Moab* (v. 5a). This is supported by 29:1 [ET, MT 28:69] and 34:1, 5, 6, 8. *Began* (v. 5b) forms a unifying bracket with *finished*

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1. Agreeing with the narratives of modern travellers for this road (Driver 1996: 5).

in 32:45, relating to Moab. Further, Moses sought to make ‘this law clear’ (v. 5b). The phrase *this law* (*tôrâ*) is best understood as ‘teaching’ or ‘instruction’, relating to both law and narrative sections within Deuteronomy, and is understood theologically as *this covenant* at 29:9, in parallel with *this law* at 1:5b. But what does it mean to make this (*tôrâ*) ‘clear’ (Heb. *bē’ēr*)? Most probably it initially means exposition for a new situation (Driver 1996: 8), but at the structural level, it may indicate the movement from *oral* exposition (1:5b) to that of *written* tradition (27:8).<sup>2</sup> Here in verse 5b, Moses seeks to accomplish in *speech* what is accomplished at 27:8 in *writing*, in order to make the instruction accessible and clear.

### Meaning

The opening phrase *These are the words* (also the opening words of Ancient Near Eastern treaties)<sup>3</sup> introduces the book’s most important idea. The character of the word is gradually refined as all that the Lord had *commanded* Moses the prophet (cf. 18:17–22; 34:10–12) concerning Israel at the centre of the chiasmic structure (v. 3b), finally leading to the exposition of *this law* (Torah) at verse 5b (cf. 27:8). Within Deuteronomy, the word is God’s authoritative word, in which the ‘ten words’ (commandments) at 5:6–21 provide the blueprint for the other narratives and laws (chs. 12–26). Thus a connection is forged between Horeb and Moab, in the fortieth year, *after* the Lord had defeated Sihon and Og (v. 4). But *this law* was not just information. It was to be taught to each generation (6:20–25), so that Israel might know how to live before the Lord within the land. As such, it stands as a witness against Israel’s rebellious and idolatrous nature, both *before* and *after* Moses’ death (31:24–29).

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2. Implying public reading and accessibility of Torah (cf. Hammurabi’s Law Code, *ANET*, 178).
  3. See *ANET*, 203–205.

## B. Historical retrospect and prospect: God's mighty acts between Horeb and Beth Peor (1:6 – 3:29)

### *Context*

Moses begins his long discourse by 'retelling' a story already known. A review of Israel's history runs from their departure from Mount Horeb/Sinai (1:6) to their arrival in the plains of Moab near Beth Peor (3:29). The promise of 1:6–8 had been spoken forty years earlier. Why had Israel failed to enter the Promised Land? What had gone wrong for both Moses and Israel? What could the hearers do now to ensure the fulfilment of that promise? These are the issues that Moses addresses in this section.

### *Comment*

#### *i. At Horeb (1:6–8)*

6–8. *The LORD our God.* The combination of the covenant name 'Yahweh' and *our/your God* occurs frequently in Deuteronomy, which also speaks of a close relationship between God and his covenant people (Thompson 1974: 84). The expression *said to us at Horeb* (4:10, 15) anticipates the identification of successive generations with the covenant (5:2–3). The people had stayed *long enough* at this mountain (approximately eleven months to a year; Exod. 19:1; Num. 10:11). The purpose for Israel being brought to Sinai was now complete. It was time to move on. Why? Because the focus of Moses' exhortation in Deuteronomy is the promise of land (v. 8), not liberation (Barker 1998: 8). However, at this point the command to move on introduces a plot of disobedience and failure, but in 2:3 it will introduce a plot of obedience and success. This will signal the conclusion of the wilderness wandering (Wright 1996: 24).

7. The command from Yahweh was to break camp and advance into the *hill country of the Amorites* (v. 7). This probably refers to the central mountain region running north to south, later occupied by the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel (Gen. 15:16; Josh. 7:7; 10:15). However, *Amorite* may also have been representative of a mixed group of people living in different areas, including the Transjordan (1:4), as well as the hill country (Num. 13:29). The term *Canaanites*

in both passages seemingly refers to the peoples of the coastal area in particular, as well as along the Jordan.

8. Finally, verse 8 introduces the campaign of chapters 1–3 as one guaranteed by long-standing divine promise. The expression *See, I have given you this land* is a formula which speaks of a legal transfer (or divine grant) from Yahweh to the recipient, Israel (Nelson 2002: 14). The land is both (a) divine gift and (b) divinely owned, but must still be taken and possessed (cf. v. 21).

### *ii. Organization of the people (1:9–18)*

This section intervenes between the command to proceed from Mount Horeb (vv. 6–8) and its fulfilment in verse 19, finally arriving at Kadesh Barnea. Some scholars therefore see this passage as an intrusion between these points (Weinfeld 1991: 139). But its place here may be suggested by its important link with Sinai (Exod. 18:13–26; cf. Num. 11:10–17). Further, verses 9–18 address the progeny aspect of the promise, following the order of Genesis 12:1–2. Finally, this section reflects different aspects of the tradition in Exodus 18 and Numbers 11, as Moses initiates a change in leadership necessitated by the rigours of the wilderness journey and life without him in the land (cf. 16:18–20; 17:8–13).

9. *At that time* (vv. 9, 16, 18) is a general time reference, covering the whole period at Horeb (vv. 6, 19; cf. Exod. 18:13–26). *I said to you* (pl.) makes the present generation part of history, bearing the burden and legacy of their ancestors (cf. 5:2; 6:1–2). *You are too heavy a burden for me to carry alone*. This language is found at Numbers 11:14, even though Exodus 18:13–26 is being followed (Driver 1996: 18). The Exodus 18 context best suits the *judicial* application of these words. The reason for Moses' words in verse 9 is then expanded in verses 10–12.

10–13. *The LORD your God* (v. 10) occurs almost 300 times in Deuteronomy, and breaks the title *the Lord our God* at verses 6 and 19. The first usage in this section (vv. 9–18) might highlight the reality of future life without Moses, as well as the people's need to assume greater responsibility for their life with God.

The problem did not lie in the population growth itself (v. 10), since this confirms God's faithfulness to the promise made with Abraham (Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; Deut. 10:22; 26:5). Moses even

expresses the personal desire that the Lord would *increase you a thousand times* (v. 11). This is extravagant language, as is *as many as the stars in the sky* (v. 10). Nevertheless, the numerical blessing introduced its own practical problems in administration. Moses spells this out in terms of *your problems ... burdens ... disputes* (v. 12). However, in the present context, the disputes or disputation take on a 'legal' connotation, pointing specifically to the need for judges.

**13.** Moses now urges the people to select leaders from among their tribes (v. 13), something not reported in Exodus or Numbers. A further peculiarity of Deuteronomy is its *threefold* criteria for leadership, with the emphasis on *wisdom* (cf. Exod. 18:21). The people are to choose *wise, understanding and respected* leaders. The first two terms are also linked to the nation keeping the teachings and laws at 4:5–6. The third term *respected* derives from a verb meaning 'to know'. The chosen leaders must have the community's publicly acknowledged respect. They would be appointed as Israel's leaders (*ro'sim*), which in verse 16 becomes Israel's judges (*šōpētim*) (Wright 1996: 26).

**14–15.** Israel agrees (v. 14), declaring that Moses' plan was *good* (cf. 5:28; 18:17). Within verses 15–16, three terms are used for leaders in Israel whose function is both military and civil. The commanders (*šarim*) are primarily military officers here, but the term is also used of civil officers entrusted with supervising work forces. Later it describes princes and court officials. The officials (*šōtērim*) were subordinate civil officers, who probably exercised secretarial skills and assisted judges and other higher ranks of officialdom (16:18; cf. 20:5, 9). The *judges* (*šōpētim*) in verse 16 were responsible for administering justice, and therefore came under the highest moral scrutiny in the Ancient Near Eastern world, and in Israel.

**16–18.** The role of judge is detailed here (vv. 16–17), both in the interests of social justice and as a charter for future generations. *Charged* (v. 16) probably reflects appointment by oath, as practised in the Ancient Near East (Weinfeld 1991: 138). *An alien* (v. 16b) could be someone residing with the Israelites, to be treated as a *brother* (v. 16a). Though not equal in all respects to the Israelites, aliens were to be treated equally in law. The Israelites had been aliens in Egypt, therefore they should love the alien as the Lord had loved them (Deut. 10:17–20). In summary, three aspects of the judges' duty are

mentioned in verses 16–17: (a) They are to judge *fairly* (v. 16). (b) They must not show *partiality* within the judicial process (v. 17a). The Hebrew idiom (*lō' take'irū pānīm*) translated *do not show partiality* (lit. 'do not regard faces') is found only in Deuteronomy and Proverbs (24:23; 28:21). The judge must hear both *small* (emphatic in the Hebrew) and great alike. (c) Finally, the text exhorts them 'not to be afraid of the face of a man' (v. 17b).

### iii. From Horeb to Kadesh Barnea (1:19–46)

The section summarizes events in Numbers 13 and 14. Verses 19–21 take us back to verses 7–8, where the command for departure was given, including the journey to the hill country of the Amorites, and the encouragement to take possession of the Promised Land. Moses covers the trip from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea at the edge of the Promised Land in one sentence (v. 19), including the description that it was a *vast and dreadful desert* (cf. 8:15; 32:10). The text therefore indicates that the journey could have been quite simple (in spite of its potential difficulties and dangers), taking only eleven days (v. 2), but it ended up taking forty years.

**21.** The gift of the land is both promise (*has given*) and divine command to act (*go up*). Moses now speaks in the singular to each Israelite about the land (*told you*), and encourages them with the words: *Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged* (31:8; cf. Josh. 1:9; 8:1; also Deut. 1:29; 7:21; 20:3; 31:6).

**22–23.** *Then all of you came to me and said ... The idea seemed good to me* (vv. 22–23). This presentation of the spies' account differs from Numbers, where God gives the command to explore the land of Canaan (Num. 13:1–3). Deuteronomy *may* suggest that the people were blameworthy in their adoption of the plan (cf. v. 13), especially in the irony of verse 22 (*Let us send men ahead*) immediately after Moses' words to them not to be *afraid* or *discouraged* (v. 21). This theme is repeated in verses 29–33, where the people are reminded that they need not be *afraid*, because the Lord God himself goes *ahead* of the people to prepare the way.

**24–25.** While Numbers relates how the spies travelled throughout the land (Num. 13:21), our passage (v. 24) focuses on the excursion to the *Valley of Eschol* (lit. 'bunch of grapes'), probably near Hebron (cf. Num. 13:22–24). The spies' report is entirely positive. *It is a good*

land that the LORD our God is giving us (v. 25). In passing over the spies' negative report (Num. 13:28–29), Deuteronomy stresses that God can be trusted (Num. 13:27). Readers thus expect a positive response, since the negative elements in the spies' report are not revealed until verse 28.

**26–33.** The response to the positive report is totally unexpected, and is summed up as *rebellion* (v. 26; cf. Num. 14:9). The story is recorded more fully in Numbers 13:26 – 14:10, but the negative tenor of the spies' report is summarized in verse 28 (cf. Num. 13:31–33). The response of the people was that *The LORD hates us* (v. 27), claiming that their destruction was the reason for the exodus. In covenant terms, this speaks of non-election (7:7–12). But Moses reminds the people of the opposite truth: *But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt* (emphasis added; 4:37–38; 7:8). This love would continue within the Promised Land, in both bountiful provision and victory over its inhabitants (7:12–16). Further, the expression to *lose heart* (v. 28) occurs commonly in holy war contexts, particularly with reference to the Lord's enemies who are terrified at his coming. Merrill (1994: 78) points out: 'Ironic indeed is that Israel, on the verge of conquest as the army of the Lord, should itself lose heart.' In verse 28, the reasons given for despair are twofold: the strength and height of both the people (*Anakites*; cf. Num. 13:31–33; Deut. 2:10, 21; 9:2) and the large cities with *walls up to the sky*.<sup>4</sup> It might have been the reverse. Fear of Israel could have melted the hearts of their enemies (2:25; cf. Josh. 2:11; 5:1), but instead Israel's wilderness generation would experience confusion and defeat rather than victory.

**29–33.** In verses 29–31 the Lord uses the language of both encouragement and holy war (or Yahweh war) with the injunction: *Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them* (v. 29; cf. v. 21). The Lord would go before the people (v. 30; cf. v. 22) and fight for them (cf. v. 4), as he did in the exodus and the wilderness. In fact, during the exodus the people had believed in God (Exod. 14:31). The Lord had carried Israel *as a*

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4. See Hansen (2003: 1–3) for Late Bronze (1480–1390 BC) witness.

*father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place* (v. 31). In Egypt, the Lord had referred to Israel as his *firstborn son* (Exod. 4:22). Such familial language was common in ancient treaty texts, where the covenant-maker would be 'father' and the receiver 'son' (McCarthy 1965: 144-147). Despite their experience, the people chose not to *trust* (or make themselves secure) in the Lord (v. 32)

**34-40.** The scene shifts from Moses to Yahweh (v. 34). It is directly related to verse 28, as though Moses had never spoken (Nelson 2002: 29). Now Yahweh swears a counter-oath to the one sworn to the ancestors (1:8). None of *this evil generation* would see the promise fulfilled, except Caleb (v. 36), Joshua (v. 38), and *the little ones that you said would be taken captive*. They had been innocent in rebellion, having *no knowledge of good or evil* (v. 39; cf. Gen. 2:9, 17; 3:1-24; Num. 14:29). This was a judgment upon Israel's rebellion (vv. 26-28, 32). Moses' own exclusion at verse 37, in which he blames the people as well, probably refers to the smiting of the rock in Numbers 20:10-13 (cf. Deut. 32:51). The rebels had to leave Kadesh Barnea and set out for the Red Sea<sup>5</sup> (v. 40; cf. 2:1; Num. 14:25), that is, in a backward south-easterly direction toward the gulf of Elath or Aqaba.

**41-43.** In these verses, Israel moves from the disobedience of inaction to the disobedience of self-chosen action (Nelson 2002: 30). A real sense of irony and parody informs the section. Israel would learn that it is not always possible to recoup an opportunity lost by unbelief (Thompson 1974: 89; cf. Luke 9:57-62; Eph. 5:15-17). Then you replied, *We have sinned against the LORD* (v. 41; cf. Num. 14:39-45). This confession of sin is the only one recorded in Deuteronomy. Further, there is a resolution to *go up* and fight in obedience to God's original command (vv. 41 and 43), which frames God's command not to *go up* in verse 42. In fact, Israel thought that it would be an *easy* (or a trifling thing) to go up to the hill country (v. 41), but this was simply the sin of presumption.

**42.** The crucial development in this section is that the Lord is not in their midst (v. 42), an idea that is important to Exodus 32-34 and Numbers 14. Because the Lord would not go with them (v. 42), they *rebelled* against him in finally going up (v. 43; cf. v. 26). Whereas

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5. Heb. = *Yam Suph* or Sea of Reeds.

before it was rebellion not to go up, now it is rebellion to go. McConville (2002: 73) points out that the logic of holy war is reversed, with the Amorites delivering a humiliating and costly blow to disobedient Israel.

**44–46.** *Hormah* (a Canaanite town in the Negev) carries an interesting echo of the idea of *herem*, the ban of destruction that Israel was to apply to the Canaanites (v. 44). There is irony in a defeated Israel fleeing to a place whose name suggested annihilation. The people return and *weep* before the Lord (v. 45a). But the Lord *paid no attention*, and turned a *deaf ear* (v. 45b). Finally, the story is frozen at Kadesh (v. 46), involving long years (lit. ‘many days according to the days that you remained there’). Progress towards the land is stopped by a retreat southward (2:1).

### *Meaning*

The movement from Horeb towards the Promised Land is driven by the promise which the Lord swore on oath to the Patriarchs, as something both given, and yet also to be entered and taken (1:6–8). But in the meantime, the first sign of the fulfilment of this promise is the *progeny* that necessitated the appointment of various leaders and judges to judge the people fairly, reflecting God’s own character (1:9–18) and Deuteronomy’s emphasis on justice. Following this, the story of the spies’ account (1:19–46) from Numbers 13–14 is rewritten to highlight the people’s sin in not advancing directly into the southern Judean hill country. Instead, the people chose to ‘test the waters’ by sending spies ahead of them, who return with only a positive report of the *good land* (1:25; cf. Num. 13:27–29). One therefore expects that Israel would trust God, and go up and possess the land. But unexpectedly, Israel resorted to false accusation (1:27) and fear relating to negative reports about the *tall* people and cities of Canaan (1:28), refusing to learn the lessons of God’s care for them in the past (1:29–33). Therefore, the Lord swore an oath that they would not enter the *good land*, thus reversing the sworn oath given to the Patriarchs at 1:8. Only Joshua and Caleb, and the perceived *at risk* children of the wilderness generation would possess the land (1:34–40). A prompt obedience was required, but not given. Then, when they presumptuously sought to go up and fight, not only was this *without* God’s presence (1:42), but the Amorites chased them all

the way to *Hormah* (suggesting a reverse ‘destruction’ for Israel!). The journey to the Promised Land is ‘frozen’ at Kadesh (1:46), leading eventually to retreat (2:1).

*iv. The journey through the hill country of Seir and Transjordan (2:1–25)*

*Context*

After thirty-eight years (cf. 2:14), the people of Israel (2:1) take up the delayed command of 1:40 to depart from Kadesh Barnea. This would involve a circuitous journey through the hill country of Seir (Edom), and then to the upper reaches of the Transjordan, culminating in victories which would place certain areas to the east of the Jordan river in Israel’s hands. While the narrative resembles that of Numbers 20 – 24, it is also distinctive at a number of points, as we shall see. Thompson (1974: 90) suggests that it probably represents a different selection of the available facts. But more important is the observation that 2:1 – 3:11 brings out a pattern (in five parallel panels) that is governed by a dual *theological* rationale (Wright 1996: 34). The first relates to the sovereignty of Yahweh with regard to national migrations and conquests. The second explains why some nations (Edom, Moab and Ammon) remained unmolested, while the kingdoms of Sihon and Og were dispossessed, becoming a kind of firstfruits of the whole land.

*Comment*

**1–3.** Even though the geographical markers are somewhat obscure, it appears that Israel initially set out in a south-easterly direction on the road leading from Kadesh Barnea (usually identified as Ain-el Qudeirat) to Elath and Ezion Geber at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba (Red Sea or Heb. *Yam Suph*). But en route, and possibly including Kadesh Barnea itself, Israel had spent some time travelling around the hill country of Seir. It is probable that this region was on the western outskirts of Edomite territory (Thompson 1974: 90).<sup>6</sup>

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6. Weinfeld (1991: 158) notes that *hill country of Seir* stands for the whole land of Seir, which is Edom.

2. *Then the Lord said to me.* There may be some significance in the fact that this particular formula occurs seven times in Deuteronomy 1–3 (1:42; 2:2, 9, 17, 31; 3:2, 26). Each instance adds a prophetic dimension to the stories in which each move follows a divine command (Weinfeld 1991: 158). But more importantly, each of these formulae relates to the theme of land possession. At the circumference are identical *negative* commands given to both Israel (1:42) and Moses (3:26), relating to the right of entrance into the land. The middle occurrence (2:17) also marks an important negative turning point in the development of this theme, to which we will return shortly.

3. The language of verse 3, *You have made your way around this hill country long enough; now turn north*, recalls the words and the original delayed intent of 1:6–8. Now the direction to the Promised Land would take a different route, finally reaching the upper reaches of the Transjordan east of the Dead Sea and the Jordan river (cf. v. 8; Num. 33:42).

4–8. The witness of these verses is that Israel would begin to *pass through* the territory of the hill country of Seir (Edom), belonging to *your brothers, the descendants of Esau*, as suggested above. In Numbers 20:14–21, we learn of Edom's refusal to allow Israel to pass through her land while Israel was stationed at Kadesh Barnea. A request was made by Moses to the king of Edom (presumably nearby) to allow passage through their territory using the King's Highway. In terms of proximity to Kadesh, this may well have referred to an ancient route passing through the Negev's Central Highlands that connects the site of Kadesh Barnea to Wadi Arabah, known in Arabic as the 'Darb es-Sultan', which literally means 'Way of the King' (Glueck 1959: 228–229).

4–5. By omitting the hostility and rejection of the king of Edom in the Numbers account, verse 4 seeks to highlight the claims of *kinship* with the phrase *descendants of Esau* (cf. Gen. 36:1–8; Num. 20:14: *This is what your brother Israel says*). *They will be afraid of you, but be very careful* (cf. Exod. 15:15) may well be reflected at Numbers 20:20b, when Edom came out against Israel with a large and powerful army, but evidently without any confrontation (contrast Sihon who did engage Israel in war at Num. 21:23). This may indicate Deuteronomy's desire to compare the fates of the five nations

(e.g. favourable to Edom, Moab and Ammon, but not so to Sihon and Og) (Wright 1996: 35). But more to the point, it underlines Deuteronomy's theological interpretation of history in terms of Yahweh's sovereignty and gracious will in apportioning land to different people, beginning with Esau (v. 5b; cf. vv. 9, 19). At a later date, Edom was thought of with more enmity (cf. Amos 1:11–12; Jer. 49:7–22; Obad. 8–21).

6. Cf. Moses' words at Numbers 20:14–21 relating to the payment for water only. Here, the Lord<sup>7</sup> commands Moses and Israel to pay in silver for *food* and water. Its presence in this abbreviated account of Deuteronomy may be a strong clue to its historical reality (cf. vv. 26–30).

7. This recalls the theology of nurture (1:31) over a forty-year wilderness period (1:3; cf. Num. 14:33–34). Nelson (2002: 38) helpfully suggests that the verse may have served a twofold purpose: first to counteract any impression that purchasing supplies (v. 6) would contradict Yahweh's wilderness providence, and also to motivate the trust Israel would need to enter this potentially risky situation. Support for this twin proposal begins with the recognition that the Lord your God has *blessed you in all the work of your hands* (v. 7a), as well as *watched over your journey* through this vast desert (v. 7b). There is a parallel in the second half of the verse with the forty years in which the Lord your God *has been with you* (v. 7c), and you have *not lacked anything* (v. 7d). This cumulative confession would therefore inspire the confidence needed here as well.

8. The exact meaning of *we went on past our brothers ... we turned from the Arabah road, which comes up from Elath and Ezion Geber, and travelled along the desert road of Moab* is not entirely clear. Mayes (1979: 136) plausibly argues that the clue to verse 8 remains with the LXX, which he says undoubtedly preserves the original reading for this verse. On the other hand, the MT of verse 8 is derived from Numbers 20:21, which also appears to conflict with verses 4–6.

9. Moab, the next border country to the north, was not to be conquered either, simply because Yahweh had *given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession*. The meaning of *Ar* appears to relate to

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7. Craigie supports Moses (1976: 108).

both the territory of Moab (vv. 9, 29; cf. Edom's Seir in vv. 5, 29) and to a specific city or region identified as Israel's crossing point on the Arnon (v. 18; cf. Num. 21:14–15, 28). This concession is all the more remarkable in the light of 23:3–6. As with Edom, there were ancient *kinship* links between Israel and Moab, through Lot. However, the shortened expression *the descendants of Lot* indicates a shared kinship that is more distant than that expressed to Esau (lit. 'your brothers', *the descendants of Esau*; v. 4), perhaps on the basis of 23:3–7 [ET].

**10–12.** The notices of verses 10–12 and 20–23 appear to be later historical notes which have much in common. (1) Each notice follows and further explains: *I have given it as a possession to the descendants of Lot* (vv. 9b and 19b). (2) They each stand between the commands of prohibition (vv. 9, 19) and forward advance (vv. 13, 24), serving as a kind of time-bridging device, bypassing the territories of Moab and the Ammonites. (3) Each section begins in a similar way, with the popular name of a local group: *Emites* (vv. 10–11) and *Zamzummites* (vv. 20–21a; cf. Gen. 14:5), both considered as *Rephaites* (cf. Gen. 14:5; 15:20; Deut. 3:11, 13), and as *tall* as the *Anakites*. However, it is clear that the *Anakites* and not the *Rephaites* figure more prominently in the conquest tradition (Deut. 1:28; 2:10, 11, 21; 9:2; Josh. 11:21–22; 14:12–15; 15:13–14; Judg. 1:20). This might suggest that the 'Rephaim' or the descendants of Rapha (legendary heroes or giants, not soldiers devoted to the Semitic deity Rapha; Firth 2009: 508) later survived only among the Philistines and around Hebron (2 Sam. 21:15–22), after being driven out of the Transjordan, their apparent home at this time (3:13). But from an early period they were associated with the *Anakites* because of their *giant* status (v. 11). It is therefore possible that there may have also been some link between them, because, during the time of Joshua, the *Anakites* themselves were driven out of the hill country of Canaan, and were also eventually confined to the area of the Philistines (Josh. 11:21–22; cf. 2 Sam. 21:15–22). (4) Finally, the Lord was responsible for helping both the Ammonites and Edomites secure their land from the Rephaites and the Horites respectively (vv. 20–22). Therefore, Israel's possession of the land of Canaan is fully justified (v. 12), using the same language, and therefore needs to be placed within a much larger world-view and context.

**12. Horites.** The common identification of this people with the

Hurrians is not beyond question, because the latter derive from the northern regions of Syria and northern Palestine for some time after the middle of the second millennium BC. On the other hand, the Old Testament references to the Horites put their centre in Seir and do not know them outside this area (cf. Gen. 14:6; 36:20-30; Num. 13:5; Deut 2:12, 22; 1 Chr. 1:38-42). The expression *just as Israel did in the land the LORD gave them as their possession* (v. 12b) appears to point to a date some time after Israel had taken possession of the land both east and west of the Jordan (cf. Josh. 12:1-24; 13:3).

**13-15.** *Now get up and cross the Zered Valley* (v. 13). The Wadi Zered is a gorge flowing from east to west into the Arabah<sup>8</sup> south of the Dead Sea, also marking the northern boundary of Edom and the southern extent of Moab. These verses record a turning point in the life of Israel. This is achieved through the repetition of the word *crossed* (v. 13), and by the historical retrospect on the thirty-eight-year period in the wilderness (vv. 14-15), which divides the failed wilderness generation of the past (1:34-35) from the successful new generation who will replace them (1:39). *The LORD's hand was against them* (v. 15). Their extinction was not due to natural causes alone, but involved the direct action of Yahweh as Divine Warrior. Much of the language in verses 14-15 is normally used against the enemies of Israel: *perished ... the Lord's hand ... against them ... completely eliminated*. Scholars therefore speak of the inversion of the 'holy war' motif, as well as an 'anti-exodus' motif.

**16-23.** The death of the defeatists (v. 16) now made it possible for a new phase of the journey to begin: *Today you are to pass by the region of Moab at Ar* (v. 18), possibly somewhere in the upper reaches of the Wadi Arnon (cf. Num. 21:28; see v. 9 above). This evidently placed Israel within the range of the Ammonites (v. 19), but not directly in Israel's path, lying to the east of Israel's northern line of advance (cf. Num. 21:24). Israel's non-harassment of the Ammonites (v. 19a) follows the same reason as that given for the Moabites (v. 9), not only on the basis of shared ancient *kinship* links (cf. Gen. 19: 36-38), but because the Lord had given it as a *possession*

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8. Refers to the area of the great Jordan rift valley, both north and south of the Dead Sea (Thompson 1974: 81).

to the descendants of Lot (v. 19b). The second historical note (vv. 20–23) parallels the first (vv. 10–12, see above). But the new element in verses 20–23 is the theological interpretation of history, attributing the removal of the *Zamzummites* from before the Ammonites (vv. 20–21), as well as the removal of the *Horites* from before the descendants of Esau (v. 22), to the direct intervention of Yahweh, the Lord of nations. The *Moabites* (v. 9) appear to be left out of this picture, unless the *Emites* (v. 10) were also removed at the same time as the *Zamzummites* (vv. 20–21), on the basis that both groups were considered *Rephaites*.<sup>9</sup> One further puzzling inclusion in verse 23 relates to the territorial gains of the *Caphthorites* (from Crete) over the *Avvites*, which are not explicitly credited to Yahweh (cf. Amos 9:7). This may indicate that the territory of the *Avvim* (associated with the *Rephaites*?) will likewise join the fate of the others, or perhaps more likely, the Philistines who destroyed the *Avvim* (v. 23) will be destroyed by the Lord (vv. 21–22), and dispossessed by Israelite expansion (cf. Josh. 13:3; 18:23; Jer. 47:4).

**24–25.** The crossing of the Arnon Gorge (the northern boundary of Moab, today identified as the Wadi al-Mawjib) completes the journey from the Zered Valley (v. 13; cf. Num. 21:10–13). It also marks the change from peaceful negotiations to war, and at the same time begins to mark the entry of Israel into the Promised Land on the eastern side of the Jordan in Transjordan. For the first time, a new divine command is directed against the Amorite king, Sihon: *Begin to take possession of it and engage him in battle* (v. 24; cf. v. 31). The Israelites needed to pass through this territory in order to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. Further, the command was also supported by a promise: *This very day I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on all the nations under heaven* (v. 25; cf. Exod. 15:14–16; Josh. 3:7; 10:12). The fact that Sihon is an Amorite signals that he is fair game for conquest, and in defying the divinely induced ‘panic’ of the nations, Sihon leaves himself open to the destruction that follows. The ‘dread’ of a deity as a powerful warrior was often believed to precede a powerful, successful army into battle (cf. Exod. 15:14–15).<sup>10</sup>

9. Suggested by Merrill (1994: 97).

10. See Woods (2001: 78–80).

*Meaning*

A major turning point occurs between chapters 1 and 2. The dominant movement is now forward (2:3), picking up from the earlier command at 1:6–8. The taking of the land is about to begin, although via a different route to that proposed in the first place from Kadesh Barnea (1:19–21). This new route east of the Dead Sea and Jordan will also highlight the sovereignty of God in terms of land that the Lord has given to others which the Israelites must not take, and land that the Lord has set apart for the Israelites as his holy people (7:6). Also, the distinction between the former failure and the new opportunity of success is expressed by the dying out of the first generation and the forty-year waiting period (2:14–15). Finally, the crossing of the Arnon gorge (2:24–25) marks the entry of Israel into the Promised Land, or at least the part of it in Transjordan.

*v. The conquest of Transjordan (2:26 – 3:11)**Context*

A brief account of the main victories that led to the possession of the whole of Transjordan is now given (cf. Num. 21:21–35). Two Amorite kingdoms occupied these areas: that of Sihon from the Wadi Arnon to the Wadi Jabbok, and that of Og in Northern Gilead and Bashan. This passage also signals ways in which it differs from both Numbers 21:21–35 and the narrative style of the previous encounters with Edom, Moab and Ammon, now suggesting that this occasion will be different (McConville 2002: 87). The main differences between these accounts are twofold. First, Deuteronomy 2:24–25 anticipates the engagement and defeat of Sihon as inevitable from the outset, even though Israel's final destination is focused as west of the Jordan (2:26–29; 3:25). Secondly, Numbers 21 says nothing about the ban (Heb. *hērem*; Deut. 2:34–35; 3:6–7), suggesting that Deuteronomy viewed the conquest of the Transjordan in the same way as that of Canaan (i.e. as part of the Promised Land; cf. Deut. 3:18–20; 20:16–18).

*Comment*

**26.** The negotiations with Sihon king of Heshbon began with a diplomatic representation. At the time, the Israelites were in the

desert of *Kedemoth*, a wilderness region beyond the eastern border of Moab. Compared with the account in Numbers 20–21, this account is heightened with a number of rhetorical touches. The expression *offering peace* (v. 26) may indicate that Moses was attempting to make a treaty with Sihon (cf. Deut. 20:10–15; 23:3–6; Josh. 9:15; 1 Kgs 5:12).

**27–30.** The terms of the proposed agreement are similar to those proposed to Edom (Num. 20:14–21; cf. 21:21–23). ‘Let me pass through’ (v. 27a) reflects Numbers 21:22 with the use of the first-person singular (NRSV; cf. NIV = *us*). But in Deuteronomy, the message to Sihon is heightened with a demand to be allowed to purchase food and water (v. 28). It would appear that Israel’s intentions were peaceful at first towards Sihon and the Amorites. This may be seen in the manner proposed for passing through (v. 27), as well as the precedent of the Edomites and Moabites (v. 29a), and the final destination stated as *until we cross the Jordan into the land the LORD our God is giving us* (v. 29b). A further statement is added to Numbers 21:23 at verse 30: *For the LORD your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate in order to give him into your hands* (cf. Exod. 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8; Josh. 11:20). These words should not be taken to reflect a view of determinism on God’s part. Rather, they are better understood as commentary upon the interplay between the exercise of human free-will and responsibility on the one hand, and the divine ordering of the historical process on the other (cf. Exod. 8:15, 32; 9:34).

**31.** This verse picks up the language of verse 24, and the promise of verses 24–25 is now resumed (Nelson 2002: 47), after the interlude of verses 26–30. It is now time to take up the challenge of 1:8, 21.

**32.** It is not clear why Sihon should leave the protection of his fortified posts (especially his capital at *Heshbon*) in order to engage Israel at *Jabaz* (v. 32), identified with *Khirbet Medeinīyeh*, about 11.2 miles (18 km) north-east of *Kedemoth* (Josh. 13:18; 21:37) at the edge of the desert.<sup>11</sup> The evidence at Numbers 21:23 offers no further clue. Perhaps an element of confidence may have been present, as

11. See *ANET*, p. 320.

Sihon had already experienced military success against the Moabites (Num. 21:26). This may also account for his defying the divine 'panic' at 2:25.

33. Israel's first victory, which marked the beginning of the dispossession of the Amorites, can be seen as the proper fulfilment of verses 24 and 31. The total defeat of Sihon is ascribed to the Lord, who *delivered him over to us and we struck him down*, together with his *sons* (dynastic hopes) (cf. Num. 21:35 with regard to Og only) and his people (*army*). This verse, together with the following verses, also stresses the important link between the divine will and action and human action.

34-37. This passage has no parallel in Numbers 21. The formula *at that time* (v. 34) introduces the principle of *hērem* ('ban'), which relates to the way in which the holy war was to be carried out. Since the victory in such a war was attributed to Yahweh as Divine Warrior, all human captives and property thus belonged to him by right of conquest. But it is evident that within the context of holy war, the application of *hērem* ('devotion to destruction' or 'ban') was not uniform in theory or practice (cf. Deut. 20:10-18; Mayes 1979: 141).<sup>12</sup>

36. The parallel tradition at Numbers 21:24 defines the conquered area of Sihon more exactly: *from the Arnon to the Jabbok*. But more graphic detail is now added to the description at Numbers 21:24, with *from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge* (also LXX and Samaritan versions). By using this fixed-border formula for the first time, Deuteronomy points out that Sihon's territory extended as far south as the Arnon. A further significant observation is that in all this area 'not one town was too high for us' (following NRSV; cf. NIV = *strong*). The reference is to walled fortresses, which especially related to the Late Bronze period (1480-1390 BC). Again, the victory is ascribed to Yahweh, which may be seen as a rebuking answer to the fear of the previous generation at 1:28. Now their offspring discovered that height was no hindrance to the hand of God and a people moving in obedience (v. 37) (Wright 1996: 39).

37. Clarification is given to Numbers 21:24 as to why Israel did

12. See Introduction on 'holy war'.

not approach the land of the Ammonites. It was not because the Ammonite border was *fortified*, but because of obedience to the *command* of God not to encroach on their territory. This included the banks of the Wadi Jabbok marking Ammon's west and north border (3:16; Josh. 12:2), as well as the hill country east of the *plateau* that Israel had taken from Sihon (3:10).

**3:1–11.** The conquest against King Og follows the pattern of the previous Sihon narrative. The account conforms to Numbers 21:33–35 closely, in terms of a 'war of Yahweh', but gives more detail to the geography of Og's kingdom.

**1–2.** *We turned and went up* (cf. 'they' turned and went up; Num. 21:33). The 'turning and going up' fits the narrative's pattern of the journey into the Promised Land (1:24).<sup>13</sup> *Bashan* was the land lying north of Gilead and the River Yarmuk, as well as north-east of the Sea of Galilee. It was bordered by Mount Hermon in the north, Mount Hauran to the east, the Sea of Galilee to the west, and the Yarmuk region to the south. It was noted for its rich pastureland and forests (Isa. 2:13; Ezek. 27:6; Amos 4:1; Mic. 7:14). *Edrei* was a city on the southern border of Bashan (cf. 3:10), identified with the modern town of Dara in Syria near the Jordanian border. *Do to him what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites* (v. 2). As king of an *Amorite* nation (v. 8; cf. 1:20), Og was subject to the same policy of extermination as was Sihon. Therefore Moses should not *fear him* (cf. 1:21), for *I have handed him over to you* (for use of the prophetic perfect see comment on 2:24; cf. 1:21).

**3–7.** The language of Og's defeat in these verses parallels that of Sihon's in 2:33–36, except that oddly there is no mention of Og's sons, though these are mentioned at Numbers 21:35 (cf. 2:33). Again, the geographical extent of the region taken is specified, involving *sixty cities* – the whole region of Argob, Og's kingdom in Bashan (v. 4; cf. 1 Kgs 4:13). *Argob* was originally thought to be a district in the eastern area of Bashan, extending as far as the desert. It was clearly well populated, fortified and urbanized (v. 5; cf. vv. 13–14). But, as with the cities and peoples of Sihon, *we completely destroyed them* (v. 6; Heb. *hērem*; cf. 2:34), indicating the Lord's involve-

13. So with McConville (2002: 88).

ment from beginning to end. Also, as with Sihon, all the livestock and plunder from the cities were kept for their own use (v. 7).

**8–11.** This section provides a summary or catalogue of the land taken by conquest from Sihon and Og east of the Jordan (2:24 – 3:7). Both kings are identified as *Amorites*, thus justifying the execution of total destruction (Heb. *ḥērem*) and all its consequences. The extent of the territory taken is described as *from the Arnon Gorge as far as Mount Hermon* (v. 8; cf. Josh. 12:1). Two supplementary comments are included (vv. 9, 11), which appear to be later comments on the original verses 8 and 10.

**8.** *East of the Jordan* (NIV) or ‘beyond the Jordan’ (NRSV). This expression need not assume an original perspective of author and reader from the western side of the Jordan as verses 20 and 25 testify (see comment on 1:5).

**9.** Mount Hermon was called *Sirion* (cf. Ps. 29:6) by the Sidonians or Canaanites, also found in Egyptian, Hittite and Ugaritic texts (Walton and Matthews 1997: 223). The Amorites used the name *Senir* (cf. 1 Chr. 5:23; Song 4:8; Ezek. 27:5), although it would appear that in the first two texts *Senir* and *Hermon* are not identical. One solution would be to consider all three names as different peaks in the same range of mountains in Anti-Lebanon.<sup>14</sup>

**10.** In the total campaign, all the cities on the *plateau (mīšōr)*, or the elevated plateau between the river Arnon in the south and Wadi Heshbon in the north (cf. 4:43; Josh. 13:9, 16, 17, 21; Jer. 48:8, 21), *all Gilead* (the mountainous area north of the plateau up to the Yarmuk, divided by the Jabbok), and *all Bashan as far as Salecah and Edrei* (both places marking the southern border of Bashan, with Salecah in the east, and Edrei in the west) were taken.

**11.** In this archaeological note, Og is pictured as a giant, requiring a huge bed that had to be made of *iron* in order to bear his weight. For this reason, it would have been considered a remarkable piece for the Late Bronze period (second millennium BC), when iron was considered to be precious, as with the term *iron chariots* (Josh. 17:16, 18; Judg. 1:19; 4:3, 13). In the Iron Age of the first millennium BC, one did not mention that chariots (or beds) were made of iron, as

14. So Mayes (1979: 144), and Weinfeld (1991: 183).

this was understood.<sup>15</sup> The bed was about thirteen and a half feet long and six feet wide. This may also relate to Og being the last of the *Rephaim*, or giants, who are now associated with the world of the dead (cf. Isa. 14:9). Finally, the reference to the Ammonite city of *Rabbah* might place this note as late as the time of David, when Rabbah was the capital of Ammon.

### *Meaning*

This section highlights the importance of God's sovereignty and power in delivering the kingdoms of Sihon and Og, identified as *Amorites*, into the hands of the Israelites. Compared with Numbers 21:21–35, Deuteronomy makes two distinctive points. First, Deuteronomy anticipates the engagement and defeat of Sihon as inevitable from the outset in exodus terms. Secondly, Numbers 21 says nothing about the ban (Heb. *hērem*; Deut. 2:34–35; 3:6–7), suggesting that Deuteronomy viewed the conquest of the Transjordan in the same way as that of Canaan, as part of the Promised Land (cf. Deut. 3:18–20; 20:16–18). Also, the defeat of Sihon and Og would become programmatic and an encouragement for Israel's taking of the land west of the Jordan.

## ***vi. The distribution of land to the Transjordan tribes (3:12–17)***

### *Context*

Moses was allowed to witness and direct the start of the conquest on the eastern side of the Jordan, and he supervised the first distribution of the land (Num. 32:1–42; Josh. 13:8–33; cf. Josh. 12:1–6). According to 3:12, the tribes of Reuben and Gad were allotted the kingdom of Sihon between the Wadis Arnon and Jabbok, including half of the hill country of Gilead (south of the Jabbok), as well as a narrow strip of land along the Jordan valley (the Arabah) above the Jabbok as far as the Sea of Galilee. Then in 3:13 the half-tribe of Manasseh received the other half of Gilead (north of the Jabbok), along with all Bashan. The differences reflected in the allocation of this land in Joshua 13:8–33 and Numbers 32:1–42 may be simply a

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15. Weinfeld (1991: 184).

case of the way in which things gradually unfolded from the time of Moses to that of Joshua and beyond. In the meantime, Deuteronomy gives us its own idealized and expansive version of the conquest of the land east of the Jordan *to this day* (v. 14; cf. 2:22).

### *Comment*

**12–13b.** Reuben and Gad share the southern half of the Transjordan called the *plateau* (v. 10), described as *the territory north of Aroer by the Arnon Gorge* (see comments on vv. 3–7), as well as half of the hill country of Gilead. The boundaries between Gad and Reuben, recorded in Joshua 13:15–28, are not mentioned here (cf. Num. 32:34–38). The half-tribe of Manasseh then received the rest of Gilead and all Bashan north of the Jabbok.

**13b–14.** A parenthetical note appears at verses 13b–14, relating to the territory of Og, or otherwise *the whole region of Argob in Bashan* (see comments on v. 4), given to the half-tribe of Manasseh. This region used to be known as *a land of the Rephaites* (v. 13b; cf. 2:11, 20), or people of giant stature. A further geographical note is introduced with *Jair*, a descendant of Manasseh, who finally took the whole region of Argob as far as the border of the *Geshurites* (to the west and south) and the *Maacathites* (to the north-west) (v. 14). This whole region was then named after *Jair*, so that *to this day* Bashan is called *Havvoth Jair* ('settlements of Jair'). Merrill (1994: 109) plausibly suggests that this name probably replaced only Argob at first, but was then extended to Bashan as a whole (v. 14; cf. v. 4). Also, if this same *Jair* was the great-grandson of Manasseh's son Makir (v. 15; cf. 1 Chr. 2:21–22), then it is possible that *Jair* may have extended his influence from Gilead (Num. 32:41; Judg. 10:3–4) to Bashan (Deut. 3:14; Josh. 13:30; esp. 1 Kgs 4:13).

**15–17.** These verses function as a mirror text, repeating the distribution of verses 12–14 (from south to north), now in reverse order (from north to south). The whole section is also united by the phrase *I gave* (Nelson 2002: 53). Makir (v. 15), a son of Manasseh, received Gilead as an inheritance (Num. 26:29). However, his descendants received Gilead by dispossessing the Amorites who lived there (Num. 32:39).

**16.** Reuben and Gad (cf. Josh. 13:15–23) received the southern half of Gilead extending as far south as the Arnon Gorge (the

middle of the wadi being the border), bounded on the east by the upper course of the Jabbok, which runs from south to north (before turning sharply west to empty into the Jordan), also forming the western border of Ammon, some 28 miles (45 km) east of the Jordan.

17. This verse completes the territory of Reuben and Gad in Transjordan, now describing its western boundary, beginning from the north with *Kinnereth* (a town on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee), then proceeding south along the *Arabab* (i.e. with the Jordan as a boundary) to the *Sea of the Arabab* (the Salt or Dead Sea), lying *below the slopes of Pisgah* (4:49; 34:1; Num. 21:20; 23:14; cf. Josh. 13:24–28). Mount Nebo is situated on the summit of Pisgah (or range of hills), from which Moses viewed the Promised Land west of Jordan (3:27; 34:1).

### *Meaning*

The narrative of the distribution of the land east of the Jordan to the Transjordanian tribes of Reuben and Gad (Sihon's territory) and the half-tribe of Manasseh (Og's territory) follows immediately after the defeat of these kings (2:24 – 3:11), as land to be *possessed* (2:31; 3:18–20). Only this account allows Moses to participate in the conquest and distribution of the land (cf. Num. 32:28–42) which he will shortly view in full (in all directions) from the summit of Pisgah, and concludes this passage (3:17b; cf. 3:27). At the same time, it prepares for Joshua's role in the conquest and distribution of the land west of the Jordan (3:21–29). Also the narrator's touch *to this day* (v. 14; cf. 2:22) puts the occupation of the Transjordan on a broad historical canvas, as does the reference to the *Rephaim* (v. 13b), which underlines Yahweh's continuing control over the history of this place to the present time.

### ***vii. Preparations for the invasion west of the Jordan (3:18–29)***

#### *Context*

This section illustrates the importance for Israel to act in unity as a group. The two and a half tribes who had acquired their land east of the Jordan must not rest and enjoy their land until they help the other tribes to possess their territory on the west side of the Jordan.

*Comment*

**18–20.** *I commanded you* (v. 18) – the two and a half tribes. This account is an abbreviated version of Numbers 32, in which Reuben and Gad are only allowed by Moses to possess their inheritance east of the Jordan on the condition that they take up arms and participate in the full conquest on the west side of the Jordan (cf. Num. 32:20–22). What is being stressed here is the solidarity of Israel as a twelve-tribe unit. Only when God had given *rest* to all would any be free of obligation to help the others (cf. Josh. 1:12–18).

**21–22.** *You have seen with your own eyes* (v. 21). On an earlier occasion, Joshua had given good leadership in battle against the Amalekites (Exod. 17:8–14). But on this occasion, Joshua is encouraged in the rhetorical style of Deuteronomy (cf. 4:3, 9; 7:19; 10:21; 11:7; 29:2) by the Lord's recent victories in Transjordan against Sihon and Og. The same divine aid was promised against *all the kingdoms* (or city-states; cf. Josh. 12:7–24) on the other side of the Jordan. In addition, *fear* (cf. 3:2; 31:6, 8) was not an appropriate response, for Yahweh would fight for his people. Finally, these words are picked up again at 31:1–8, as a frame to Deuteronomy. But in this passage, Moses actually commissions Joshua, reinforcing the importance of Deuteronomy as a 'last will' or 'testament' of Moses, which thereby also looks forward to life within the land (cf. Josh. 1:1–9).

**23–29.** This final section builds upon 1:37–38 (cf. Num. 20:9–12), as well as upon the previous verses 21–22, but in a contrasting fashion.

**23.** For the first time, Moses presents an impassioned plea on his own behalf (v. 23). The verb *pleaded* (*hithpa'el*) is a strong one, suggesting 'show favour' or 'be gracious'. Its only other usage in the Pentateuch is found at Genesis 42:21, when Joseph's guilty brothers do not listen to the 'pleading' of the innocent Joseph. But here, the reverse will apply. God will not listen to Moses. In fact, the Lord says to Moses, *Do not speak to me any more* ('*al tôsep* – the root of Joseph) *about this matter* (v. 26b) (Friedman 2001: 572).

**24.** In order to give strength to his prayer, Moses addresses the God he knows by name: *Sovereign LORD* (lit. 'My Lord Yahweh'), illustrating his personal relationship with God as one of master and servant. This form of address is used only in the prayers of Moses, both here for himself, and at 9:26 for the people. Further, Moses'

long-term understanding of God's will and purpose would entitle him to anticipate more to come, with the words *you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand*, covering the period from the exodus from Egypt to the conquest of the lands east of the Jordan. This is quickly followed by an affirmation of God's uniqueness, here in *deeds* and *mighty works* (Exod. 15:11; Deut. 3:21; cf. 34:10–12), which Moses will impress on Israel at a later stage (4:35, 39; 6:4). Surely this would form the foundation of a prayer that would meet with a favourable response.

25. With deep longing in his heart, Moses longs to pass over the Jordan and see the *good land* (LXX and Vg.: 'this good land'). It is likely that Moses appeals here to both God's purposes and power. The reference to the *hill country* and *Lebanon* go back to 1:7 (cf. 11:24). The inclusion of *Lebanon* (cf. Gen. 15:18–19) may suggest the fertility and natural beauty of the land, which at the same time would signify its northern and western borders.

26. In Hebrew the opening words of verse 26, 'The Lord was *cross* at me', are a pun on the opening words of the previous verse 25: 'Let me *cross* and see the good land which is across the Jordan.' Finally, the Lord says to Moses, *You are not going to cross this Jordan* (v. 27), which frames verses 25–27. Christensen (2001: 67) points out that verse 26 stands at the centre of 3:23–29 as a seven-part menorah pattern, based on the words 'seeing' and 'cross'. The expression *because of you* (*lěma'anēkem*) (v. 26) is offered by Moses as the reason why he could not cross the Jordan. Some see this as Moses blaming the people for his fate. At 1:37 the preposition carries the meaning of Moses' *solidarity* with the people's sin (cf. 32:48–52) when he struck the rock at Meribah to get water (Num. 20:9–13; 27:12–14). Moses' persistence with his request to enter the Promised Land had apparently lost its focus. It was the Lord himself who was to remain the true promise and vision of Moses (Craigie 1976: 127). The words *that is enough* (lit. 'you have much') are used differently by Korah against Moses and Aaron at Numbers 16:3 (*You have gone too far!*). When God now uses this same expression here, it is a reminder to Moses that he has lived a unique and full life of one hundred and twenty years, and has done great things. Even in being denied his dream of coming into the land, he has much, and perhaps more than any other human who has ever lived

(34:10–12) (Friedman 2001: 573). Also, God would have even greater things in store for him after his death, both in terms of what Joshua will accomplish in the land, and even beyond (cf. Luke 9:30–31).

**27.** Finally, Moses is granted the consolation of viewing the Promised Land in all directions from the summit of Pisgah, including the land east of the Jordan. Like Abraham (Gen. 13:14), Moses would inherit the land through his descendants. He would be granted the unique privilege of a personal viewing of the land with his *own eyes* (cf. 34:4, 7), since he would not experience it either first-hand or second-hand across the Jordan. In fact, Moses' death is not recorded until 34:1–12, so that the whole book is framed between the announcement of his impending death and the declaration of his actual death. In one important sense, therefore, the book takes on the form of a prophetic last will and testament of Moses, Israel's great lawgiver.

**28–29.** The impending death of Moses is the occasion for the appointment of Joshua as his successor, who will 'cross' over the Jordan (cf. Num. 27:12–23). The *commission* (NIV) (lit. 'command') of Joshua is a reaffirmation of his new role from 1:38. Joshua is also to be *encouraged* and *strengthened* (v. 28; cf. 31:7–8). In his preparation of Joshua, Moses will have an active role in the conquest of Canaan, a role that also involves the acceptance of his own exclusion (McConville, 2002: 95). The account finally concludes with a geographical note about the valley near Beth Peor (v. 29). This is fitting, since it will be the place of Moses' farewell address, as well as the vicinity of Moses' burial ground.

### *Meaning*

The Transjordanian tribes had attained their *rest* and *inheritance*, which not only included them within the borders of the true Promised Land, but was also a call for them to help secure the land west of the Jordan together with the other tribes, stressing the unity of Israel. Then as a follow up to 1:37–38, Moses encouraged Joshua to take possession of the land without *fear* in the light of the Lord's victory over Sihon and Og, thus providing a frame to 31:1–8. The important themes of Moses' exclusion, his vision of the land and Joshua's succession come together here, as they do at chapters 31 –

34. In this way Deuteronomy portrays Moses' death as a necessary prerequisite for the fulfilment of the promise of the land. He dies so that the people may enter the land. But at the same time, Moses' death will always serve as a reminder of the non-entry of Moses into Canaan, as well as reassert the authority of his teaching.

### C. The practical consequences for Israel (past, present and future) of God's past actions (4:1–43)

#### *Context*

Chapter 4 forms a bridge between the historical review of chapters 1–3 and the beginning of Moses' exposition of the law in 5:1. But as such, chapter 4 also concludes the first address of Moses (chapters 1–4), as well as serving as a kind of window case of 'reading instructions' (past, present and future) for the rest of the book of Deuteronomy (Nelson 2002: 60). Chapter 5, as a reverse side mirror, then begins the second and longest address of Deuteronomy, from 4:44 to 28:68 (Olson 1994: 40–48).

#### *Comment*

1. Since the beginning of the book, we have been waiting for the covenant requirements to be spelled out, after the rehearsal of Israel's journey from Horeb to the plains of Moab (1:1–3:29). With the expression *And now hear O Israel* (4:1), Moses begins his sermon application by making an important equation between obedience to the *decrees* (*huqûqîm*) and *laws* (*mišpāṭîm*) and the enjoyment of life within the land. The expression, *Hear, O Israel* (cf. 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9), is characteristic of a didactic address, but here these words also have an object with the *decrees and laws* (also at 5:1) that Moses is to *teach* Israel (4:1, 5, 9–10, 14; 5:1, 31; 6:1, 7, 20–25; 11:19; 31:12–13, 19–22). The phrase *so that you may live* is also central to the book, culminating at 30:15–20. Within these framing texts, 'life' relates to both physical longevity and well-being, as well as to the enjoyed blessings of the covenant within the land. The expression *the LORD, the God of your fathers* links the possession of the land with the original Abrahamic promise (Gen. 15:18–19; Exod. 3:16–17). Here, it might appear that possession of the land depends on prior obedience to the laws, but the reverse can also be found in verses 5–6.

2. This verse completes verse 1, not only by introducing the term *commands* (*mišwôt*) as a summary term for *decrees* and *laws*, but also by giving further authority and integrity to these ‘permanent authoritative rulings’ with the addition that nothing can be added or subtracted from them (cf. 12:32; Matt. 5:18–19; Jer. 26:2). This same unilateral arrangement was made by the sovereign in Ancient Near Eastern treaties and law codes. Weinfeld (1991: 200) notes that this kind of warning has its proper place either at the beginning of a divine work, as here, or at the end of a work (cf. Rev. 22:18–19).

3–4. *You saw with your own eyes* (v. 3) underlines the importance of ‘witness’ in this chapter (also at vv. 9, 15, 34). The incident at Baal Peor (Num. 25:1–13) is not mentioned in chapters 1–3, and may only be hinted at in 3:29 (Beth Peor). Representing the place of Israel’s most recent religious idolatry and disloyalty (cf. 1:26–46), the name is pointedly given as *Baal Peor* and not the more neutral Beth Peor of 3:29 and 4:46. This was an ideal opportunity to juxtapose the true worship of God with the false worship of Peor (Weinfeld 1991: 2001; cf. Matt. 16:13–20). Within its present context, these verses now provide a negative counterpart and illustration to verses 1–2, namely that disobedience to God’s law brings destruction and death. But those who *held fast* (*dābaq*) (the first image of obedience as ‘loyalty’ in the chapter; cf. 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20) *to the LORD your God are still alive today* (vv. 1, 4, 40).

5–8. *See, I have taught you decrees and laws* (v. 5). The tense here (*taught*) is perfect (past), and could indicate an activity already completed over the past forty years since Sinai (Merrill 1994: 116). On the other hand, the past tense is generally used in Semitic languages to make a formal declaration relating to the present or future, and is often accompanied by *see* (cf. 1:8; 2:24, 31). The point about this passage then relates to the importance of a fresh obedience to the *decrees* and *laws* that frame the section in verses 5 and 8. In addition, Israel lived on an open stage before a watching world (cf. Exod. 19:4–6; Isa. 42:18–25). Obedience to these laws would not only ensure the success of Israel’s covenant life within the land (v. 5), but would also display before the nations the greatness and wisdom of her laws (v. 6), leading to an acknowledgment of the greatness of Israel as a nation because of her intimacy or *nearness* to God in prayer that existed in no other religion (v. 7). Finally, the

superiority of Israel's law code could be demonstrated both on the basis of its *righteous* nature in comparison with other law codes of the ancient world (cf. Pss 1; 19; 119; 147:19–20), as well as its reflection of the righteousness of the Lord himself (v. 8). In both respects, the effect of the rhetorical questions of verses 7 and 8 makes the claim that Israel is incomparable, in the same way that the rhetorical questions of verses 32–34 are designed to claim that Yahweh is incomparable (Wright 1996: 48). This last claim to the *righteous* nature of Israel's law and God may have been used by Deuteronomy as a polemic against the claim of the 'just laws' of ancient law codes, in which the kings of the Ancient Near East usually counted on their collections of laws to convince the gods that they were 'wise' and 'just' rulers (Weinfeld 1991: 202).

9–14. *Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely* (v. 9) is repeated in verses 15 and 23. In this section, Israel's constant problem will be one of forgetfulness (*eyes have seen*) and disobedience (*slip from your heart*) (cf. 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19; 9:7), relating to (1) the revelation of God's *words* given at Horeb (principally the 'ten words or the Tēn Commandments; v. 13), in the context of an unforgettable manifestation of God's presence (vv. 10–11); (2) there was no physical form to God's presence, but only a *voice* declaring his covenant, in the form of the Ten Commandments, which he *wrote* on two stone tablets (v. 13). The point of this revelation to Israel was also twofold: (1) to engender a proper *fear* and worship of God as long as they live in the land; and (2) that they may *teach* these laws to their children (vv. 9, 10; 6:7–9, 20–25; 11:19; 31:13; 32:46). It is assumed that the present audience being addressed also stood at Horeb (cf. 5:1–4).

11. *While it blazed with fire*. The fire theophany (v. 11) sets the stage for repeated references to Yahweh's words at Horeb (vv. 12, 15, 33, 36; 5:4, 22). The phrase *blazed with fire* (*bā'ar*; also 5:23; 9:15) is not used of *Sinai* back at Exodus 19:18 (*the LORD descended on it in fire*), but it *is* used for the burning bush at *Horeb*, the mountain of God (Exod. 3:1–2),<sup>16</sup> which therefore became the sign of things to come when Israel returned to this mountain (Exod. 3:12). Deuteronomy

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16. Possibly accounting for Deuteronomy's preference for the name *Horeb* (cf. 33:2).

then becomes more specific with the point that Israel heard God's words on Horeb from *out of the fire* (v. 12; also see above), which recalls how Moses himself heard God call *from within the bush* that was on fire (Exod. 3:1-4) (Friedman 2001: 575). Thus in Deuteronomy, Horeb now replicates the burning bush of Moses for Israel (cf. 33:16).<sup>17</sup> This becomes the starting point of Israel's call and vocation in the light of Exodus 19:1-6, to be *a treasured possession* and *a holy nation unto the LORD* (Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:18-19). Further, Deuteronomy does not mention *lightning* and *a very loud trumpet blast* from Exodus 19:16-19; 20:18, but it does refer to the *black clouds* and *deep darkness* as a backdrop. Thus are held together, as one, hiddenness and revelation, mystery and accessibility, transcendence and immanence, especially as the *fire* of God's presence blazes literally to the 'heart' of the heavens (cf. v. 36; 29:29; Miller 1990: 59). Also, the use of contrasting colours and images, of light and darkness, would have helped to emphasize the *voice* and *fire* (mentioned seven times: vv. 11, 12, 15, 24, 33, 36 [twice]) of the presence of God, especially as this reaches a climax in both Deuteronomy 4:24, with the description of Yahweh himself as *a consuming fire* and *a jealous God*, and in 5:22-27. The image of *fire* probably carries multiple meanings in Deuteronomy. In this chapter, Christensen (2001: 86) points to a chiasmic structure at 4:11-24 in the following way:

A	At Horeb Yahweh spoke from the fire	4:11-14
B	No graven image in any form permitted	4:15-19
C	Yahweh took you out of Egypt to become his <i>inheritance</i>	4:20
X	Yahweh's anger: Moses is not allowed to enter the land	4:21a
C'	Yahweh is giving you the land of Canaan as your <i>inheritance</i>	4:21b-22
B'	No graven images in any form permitted	4:23
A'	Yahweh is a consuming fire - a jealous God	4:24

Given this structure, the focus of attention at the centre (4:21a) is on

17. See Wilson (1995: 206).

Moses being denied entry into the Promised Land (cf. 3:23–29). But the important outer frames of *fire* relate to the Lord's uncompromising commitment to his covenant (4:11–14, 24). As such, the Lord will not tolerate any rival in terms of graven images in any form (4:15–19, 23), as he is a *jealous* God (v. 24; cf. 32:21) and is equally committed to his people and to the land as his 'personal property' (*naḥālā*) (vv. 20, 21b–22; cf. vv. 25–31). Finally, and not surprisingly, the people later request that Moses alone should 'draw near' (5:27), and hear God's voice from this *blazing fire*, as at the original burning bush.

12. The contrast between *form* (*tēmūnā*) and *voice* (*qôl*) at this point stresses the auditory nature of this event in the form of *words*, which will follow in verse 13 as the declaration of the 'ten words' or commandments. But the notion of *form* will find greater development in verses 15–18 and 25–28 as an attack on idolatry. This is the chief sin according to Deuteronomy, and runs counter to Israel's imageless worship of God. God was to be heard and not seen, and through hearing, obeyed.

13. For the moment, the issue of the *form* is put aside, while the content of the *voice* is developed in terms of a *covenant* (*bērit*), requiring obedience. This is the first of twenty-eight references in Deuteronomy. Here it is applied in a restrictive sense to the 'ten words' or *Ten Commandments* (Exod. 34:28; cf. Deut. 4:23; 9:9, 11, 15; 10:4, 8), which form the primary building blocks upon which the entire Torah is based, including the so-called 'Book of the Covenant' (Exod. 21:1–23:19), which is expanded and revised in the book of Deuteronomy. Writing on *stone tablets* was common practice in the Ancient Near East for the recording of law codes, and indicates permanence and importance. The use of *two* tablets may imply the making of two copies, one for each party, following the practice of ancient treaty agreements. In this singular act, law code (see verses 5–8 above) and treaty may have come together.

14. It is probably best to see the reference here to *decrees* and *laws* as a way of linking the present Deuteronomic law to that of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1–17) and the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 21:1–23:19)<sup>18</sup> given at Horeb *at that time* in the past. These will now

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18. Called *laws* (*mišpāṭīm*) only at Exodus 21:1.

be expounded for a new situation (cf. 5:1), beginning with the Decalogue or 'ten words' in 5:1-21, which will provide the sequence of laws in 6:1 - 26:19 (see Introduction: Some literary features of Deuteronomy, p. 33).

**15-24.** Verse 15 restates the warning of verse 9 (*be careful*), and picks up on the previous reference to *form* (*tēmūnā*) at verse 12, developing it more fully in this section. Horeb demonstrated that images are inappropriate in the worship of Yahweh. This section now anticipates, and lays a foundation for, the teaching on the second commandment at 5:8-10.

**16.** *So that you do not become corrupt* (cf. v. 25; 9:12). Following these words come four different terms associated with idolatry (*idol, image, shape/statue, form*; cf. Gen. 1:26-27 with an identical use of terms, relating to male and female as made in the *image of God* and exercising dominion over creation), indicating a rigorous and exhaustive attitude to idols (cf. 5:8). Further, the making of 'all' (emphatic *kol*) idols (vv. 15, 16, 17, 23, 25; 5:8), and their subsequent worship (vv. 19; 28; 9:12, 16), would make Israel *corrupt*, in terms of confusing the Creator with the created (vv. 35, 39; cf. Rom. 1:23, 25). But why the prohibition against idols as a way of worshipping Yahweh? A strong case can be made from the present context (vv. 12-14, 32-40), that the contrast is not between visible and invisible, or between spiritual and material, but between the *visible* and the *audible* (Wright 1996: 50), or between the *static* and the *relational* (Fretheim 1991: 225-227). Idols belong to culture, and have 'form', but do not 'speak' or 'act' in history as Yahweh does. In fact, Yahweh's invisibility also becomes the basis and potential of his greater accessibility, especially as Israel pledge to keep his covenant laws (7:12-16; cf. John 14:23). What sets Yahweh apart is not that *he* looks different, but that he calls for a *people* who will look different in every way from the surrounding cultures (Wright 1996: 51).

**17-19.** The list relating to the *form* (five times) that idols might take reverses the order of the creation account of Genesis 1:1-28: human beings, land animals, birds, creeping things, fish and the heavenly bodies (cf. also the tripartite division of *heaven, earth* and *waters* at 5:8). In doing so, it also potentially reverses the original intent of the meaning of the *image of God* in *male* and *female* at Genesis 1:26-28, who therefore should not be the objects of worship themselves (see

v. 16 above). Within the context of this chapter, such idolatry would undermine: (1) the purpose for which Israel was redeemed (v. 20); (2) the Lord's gift of the Promised Land to Israel (vv. 21b–22), both described as the Lord's 'special inheritance'. Finally, the heavenly bodies were among the most worshipped of the deities within the powerful nations of the Ancient Near East, especially the *sun* and the *moon* (cf. Job 31:26–28). Because these were so *enticing* (v. 19; cf. 17:2–7), with their ready-made nature (therefore not strictly *images* as such), Israel was not to bow down (sing.) to them and worship things that *the LORD your God has 'apportioned' to all the nations under heaven*. This problematic statement may simply be a reference to Genesis 1:14–18, which asserts that the heavenly bodies were created by God to serve the whole of humankind (including Israel), but were not in turn to be served or worshipped by any nation (especially Israel). Here we may also note the *inclusive* nature of verse 19 (with the words, lit. 'apportioned to *all* of the nations under *all* of the heavens'). Further, the text here stops short of saying that these heavenly bodies are *worshipped* by the nations, but it is possible that this might be implied (cf. Jer. 10:1–16; 2 Kgs 17:16; Zeph. 1:5). Be that as it may, these heavenly 'lights' as *apportioned* (*hālaq*, also at 29:26 [ET], referring to the *gods* of Canaan; cf. 2 Kgs 17:7–20), or 'assigned' to *all* of the nations, including Israel, may also be a reference to their proper place as a witness to Yahweh's sovereignty and kingship *over* creation (cf. *Most High* at 32:8–9; *King* at 33:2–5; Jer. 10:1–16). This is given particular support in the 'witness' texts at 4:26; 30:19, as well as in verses 32–40 within the present chapter.

20. *But as for you* (pl.) now provides the intended point and contrast with verse 19. This is also supported by Deuteronomy 32:8–9, where similar language is used in contrasting the nations' inheritance of land with that of Yahweh's *portion* (*hēleq*) and allotted *inheritance* (*naḥālā*), Israel. Thus, the *boundaries* of heaven and earth are shared at 4:19–20 (heaven), and 32:8–9 (earth), involving both the nations and Israel, but in both passages, *Israel* is singled out as Yahweh's favoured people. Verse 20 then gives the double reason why Israel should not bow down to any created thing, based on (1) their redemption from the *iron-smelting furnace* of Egypt (1 Kgs 8:51; Jer. 11:4; cf. Isa. 48:10–11); and (2) the exclusive covenant relationship of Yahweh as *the people of his inheritance* (v. 34; cf. Jer. 10:1–16).

The description of Israel as the Lord's *inheritance* (*nahālā*) is first found here in verse 20, and finally at 32:9 (also 9:26, 29; cf. 1:31; 8:5; 14:1; 32:6; Exod. 4:22; 19:5).

**21a.** Here, at the centre of 4:11–24, Moses returns to the theme of his rejection from the Promised Land (cf. 1:37; also 3:26 at the centre of 3:23–29). In all passages, the *anger* of Yahweh is recalled, *because of you*. Also, Moses now draws attention to the importance of his death for the first time (v. 22). Standing at the centre of this section, Moses maintains his integrity with regard to the matter of idolatry (Exod. 32). But the warning is also clear. If this can happen to Moses, it most surely can happen to *you*, if Israel fails to live as God's obedient covenant people within the land.

**21b–24.** Now in reverse order, and paralleling verse 20, Israel is reminded of the ultimate goal of their great deliverance from Egypt: the possession of the *good* land when they cross the Jordan, which will also become their *inheritance* (*nahālā*) (vv. 21b–22). Then as a parallel to verses 15–19, verse 23 exhorts Israel to be very *careful* not to forget the *covenant* made at Horeb, as this especially relates to the question of *idolatry* covered by the first two commandments. To practise idolatry is to *forget* the covenant at its most foundational and operational levels, as Yahweh will tolerate no rivals (cf. 6:4–5). Such behaviour demands and deserves the judgment of divine wrath, that of a *jealous God*, who is a *consuming fire* (v. 24; cf. 6:15). The term *jealous God* ('*el qannā*'; v. 24) does not speak of a petty, selfish envy, but within this context means that Israel, as God's 'personal property' (4:20; 32:9), must also respect his right to exclusive love, obedience and worship, without any rivalry (v. 23b; cf. 6:4–5), otherwise the Lord's jealousy and anger will kindle a fire of judgment by his wrath (6:13–15; 32:16–22).

This enables us to see why *idolatry* is the greatest sin in Deuteronomy. As Merrill (1994: 125) suggests, the juxtaposition of the *iron-smelting furnace* of verse 20 and the *consuming fire* of verse 24 is not without purpose. Yahweh had brought his people out of the fiery oppression of Egypt, by the fire of his redeeming love, so that they could become 'a people of his hereditary possession'. But if Israel should break covenant with him through idol worship (v. 23b), they could expect the fire of his jealousy and wrath (cf. Exod. 32:10; Deut. 6:13–15; 32:16–22; Isa. 48:10–11). In rebellion and

idolatry they would find the God of verse 24, but in repentance and return they would find the God of verse 31 (cf. Exod. 34:6).

**25–31.** Having reviewed the past, Moses now looks to the distant future (v. 25). As such, the words of this book are relevant to generations of Israelites yet unborn, just as the present generation are considered as having stood at Horeb when the original covenant was given (5:2–3). This passage is also the first of a number within the book which look to the future and anticipate Israel's *failure* to live as the people of God within the Promised Land (28:15–68; 29:22–28; 30:1–10, 11–20; 31:16–29; 32:1–43).

The main thrust of this passage sounds a warning against *idolatry* already delivered to Moses' contemporaries (vv. 15–19, 23), but also relevant for generations of Israelites yet unborn. This particular sin will prove to be Israel's great undoing within the land of promise, and will even bring about their exit from the land. In order to make the point more vividly, this passage also uses a legal lawsuit 'case' (*rib*) against Israel, where *heaven and earth* are invited to witness Yahweh's declarations of these judgments (v. 26; cf. 30:19; 31:28; 32:1). This will result in both *death* within the land (v. 26) and *scattering* from the land (v. 27). The passage makes use of a number of contrasts, noting the reverse of the covenant with Abraham, with *only a few of you will survive* (v. 27; cf. 1:11; 6:3; 13:17). Ironically, the punishment for idolatry will be the worship of man-made gods in exile, which cannot relate to any of Israel's needs, because they are completely lifeless (v. 28). Then Israel will discover how frustratingly impotent these gods have been. Such gods contrast sharply with Yahweh's active power in verses 32–40. However, exile will not be the end of Israel's story. They will find God afresh if they seek him *with all* [their] *heart and and with all* [their] *soul* (v. 29). This formula is used in contexts which speak of Israel's commitment to the Lord in covenant loyalty and love (cf. 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 30:6). Therefore, to seek him in captivity is to renew one's pledge of covenant loyalty (Merrill 1994: 128). This is supported by verse 30, when in *distress* God's people *will* return to him and obey him. It appears that Israel's ability to repent and return to the Lord also works in tandem with God's own character and work of grace within his people (cf. 30:1–10; esp. v. 6; also Exod. 32:1–34:28; Lev. 26:40–45; Jer. 31:27–34; Ezek. 36:22–32).

In secular treaties, rebellion was seldom treated with mercy, even if there was a show of repentance. But finally in this section, the nature of Yahweh is quite different to that of secular kings. Here he is presented as a *merciful* God (v. 31), who will not *forget the covenant* sworn by oath to the Patriarchs (Gen. 15:18; 22:16-18), in contrast to the prospect held out in verse 23 of Israel *forgetting their covenant* with God. The concept of a *merciful God* (Exod. 34:6-7) therefore explains why Israel may find it possible to return to the Lord (vv. 29-31), for as such, he will neither *abandon, destroy* (cf. vv. 16, 25) nor *forget* (cf. vv. 9, 23) his people. So now, as they are about to begin their life in the Promised Land, Moses informs them that God is, in the first place, not a wrathful God, but a *merciful* God.

**32-34.** In Hebrew both the previous verse (31), and now verse 32, begin with the particle *for* (*ki*), which may argue for a link between these sections, in answer to the question, 'On what grounds may Israel hope for restoration?' (Thompson 1974: 108). But at the end of this section (v. 40), the link may equally argue for the recipe and prospect of a long life within the land. Creation is recalled for the first time (v. 32a; cf. Gen. 1:1 - 2:4a), in order to pose three rhetorical questions (vv. 32b, 33, 34), each expecting the answer 'no' (cf. vv. 7-8). The second and third questions flesh out the first in verse 32b (lit. 'has there been anything like this great thing/event/deed?'). The most telling point of Moses' argument occurs at verse 34: *Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation ...?* That the Lord, as Divine Warrior, took Israel out of Egypt shows the powerlessness of Egypt's gods, embodied in the Pharaoh, thus demonstrating that Yahweh is the only true God (v. 35; cf. Exod. 12:12). Five expressions of Yahweh's power in salvation and judgment follow in a concentric pattern, divided by the term *war* within Egypt, *before their very eyes* (4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 10:21; 11:7; 29:2-3; 34:12), framing the book:

- A Trials and testings
- B Signs and wonders
- C War
- B' Mighty hand and outstretched arm
- A' Great and awesome deeds/terrors

**35.** *You* (emphatic sing. pronoun) *were shown these things so that you might know* ... Monotheism in Israel was not the conclusion of an evolution of religious speculation, but an assertion generated out of historical experience and grounded there (cf. 7:7–11; 10:12–22; 11:1–8) (Wright 1996: 55). *The Lord is God*: the Hebrew is written with the definite article (lit. ‘he is *the* God’) (Waltke-O’Connor 1990: 249, para 13.6). Grammatically, this excludes the possibility of saying this about any other god as well (cf. 1 Kgs 8:60 which is later related to *the nations*). This is supported by the following words, *besides him there is no other* (cf. v. 39; 5:7; 6:4). Two other early songs of Moses also affirmed the same truth to Israel (Exod. 15:11, 18; Deut. 32:12, 15–22, 39), as well as the golden calf episode (Deut. 9:7–29; cf. Exod. 32:1–35).

**36–38.** Taking up the order of the Horeb and exodus events, Moses draws attention to a number of motive clauses expanding on verse 35. The first is God’s *discipline* (*yasar*) of Israel, reflecting the father-son relationship between God and Israel (cf. 8:5). This came when God spoke out of the fire at Horeb to the people, in the form of the Ten Commandments (cf. vv. 11–13). Secondly, verse 37 highlights two important words, *love* and *chose* (lit. ‘his descendants after him’). Clearly Abraham is in view as the one to whom the original promise came, which was then repeated to Isaac and Jacob. The theme of God’s love for Israel and their ancestors is unique in the Pentateuch (cf. 10:15; 23:5). The point here is that the exodus deliverance was predicated on Israel’s prior election by the Lord. It was precisely because of Yahweh’s prior love and choice of the Patriarchs that he acted to redeem *my firstborn son* from Egypt (Exod. 4:22–23). Furthermore, God’s presence (Heb. *panim*) (Exod. 33:14–15) and great strength would drive out much stronger nations in order to give the land to Israel as their promised inheritance (v. 38).

**39–40.** Finally, verse 39 acts as an envelope to verse 35, and also completes the argument of much of this chapter with the reference to the Lord as God *in heaven above* and *on the earth below*. But the Lord’s transcendence and immanence are not to be thought of as polar opposites or mutually exclusive domains of his operations and existence. Rather, Israel experiences divine immanence in the earthly actions of the transcendent Yahweh, who hears prayer (v. 7), commands law (vv. 8, 13–14), liberates from Egypt (vv. 20, 34, 37),

and bestows land (v. 38) (Nelson 2002: 70–71). Such a God also demands a continuous obedience to his covenant laws if Israel is to enjoy his blessing within the land *for all time* (v. 40; cf. 11:1; 14:23; 19:9).

**41–43.** Many scholars consider this section to be out of place. However, it could well have been included here for several reasons. (1) The need for such cities of refuge is already established with the conquest of the Transjordan (Sihon and Og), and the distribution of land (cf. Num. 35:1–34). (2) The provision of such cities would begin to provide a visible witness to God's power and faithfulness in giving Israel the land originally promised to Abraham (cf. Gen 12:1–3), signalling the fact that the Lord can also be trusted and obeyed across the Jordan. (3) Clements (1998: 320) points out that the sign and 'proof' of Israel's claim to territory east of the Jordan was that the divine law was upheld and authoritative with regard to the cities of refuge (cf. Josh. 20:8).

### *Meaning*

Deuteronomy 4 has a pivotal role to play in linking past, present and future history together. As such, it serves as a kind of window case of 'reading instructions' for the rest of Deuteronomy, especially as an introduction for the specifics of the Decalogue in chapter 5, which then provides a theological 'blueprint' for the rest of the book. The chief theological concern of 4:1–43 is that Israel should take special care not to forget or disobey the Lord's *voice* from the burning Mount Horeb (*you saw no form*), especially as this relates to the sin of idolatry, which will make Israel *corrupt*, as well as run counter to Israel's imageless worship of God. God was to be heard and not seen, and through hearing, obeyed. At the centre of this material on idolatry, Moses' death (4:21–22; cf. 3:26) is recalled, highlighting his integrity at this level, but it also stands as a warning to Israel that, if this can happen to Moses, it can surely happen to them. In fact, the signs are already present that Israel will fail at this level and, as a result, will be scattered from the land and worship gods of wood and stone who cannot help them. But should Israel return to the Lord, they will find a God of covenant, mercy and grace (vv. 25–31). Finally, the Lord is presented as the true God as well as *incomparable* (vv. 35, 39), as a frame to Israel's *unique* standing

before him (vv. 7–8). As such, the Lord has not only demonstrated his love to Israel as well as faithfulness to covenant promise in giving them the land, but this also requires of Israel their reciprocal response to keep his decrees and commands that Moses is giving them *today*. As a final demonstration of the validity of these laws, and their 'life-giving' nature, Moses sets up three cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan (vv. 41–43).

## 2. SECOND ADDRESS OF MOSES: WHAT GOD COMMANDS FOR THE FUTURE (4:44 – 28:68)

This lengthy section of Deuteronomy is really the core of the book. It is made up of two large blocks of material which follow a pattern found in Ancient Near Eastern treaties of general principles (5:1 – 11:32), followed by more specific laws (12:1 – 26:19). However, the chapters that follow (27:1 – 28:68) are a mix of law codes and treaties with the document clause (27:3; 31:9–13), blessings (28:1–14) and curses (28:15–68). Thus the core of the book is envisaged as a covenant document that defines the relationship between God and Israel. Understood in this way, the first section of general principles (5:1 – 11:32) seeks to bind Israel to God in love and loyalty, promising blessing for obedience, and curse for disobedience. The second section (12:1 – 26:19) then defines this relationship in terms of obedience to specific laws (cf. John 15:10–11).

### A. Introduction to the second address of Moses (4:44–49)

#### *Context*

These verses form an inclusio with 1:1–5 in highlighting the *law*

(*tôrâ*) that Moses set before Israel, but now defined more precisely with further legal terminology. The renewed references to the victories over Sihon and Og show that the first four chapters take as their main theme the beginning of the conquest, with the subduing of Transjordan being a kind of firstfruits (McConville 2002: 114). As such, verses 44–49 form a frame for the first four chapters, and also serve a *dual* purpose in providing an introduction of conquest history to the covenant demands which follow (cf. Exod. 20:1–2, 3–21).

### Comment

**44–45.** *This is the law Moses set before the Israelites* (v. 44; cf. 1:5) links the following legal terms more precisely with what is to follow in chapter 5. The term *law* (*tôrâ*) denotes instruction in a broad sense, and is further defined by the term *stipulations* or testimonies (*'ēdūt/ 'ēdôt*) used only here in verse 45 and in 6:17, 20. This new term may refer to the Decalogue at 5:6–21 (cf. Exod. 25:16; McBride 1987: 233–234), which came to represent the particulars or conditions of the covenant requirement. This is followed by the terms *decrees* (*huqqîm* = written down or inscribed) and *laws* (*mišpātîm* = rulings of a judge), as more explicit ways of defining the stipulations/testimonies (cf. 5:1, 31; 6:1, 20; 11:32; 12:1; 26:16–17).

**46.** The more neutral *Beth Peor* ('house of Peor'; contrast *Baal Peor* at 4:3–4) not only points back to 3:29, but could well reflect Numbers 23:28 where Balaam also *blessed* Israel as a nation that *devours hostile nations* (Num. 24:8). This meaning would suit the following verses.

**47–49.** These verses are a summary description of what has already been given in 3:8–22. The land extended from Aroer in the south to Mount Hermon in the north. Hermon is called *Sîyon*, which is probably a variant of *Sirion* (cf. 3:9; Ps. 29:6).

### Meaning

Verses 44–49 correspond to 1:1–5, with its summary account of Moses' preaching *beyond the Jordan*. With the renewed emphasis upon the Torah (v. 44; cf. 1:5) and the allusion to the victories over Sihon and Og, this section now prepares more fully for the Decalogue to follow. Also, the further introduction of legal terms links the Torah

(instruction) with the Decalogue and other laws. The new term *stipulations* or ‘testimonies’ (*‘ēdōt*) may have been introduced to focus the Decalogue more directly, and also to form a bridge with the common pair *decrees* and *laws*, also found at 6:17, 20, concluding with *this law* (Torah) at 6:25 as a frame to 4:44–45. The reference to Beth Peor may have been meant to pattern God’s intent to *bless* his people with these laws, as at Numbers 23:28.

## **B. The foundation and nature of Israel’s covenant faith: the Decalogue and its demand for total allegiance to Yahweh (5:1 – 11:32)**

A major new section of the book is introduced (5:1 – 11:32) which Lohfink (1963) has fittingly described as *Hauptgebot* (Principal Law). These chapters are concerned with orientation, ethos, commitment and loyalty, and not with specific legal details. As a ‘reverse mirror’ to chapter 4, chapter 5 also presents a similar threefold view of history, by providing the ‘blueprint’ for Deuteronomy’s themes (Olson 1994: 40–48). Within it, the Decalogue, or ‘ten words’ (cf. 4:13), is now fully revealed, and becomes the foundation and prologue for both the general stipulations of 5:1 – 11:32 and the more specific laws of 12:1 – 26:19.

### *i. The heart of the covenant faith (5:1 – 6:3)*

#### *Context*

The Decalogue or ‘ten words’ not only form the basis of Israel’s personal relationship with God, but they also define the basic demands of this covenant relationship, in a manner similar to the Near Eastern treaty pattern. Also at this point, Moses makes an important connection and contrast between the Decalogue given in the past at Horeb and the *decrees and laws* of Deuteronomy which are now declared in the peoples’ hearing *today* (v. 1). However, Moab is a renewal of Horeb, and not its replacement, and both are grounded in the exodus deliverance and Abrahamic promises (5:6; 6:20–25; 7:12) (Barker 2004: 5). In order to give authority to the *commandments* or *words* of verses 6–21, Moses especially appeals to the *voice* of God at Horeb (five times in vv. 22–26), as well as

to his appointed role as mediator by the people and the Lord (vv. 23–31).

### *Comment*

**1–5.** *Moses summoned all Israel* (v. 1) indicates the convening of a covenant assembly, linking Horeb to Moab (29:2 [ET]; cf. Josh. 24:1). The words *Hear, O Israel* (v. 1) not only brackets the section 5:1 to 6:3, but also occurs at the commencement of important sections (4:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9). In the treaty texts of the Ancient Near East, the verb ‘hear’ appears with the sense of ‘obey’ (Thompson 1964: 36).

**2–3.** In these verses, Moses switches to the first-person plural *with us*, in order to make the important connection between the present generation gathered on the plains of Moab and the original covenant made (lit. ‘cut a covenant’) at Horeb. *Not with our fathers* (cf. 11:2–7 *not your children*; 29:14): the *fathers* in question were the preceding generation, who died out during the wilderness wanderings (1:35; 2:14–16). But now the present generation (v. 3)<sup>1</sup> were called to identify fully with the Horeb covenant, as though they were present at its original making.

**4–5.** *The LORD spoke to you face to face* does not imply that Israel saw God. The language is metaphorical and suggests a ‘direct’ and ‘personal’ form of covenant making (4:12, 15, 33, 36; 5:22; 34:10; cf. Exod. 33:7–23). Verse 5 takes the form of a parenthetical comment which seeks to explain how Moses acted as a mediator between the Lord and the people, lest the *fire* and *voice* of God should eventually consume them (4:11–13; 5:25–27; cf. Exod. 19:24; 24:2; 34:3).

**6.** This verse is very important for understanding the Decalogue and subsequent laws, for it reveals: (1) the Lord’s self-identification as *I am the LORD your God* who stands in covenant relationship with his people, corresponding to the preamble of the Near Eastern treaty; (2) *who brought you out of Egypt*, indicating prior redemptive initiative and grace, resembling the historical prologue of the treaty

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1. Stated with seven different words, not fully captured by the NIV: with us/we/these/here/today/all of us/living.

form. This twofold structure will continue to define the true nature of Israel's laws in Deuteronomy, justifying a claim to Israel's love, loyalty, obedience and affection throughout.

7. The first commandment (following the classical *reformed* division of the commandments) is a clear statement of a broad general principle, which undergirds *all* of the teaching of Deuteronomy. Following verse 6, the Lord could justly command that, first and foremost, Israel shall have no other gods *before me* ('*al pānāy*; v. 7). Two issues are at stake here. (1) The demand for exclusive loyalty to Yahweh at this point is paralleled in the Ancient Near Eastern treaty texts by the necessary pledge of fidelity on the part of a vassal to the Suzerain ('Duppi-Tessub . . . do not turn your eyes to anyone else. Your fathers presented tribute to Egypt; you [shall not do that!]' *ANET*, 1950: 204). (2) The phrase *before me* has been given several possible translations, but the suggestions 'in my presence' (6:14-15; 9:18; 16:21-22; cf. Exod. 34:6-14), 'beside me' (4:35, 39; 6:4; 32:39; cf. Josh. 24:14-20) or 'in preference to me' (cf. 21:16) best suit the sense and context. At a linguistic and theological level, this implies monotheism (cf. 6:4-5; 7:5, 9; 12:1-3; 16:21-22), as other gods exist in form and name only, but not in reality and power.<sup>2</sup>

8-10. The wording of the second commandment is virtually the same as that of Exodus 20:4-6. Since the first commandment has excluded other gods in general, it is probable that the command here refers to any physical representation of Yahweh (cf. 4:15-19). This may also have a precedent with the golden calf episode at Exodus 32:1-35, especially if the calf was meant to represent Yahweh. However, it is also possible that the second commandment could be seen as an extension of the first commandment at verse 7, on the basis that the natural antecedent of *them* in verse 9 is *other gods* in verse 7. The combined argument of both commandments would then come to mean that any temptation by Israel to *bow down* and *serve* (worship) *other gods*, including Yahweh himself, by means of an image or idol (*pesel*), in the form of anything in creation, was expressly forbidden (4:15-19; 29:17; cf. Exod. 32:7-8;

2. Compare also an inscription found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud (ninth - eighth century BC) which refers to 'Yahweh and his Asherah' (Hess 1993: 13-42).

34:10–17).<sup>3</sup> This is because the Lord claimed exclusive covenant relationship over his people: *for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God* (v. 9). The jealousy of Yahweh is not that of envy, but a function of his covenant love and commitment to his people, requiring exclusive love and loyalty in return. The concept of Yahweh's *jealousy* relates primarily to the embargo on the worship of rival gods (Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:14–15; cf. Exod. 20:5; 34:14; Josh. 24:14–20) who were really *no gods* and *worthless idols* (32:21), on a par with *demons* (32:17; Ps. 106:37). The result of this aspect of Yahweh's nature is expressed in contrasting terms (vv. 9b–10; cf. 7:9–10; Exod. 34:6–7). On the one hand (with regard to sin and its punishment), three or four generations within an extended household were the maximum that was likely to be encountered (cf. Gen. 50:23; Job 42:16). This parallels and contrasts with the corresponding clause: *but showing love (hesed)<sup>4</sup> to a thousand generations* (an unspecified number of future generations) *of those who love me and keep my commandments* (cf. 6:20–25).

Taken together, the first and second commandments stand at the heart of all that follows in Deuteronomy, including the envelope of chapters 4 and 6, which surround the Decalogue in chapter 5 (Wright 1996: 72).

**1.1.** The third commandment is linked to the first two, and at least three levels of meaning are present within Deuteronomy: (1) At the *primary* and vertical level is the prophet (18:9–18), who may make false claims of revelation (lit. 'You shall not lift up the name of Yahweh your God to "emptiness or worthlessness"'). This also relates to following other gods (13:1–5), or *speaking* in the name of other gods (18:20), which incurs the death penalty. Israel as a covenant nation were called by the *name* of the Lord (28:10). Furthermore, Israel are urged to take oaths in Yahweh's name alone, and not in the name of any other worthless god, since Israel belonged exclusively to Yahweh (6:13–15; 10:20; cf. 10:8; 12:2–5; 18:20–22; 21:5; Exod. 23:13; Josh. 23:7; Pss 16:4; 24:3–4; Jer. 12:16; Zeph. 1:5). (2) The second level of meaning (reflected by NIV = *misuse*) at the horizontal level relates to

3. Illustrated in Deuteronomy with the Baal of Peor (4:3–4; cf. Num. 25:1–18) and the golden calf episode 9:7–10:11; cf. Exod. 32:1–34:28).

4. Also at 7:9, 12. See '*hesed*', *TDOT* 5:44–64.

false testimony or witness within social and juridical contexts, in which the Lord's name would be invoked (falsely) against others (esp. 5:20; 19:16-21; cf. Exod. 20:7, 16; Lev. 19:12; 24:10-23 = cursing the name of God, tantamount to murder). (3) Other levels of meaning include the breaking of covenant law in general (28:9-10; also 15:12-18; cf. Jer. 34:8-16), keeping a vow or promise made to the Lord (23:21-23; cf. Judg. 11:30-40; Eccl. 5:4-7), pagan practices (12:31; cf. Lev. 18:21; also 14:1-2, 21b; cf. Lev. 21:5-6), food laws (14:3-21a), false reports, rumours and oaths (Exod. 23:1; Hos. 10:4), false words, lying visions and magic (Ezek. 13:8-9). These texts begin to illustrate the difference between the use and power of Yahweh's name for both good and worthless purposes.<sup>5</sup>

**12-15.** Of all the commandments, only the Sabbath command shows significant variations from its counterpart in Exodus 20:8-11. (1) Lohfink (1994: 248-264) has shown how motifs from the Decalogue's beginning (*Egypt, the land of slavery*; v. 6) and ending (*ox or donkey*; v. 21) are present only in Deuteronomy's Sabbath command (vv. 14-15). This rhetorical effect therefore suggests that the concerns of the entire Decalogue are drawn together in the command to keep the Sabbath day, which Lohfink has termed a 'Sabbath Decalogue'. To support this point, Lohfink (1994: 257) has shown that in Deuteronomy, the Sabbath command structures the Decalogue into five blocks of alternating long and short statements, of which the third and central one is the Sabbath command.

I.	Worship of Yahweh	5:6-10	Long
II.	Name of Yahweh	5:11	Short
III.	SABBATH	5:12-15	Long
IV.	Parents	5:16	Short
V.	Moral commandment	5:17-21	Long

5. Harman (2001: 76) suggests 'living as the people of God' without hypocrisy in his service. This also has support from the rabbinic suggestion that Aaron (Exod. 28:12) and Israel (Num. 6:27) were both 'bearers' of the name of God (cf. 28:10). See Bar-Ilan (1989: 19-31; Heb.).

(2) Lohfink (1994: 252–253) also observes that, whereas Exodus 20:8–11 begins with *Remember* (*zākôr*), Deuteronomy begins with *Observe* (*šāmôr*), stressing the need for obedience over that of remembrance.<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy mainly uses the verb *remember* (*zākâr*) throughout to recall historical experience, including here at verse 15. As Lohfink points out, Deuteronomy highlights the rhetorically pleasing bracket of *the Sabbath day* in verses 12–15 through a concentric structure produced by the common word pair *observe* and *keep* at either end (often found together throughout Deuteronomy).

5:12 Observe (*šāmôr*) the Sabbath day  
 5:12 as YHWH your God has commanded you.  
 5:14 to YHWH your God  
 5:14 and your male and female slave  
 5:14 so that (as a mark of the turning point of the text)  
 5:14 your male and female slave (may rest, as you do)  
 5:15 YHWH your God  
 5:15 therefore YHWH your God commanded you  
 5:15 to keep (*la'ššôt*) the Sabbath day

(3) The main difference between the Sabbath command in Exodus and Deuteronomy is the *motivation* for keeping it. In Exodus 20:8–11, this is linked to God's creational design, in which on the seventh day God *rested* from his work, thus making it holy (cf. Gen. 2:1–3). In Deuteronomy 5:15, Sabbath observance is not rooted in God's creational act, but in God's *redemptive* act of exodus deliverance, drawing particular attention to the fact that Israel were *slaves in Egypt*, and were delivered by nothing less than God's great creational acts of power, as well as his sense of covenant faithfulness and social justice. Israel is urged not to become like Pharaoh in its treatment of fellow Israelites within the Promised Land, especially in light of the fact that they were once *slaves* (5:15; 6:21; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22) and *aliens* (10:19; 23:7) within Egypt. This would

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6. Miller (1990: 80). In Exodus, the community is called to remember, and obey out of that memory.

also account for the emphasis that Deuteronomy places upon the words *so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do* at the centre of this command at verse 14b (cf. Job 31:13-15), not found in Exodus 20:10 or 23:12 (see Lohfink's outline above). The *Sabbath principle* relating to the poor, including the *manservant and maidservant*, is followed up in chapter 15, especially verses 12-15 (oddly enough paralleling 5:12-15), including the next usage of 5:15 (slavery followed by exodus deliverance) at 15:15 within a formulated command.

Because the Sabbath is centrally located (vv. 12-15), it is linked to both one's relationship to Yahweh before it (vv. 6-11), and relationships at the human level after it (vv. 16-21). The command to keep it *holy* (v. 12) comes to mean that it should be set apart in terms of rest and non-activity from the normal pattern and cycle of work, facilitating focus on the Lord of the Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11; cf. Mark. 2:27-28; Acts. 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). In this way, the Sabbath is a further bulwark against idolatry (relating to God) and exploitation of work (relating to humans), building the claims of the primary commandments into the ceaseless regularity of daily life itself (Wright 1996: 74).

The words *as the LORD your God has commanded you* (vv. 12, 15, 16) are only connected to the two positive commands of Sabbath and parents. Further, because these two commands are the only ones whose motivations differ from those of Exodus 20, they may stress that the imperatives (or commands) themselves have been transmitted unchanged, even if the motivations have been expanded (Nelson 2002: 83). At the same time, their particular importance for Deuteronomy may also be implied, especially if there was a real or potential problem in keeping them.

The Sabbath commandment is addressed initially to those who own land, domestic animals and slaves. The division between work and leisure is not to be made on the basis of social class (slave, alien), gender (son or daughter, male or female slave), or even non-human species (domestic animals; in v. 14 *your ox, your donkey*, and *any* are additions to Exod. 20:10), but provides an opportunity for leisure for all strata of society (Miller 1985: 81-97).

Finally, Sabbath in Deuteronomy not only looks backward to the exodus deliverance (cf. Exod. 5:1-9; Miller 1990: 81), but it also

looks forward to the occupation of the land as giving *rest* (3:20; 12:10; 25:19; cf. Heb. 4:1-11).

**16.** The movement from the fourth to the fifth commandment (cf. Lev. 19:3) is from society as a whole to the family that forms the basic unit of society. The fifth commandment is the only one which carries a promise (long life *in the land the LORD your God is giving you*), and adds to Exodus 20:12 the sermonic words *that it may go well with you* (cf. 4:40). After the first four commandments, which relate to the vertical divine-human relationships (5:6-15), it is significant that the role and authority of parents heads the final six commandments (5:16-21), which relate to the set of horizontal relationships between humans (cf. 27:15, 16). This indicates four important things. (1) In the hierarchy of human relationships, the relationship between children and their parents ranks beneath only that of their relationship to God, which is primary, and establishes the model for the fifth commandment (4:39-40; 5:29-33; 6:1-3, 18, 24; cf. 12:25, 28; 22:7). (2) The command to *Honour* (*kabbēd*) father and mother, meaning to give due respect, authority, weight or importance to them (in the *piel* intensive form of the verb) (cf. 1 Sam. 2:29; 15:30; Ps. 86:9), protected the basic kinship unit of the family, which was fundamental in the social realization and preservation of the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh. Therefore, whatever threatened the basic family unit, threatened the wider social basis of the whole covenant relationship, and was thus treated seriously (21:18-21; 27:16; cf. Exod. 21:15, 17) (Wright 1996: 77). (3) Thirdly, this command also placed a corresponding onus upon parents to be worthy of such *honour*, so that the child (or adult) could not be put into a position in which this honour would be difficult to give (Friedman 2001: 583). The ideal is for parents to be obedient and exemplary models and teachers of the law to succeeding generations of their children (6:20-25). (4) Finally, such *honour* given to parents would not only involve respect (Lev. 19:1-3, 32) and practical care (cf. John 19:25-27), but obedience to their modelling and teaching of God's law. This may then be seen as a brake and a restraining influence upon the commandments that follow.

**17-21.** The remaining five commandments may be regarded as a unit, connected by the word *and*. The first four categories of *murder*, *adultery*, *theft* and *false testimony* (in order of priority and importance)

served in Ancient Near Eastern law codes as the general rubrics of all civil law. The laws are here stated in apodictic or command ('Thou shalt not') form, whereas in the Code of Hammurabi they are in casuistic or case ('If ... then') form.

17. In Hebrew there is no technical term for premeditated homicide, as the term *rāṣaḥ* in Deuteronomy can be used for both intentional (22:26; NIV *murder*) and unintentional (4:42; 19:3-4; NIV *kills*) acts of killing. Clearly, the meaning of this command in Deuteronomy relates to intentional and malicious acts of taking life, and therefore is here appropriately translated *murder* by NIV. At the same time, this command may have also sought to place a brake upon 'blood revenge', as this practice may have been very difficult to control in ancient Israelite society. This concern is reflected at 19:1-10, 11-13, as well as at the very beginning of Deuteronomy with the appointment of the three cities of refuge east of the Jordan (4:41-43), so that the shedding of innocent blood would not pollute the land (cf. Num. 35:6-33, esp. vv. 33-34). However, this command does not include the endorsement of other forms of killing, such as the total destruction (*ḥērem*) of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan at 7:1-26 (where *rāṣaḥ* is not found); capital punishment for apostasy at 13:1-11 (where the word for 'put to death' at 13:9 is *ḥarag*; cf. Exod. 13:15); the legitimate handing over of a murderer to the *avenger of blood* (19:11-13); and the case of a rebellious son (21:18-21). Finally, *murder* heads this list in gravity and importance, because it is a desecration and violation of the dignity and worth of human beings made *in the image of God* (Gen. 9:6).

18. This command focuses on the specific sexual sin of *adultery* (*nā'ap*), and is defined at Leviticus 20:10 as a man who *commits adultery* (has sexual relations) with his neighbour's wife (Deut. 22:23-29 also extends this to a virgin betrothed to be married). At the heart of this command was the 'kinship' issue, as this related to the basic family unit (as the basis of society), as well as to the extended family within Israel, which it sought to protect (also see comments at v. 16 above). Thus, as an extension of this primary command, a range of other limitations were placed upon various sexual activities of an improper kind (see Lev. 20:10-24; cf. Lev. 18:1-30). Like *murder* in the previous command, *adultery* and related sexual sins also *defiled* the land (Lev. 18:24-28). Further, the rape of a betrothed virgin is

likened to *murder* (Deut. 22:26). In the Ancient Near East, adultery was called 'the Great Sin' (associated with anarchy), and carried with it a great deal of shame and guilt (cf. Gen. 20:9). In the Old Testament, the penalty was capital punishment (Deut. 22:22–27; cf. Lev. 20:10). The phrase *the great sin* is also used of *idolatry* (Exod. 32:21, 30, 31), and finally links the use of *adultery* language with Israel's disloyalty to Yahweh (Isa. 57:8; Jer. 3:1–13; Ezek. 23:36–49; Hos. 1:2; 4:1–19).

19. At the centre of these five remaining commandments is the prohibition of *theft* (*gānab*), even though the verb can mean 'kidnap' in other contexts (cf. Exod. 21:16; Deut. 24:7). In many ways, the concept of *theft* can relate to the commandments either side of it. At commandment six, *murder* is the theft of life; then at commandment seven, *adultery* is the virtual theft of a neighbour's wife, as well as the purity and sanctity of the marriage relationship. Here in v. 19, theft relates to goods and possessions, which are a vital part of whoever owns them. Further on in commandment nine (v. 20), *false testimony* is theft by means of character assassination and betrayal, as well as withholding justice (cf. Zech. 5:1–4). Finally, this is followed by commandment ten (v. 21) on *covetousness*, the most subtle and potentially dangerous of all, as it is theft by inward desire, which may lead to action relating to any of the others. In contrast to Ancient Near Eastern law codes, theft in the Old Testament was not punished by death, but was remedied by restitution of different kinds (Exod. 22:1–15), thus illustrating the importance placed upon human life over that of material goods.

20. The ninth commandment is specifically aimed at prohibiting *false testimony* against one's neighbour, where it counted most, within a court of law. This is demonstrated by the application of this commandment at 19:16–21. False charges could be brought against a person for a number of different motives and reasons, one of the most famous being the greed and murderous intent behind the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1–29). But it was made difficult to do so, not only because of the strict set of legal checks and balances that had to be met, including witnesses, but also because the stakes were very high for a person bringing a false charge, with the 'law of talion' (*eye for eye, tooth for tooth*) being applied to this person as well (cf. 25:1–3). Here the word *false* translates *šāw'* (meaning 'empty' or

‘without substance’), and is the same word used for the misuse of the divine name at 5:11 (see comments on v. 11). On this basis, Deuteronomy wants to make the point that breaking the ninth commandment would frequently involve breaking the third, which increased its seriousness (Wright 1996: 84).

**21.** The tenth commandment radicalizes the law by focusing on *covetousness* or strong inward desire, which can lead to wrong action (7:25; cf. Josh. 7:21). The command in Deuteronomy differs from that in Exodus 20:17, by beginning *you shall not covet* (*ḥāmad*) your neighbour’s wife, or by setting your *desire* (*’āwā*) on your neighbour’s house, land, manservant or maidservant, ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour. Thus in Deuteronomy, *house* and *wife* are reversed, and *land* is added to *house* (cf. 2 Kgs 8:3, 5). Also, Deuteronomy only uses the verb *ḥāmad* (*covet*; NIV) for neighbour’s wife (but it is used for all groups in Exod. 20:17), and has a different verb, *desire* (*’āwā*), for the other categories. The prominence given to the wife may well reflect a theological development in which women’s rights were being increasingly recognized by Moses on the eve of the conquest and occupation of the land (e.g. 21:10–14; 22:13–19; 24:1–5; 25:5–10; cf. Num. 27:1–11; 36:1–13).

**22–27.** These verses provide a narrative envelope to the Decalogue and, as such, pick up and develop verses 1–5 (esp. vv. 4–5). Their main purpose is first of all to establish the distinct status and authority of the ‘ten words’ as coming from Yahweh, as well as record the fear of the people, leading to the authority invested in Moses as mediator of the law by both the people and God.

**22.** Verse 22 functions as a summary conclusion to the ‘ten words’ and a bridge to what follows. Also, whereas in 5:1–5 the order is covenant plus theophany, this is now reversed to theophany plus covenant in 5:22 (Christensen 2001: 126). This verse recalls the language of the Sinai theophany of 4:10–14 (cf. Exod. 19:16–21), highlighting the divine source and authority of the Ten Commandments (proclaimed in *a loud voice*), as well as their completeness and finality (*he added nothing more*), and concluding with their fixed and permanent nature (*he wrote them on two stone tablets*) (4:13; 9:10; cf. Exod. 31:18).

**23–27.** Whereas verse 22 made its own unique link back to Exodus 19:16–21 and the Sinai theophany just *before* the giving of

the Ten Commandments at Exodus 20:1–17, verses 23–27 likewise make their own unique and expansive link with Exodus 20:18–21, the passage immediately *after* Exodus 20:1–17. Deuteronomy draws attention to the fact that Israel was shown God's *glory and majesty*, and had *heard his voice* out of the fire (not directly evident in Exodus 20:18–21, where the people *stayed at a distance*), causing the elders of the tribes to confess that a *man* can still live, even if God speaks with him (v. 24; cf. 4:33). But this revelation suddenly brought home to them a vivid sense of their mortality, with verse 25 as the rhetorical midpoint of this passage: *But now, why should we die?* Mayes (1979: 173) sees a contradiction between verses 24 and 25 as coming from different hands. But here, it may have been a case of 'safety first' on behalf of the elders, in not knowing quite how far such a unique experience of hearing the voice of the living God could be presumed upon by *mortal man* (v. 26). As a variation to this, Exodus 20:20 offers a theological reason in terms of God's *testing* his people in order that they might *fear* him and be kept from sinning. Finally, on the basis of the theophany revealed to them (v. 24), the elders unanimously commission Moses to be their mediator (cf. 18:15–20), and at the same time they commit the people of Israel to *listen and obey* (v. 27; cf. Exod. 19:7–8).

**28–29.** Such a response from the people received the approval of God as *good*,<sup>7</sup> which at the same time placed God's own stamp of approval upon Moses as mediator of his laws (v. 28). Then in verse 29 the Lord expressed a wish (*mī yitēn*), literally translated 'Who would give or make it so?' (cf. Exod. 16:3). The people had often failed to display a heart in step with God's will. But on this occasion, Israel's own *fear* of God (cf. Exod. 20:20), as the gathered assembly at Horeb within the context of receiving and obeying the law, would be the key to all future success *always, so that it might go well* (be 'good') *with them and their children for ever* (v. 29). At the same time, these words also express a sense of future failure, and anticipate God's final remedy (30:1–10).

**30–31.** Having dismissed the formal assembly (v. 30), the

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7. Witnessed in the Amarna letters (*EA* 99: 17; 369: 21) of the fourteenth century BC.

emphasis is now upon Moses. Verse 31 begins *But you* (emphatic personal pronoun). Moses alone will now receive God's laws to give to the people at a later time. As such, Moses will become a prophetic guardian and teacher of God's will and law (18:14–21; cf. Jer. 23:18). Wright (1996: 91) notes here that there is a hint of God's conversational politeness and intimacy with Moses which will no longer involve the *loud voice* heard by the people (5:22). The term *command* (*mišwá*, sing; v. 31) could relate to the Decalogue at this point, and also refers comprehensively to the whole law in Deuteronomy. As such, it acts as an umbrella term or unifying concept (see 6:1, 25; 7:11; 8:1; 11:8, 22), whereas *decrees* (*ḥuqqím*) and *laws* (*mišpāṭím*) together or separately refer to the specific elements of the covenant law. Moses was instructed to teach these laws to the people as their guide for life in the Promised Land.

**5:32 – 6:3.** These verses make up a transitional section similar to 11:32 – 12:1 later on and, as such, argue for the unity of this section and the important link between chapters 5 and 6.

**5:32–33.** The direct speech *Be careful to do* (v. 32a) takes us back to the same words at the beginning of this chapter, *be sure to follow them* (5:1b), and anticipates the same combination at 6:3a (also at 6:25 and 7:11). Here verse 32b includes the phrase *do not turn aside (swr) to the right or to the left*, for added rhetorical effect. These words follow the 'journey' and 'path' language of 2:27 (also see 17:11, 20; 28:14) and are continued in verse 33a: *Walk (hālak) in all the way (dereḳ) that the LORD your God has commanded you*. The laws of Deuteronomy are like a straight and well-marked 'path' or road, without any detours. Therefore, it was imperative for Israel to follow the Lord in *all* the way that he had *commanded* (repeated in vv. 32–33). Placed here, these verses are not seen as an intrusion on the assumption that the law had already been given, but may be perceived as anticipating the full complement of laws to follow. This would also suggest that what is true of the Decalogue to begin with (just given) will also be true for the other laws in Deuteronomy (cf. 10:12–13; 11:22), with the attendant motivational blessing *so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess* as a fitting conclusion to the chapter (cf. 4:40; 5:16, 33; 6:1–3, 24; 22:7).

**6:1–3.** In Hebrew, the opening words 'And this is the command (sing.), the decrees and the laws' pick up and repeat 5:31, with the

addition that Moses is now passing on exactly what the *LORD your God directed me to teach you* to do, repeating the original purpose of 1:1–5 (see commentary on these verses). And so the sequence of meaning is: ‘God gave me all this command (5:31) ... So be careful to do all that God has commanded you (5:32–33) ... And this is it (6:1–3) ...!’ (Wright 1996: 93), anticipating the Shema at 6:4–9. Verses 2–3 look to the future by introducing (*so that*) four additional, motivational expressions (relating to *fear* of the Lord, *long life*, well-being, and increased posterity). Also, each verse begins with the second-person singular form of address (thereby possibly stressing the importance of the *individual* within *corporate* Israel), relating to the keeping of the law. The large increase in population was a covenant promise (Gen. 12:2; 15:2–6; 17:2, 6). If Israel wanted the full enjoyment of the good things promised by the Lord, then wholehearted obedience was essential. Finally, the expression *milk and honey* (also at 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20; cf. 32:13–14) is first encountered in the words of the Lord to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:8, 17). Apparently it was a well-established literary motif, probably referring to the milk of goats and the syrup of dates (Hoppe 1993: 160), and relating to the overall bounty of the land of Canaan (Num. 13:23–27). Similar expressions are found in the ancient Egyptian Tale of Sinuhe,<sup>8</sup> as well as in the Ugaritic epic of Baal and Mot,<sup>9</sup> which describes the return of fertility to the land with the words:

The skies will rain down fat (milk)  
And the valleys will flow with honey.

### *Meaning*

The section 5:1 – 6:3 is framed by Israel’s call to *hear* the *command/s*, *decrees and laws*, that she might learn to obey and follow them. Within chapter 5, Moses spells out the detailed blueprint of the Decalogue or ‘ten words’ (*command/s*) which form the basic building blocks for Israel’s covenant faith and further laws in Deuteronomy (*decrees and*

8. *ANET*, pp. 18–25, lines 80–90.

9. *ANET*, p. 140 (iii–iv), lines 6–7.

*laws*). As such, chapter 5 is the reverse side mirror to chapter 4, where Israel heard only the *voice* of God at Horeb, but saw no form, imparting to them the ‘ten words’ as well as the *decrees and laws* (4:12–14). But chapter 5 now adds the importance of Moses’ mediatorial role and authority in receiving the laws and communicating them to the people (5:23–31). It also highlights the people’s *fear* as the *key* to their future obedience of the law and success within the land (5:29). Further, Moab is a renewal of Horeb, and not its replacement, in terms of the laws now given. Taken together, the first and second commandments (5:6–10) stand at the heart of all that follows in Deuteronomy, including the envelope of chapters 4 and 6, which surround chapter 5. Standing at the centre of the Decalogue (5:12–15) is the Sabbath command, which is the only one which reveals significant variations from its counterpart in Exodus 20:8–11. It not only relates to the laws either side of it, but has important implications for Deuteronomy’s humanitarian concerns of social justice (i.e. 15:12–15). In this way, Deuteronomy preserves at the heart of its Decalogue the essence of the greatest commandment of Jesus, namely love for God, and love of neighbour as oneself (cf. Deut. 6:4–5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:34–39; Mark. 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28).

## ***ii. The heart of Israel’s faith and confession (6:4–25)***

### *Context*

This section now moves us to the heart of Israel’s faith and confession, and the book of Deuteronomy itself, as an expression and extension of the first two commandments in particular (5:6–10), giving essential expression to Israel’s covenant faith. Already we have noted that Deuteronomy 4 and 6, like an envelope around the Decalogue in chapter 5, are really extended meditations on the first two commandments (Wright 1996: 72). These are then developed in chapters 6–11, and also take up fresh importance within the laws of chapters 12–26.

### *Comment*

4. *Hear, O Israel.* The section (vv. 4–9) has been known to the Jews for many centuries as the ‘Shema’, patterned on the first Hebrew word *Hear* (implying ‘listen carefully’ and ‘obey’), and has

been recited along with Deuteronomy 11:13–21 and Numbers 15:37–41 as a daily prayer.

The second half of this verse has been more difficult to translate, because of two main issues. First, the four Hebrew words, *Yahweh/our God/ Yahweh/ one*, have no verb ‘to be’ (i.e. *is*) within the structure of the phrase. How then do we read it? Its sense is governed by where we think that *is* should be located, and even whether this should be understood once or twice. The second problem relates to the last word *one* (Heb. *’ehād*). Should it be translated as an adjective (‘one’) or an adverb (‘alone’)? The NIV footnote points out that at least four readings are possible:

- (a) Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one.
- (b) Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone (NRSV; JPS); (or our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone).
- (c) Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one (NIV).
- (d) Yahweh our God is one Yahweh.

The Septuagint (LXX) renders these words as: ‘The Lord our God is one Lord’, which suits options (c) and (d) above, and connects back to 4:35, 39. It anticipates texts such as 32:39; Isaiah 43:11; 44:6, 8; 45:5–6, 18, 21–22; 46:9; Zechariah 14:9; and underlies Mark 12:29 in the New Testament. This accumulated evidence begins to point strongly towards a ‘monotheistic’ (‘sole’, ‘unique’, ‘one and only’, ‘one and not many’) understanding of the word ‘one’ (Heb. *’ehād*) here.

This commentary adopts the NIV translation at option (c) above as the preferred reading, supported by the fact that ‘Yahweh’ and ‘our God’ always stand together in apposition (i.e. ‘Yahweh our God’) in Deuteronomy (found from 1:6 – 6:4), and never function as subject and predicate (i.e. ‘Yahweh is our God’). The first two options (a) and (b), beginning ‘Yahweh is our God’ (subject and predicate), draw attention to the special *relationship* between Yahweh and Israel, but (a) also includes a statement about God (‘Yahweh is one’). Options (c) and (d) are phrased more as statements describing the nature and character of God.

Also following option (c), Moberly (1999: 132–133) gives important argument to the meaning of ‘one’ as ‘unique’ or ‘one and only’ on the basis of Song of Songs 6:8–9, and goes on to say that this

passage acknowledges other women as well, but only one is *unique*. This fits well with the translation of ‘one’ as ‘alone’ (a very rare use of *’eḥād* in Hebrew), also implying a relational meaning between Israel and God.

It has been argued by Moberly and others that to speak of Yahweh as *one* in verse 4 cannot be understood apart from the appropriate human response to *love* Yahweh in verse 5. In other words, Israel’s *love* affirms Yahweh’s uniqueness in a confessional manner, but not as an intellectual exercise arriving at a doctrine of God that may be called ‘monotheism’ (MacDonald 2003: 209). Then the issue related to *our God* (v. 4), and *your God* (v. 5) is a way of highlighting Israel’s need to give exclusive *love* to *their* unique God (or ‘one and only’ covenant God) within the wider context of the many so-called rival gods yet to be encountered across the Jordan, supported at verses 13–15. Thus, in the light of verse 5, verse 4 really intends to answer the question, ‘Who really is *our* only God?’ The answer is, ‘Our only God is Yahweh’ (Nelson 2002: 90). But at another important level, verses 4 and 5 can also be seen as a monotheistic confession about God himself, based on the Lord’s *redemptive actions* in the past (4:32–40; 5:6–7; 6:20–25) in answer to the question, ‘Who really *is* God?’ (cf. Exod. 5:2; 15:11). The answer to this question is, ‘Yahweh our God *is* God, he is the *one* (unique God);<sup>10</sup> besides him there is no other’ (4:35, 39; 5:6–7; Harman 2001: 88). Understood in this way, the command to *love* Yahweh in verse 5 may also be seen as *reciprocating* the Lord’s *prior love* in terms of Israel’s election and exodus deliverance in 4:37–38, involving the monotheistic statement *there is no other* in the frames of this same passage at 4:35, 39 and also at 5:6–7, which, as already indicated, gives meaning to 6:4–9. Therefore, this need not involve the discussion as to whether 6:4–5 implies a theoretical or philosophical monotheism at this point, for within the wider context, as we have just seen, it is ‘Yahweh himself who defines what monotheism means’ (Wright 1996: 97). This especially relates to the Lord’s unique covenant relationship with Israel, something that no other god had,

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10. Craigie (1976: 168–169) has suggested that *one* may be intended as a name or title of God.

or could have, in his ‘oneness’, incomparability or singularity (4:1–8, 32–40; 32:1–43).

Our discussion of the alternative translations at 6:4 allows for both an exclusive relationship of *love* to be expressed to Yahweh as Israel’s ‘one and only’ object of affection in the light of verse 5, supported at verses 13–15, as well as understanding *one* in verse 4 to be a classical statement of biblical ‘monotheism’, especially as reciprocating the Lord’s prior redemptive *love* towards Israel at 4:37–38, framed by 4:35, 39.

5. *Love the LORD your God*’ (NIV) is better rendered, ‘And you shall love the LORD your God’ (Friedman 2001: 586–587). This translation shows how the Hebrew text continues the force of the opening imperative (or command) *hear* at the beginning of verse 4, and now links that to the command to *love* God in this verse. Further, the phrase ‘And you shall love’ is the first of *seven* perfect verbs (all 2 ms) prefaced with *and*, all with imperative force, linking verses 5–9.

The call to *love* God is the appropriate response to all that verse 4 implies about the uniqueness of Yahweh himself, as this relates to Israel, both past, present and future (see comments above on v. 4). The call here for Israel to *love* (*’āhab*) God is the first of its kind in the Pentateuch, but for that very reason, as part of Moses’ farewell speech, it makes a fitting conclusion and response to all that the Lord had done for Israel from the call of Abraham to the present, in setting his *love* and *affection* (*hāsāq*) upon them (4:37; 7:7–8, 12–13; 10:15; 23:5). Now in the form of a command, Israel is exhorted to *love* the Lord in return, not in any formal or legalistic manner, even though certain attitudes and actions were expected as evidence of this love (well summed up at 13:3–4), but with *all your heart* (the seat of mind and will, including a range of emotions and affections) *and all your soul* (the principle of life itself; cf. Gen. 2:7b; inner self and being) *and with all your strength* (resolve and strong commitment) (cf. 2 Kgs 23:25).

6–9. It is difficult to decide whether *these commandments* (‘words’) (v. 6) refer to verses 4–5 just given (cf. Exod. 13:9, 16), or include the preceding Decalogue (‘ten words’) written on two stone tablets (5:22), or whether they anticipate all the teaching up to 11:18–20 where verses 6–9 are repeated. The phrase *these commandments that I give you to today* would suggest that at least the words Moses spoke up

to this point were meant, if not the whole teaching of the book. This teaching was to be *upon your hearts* (cf. 11:18), and not just left written on tables of stone (5:22), in order that Israel might have the ability and will to keep the Lord's commands always (5:29; cf. 30:6, 8, 14; Jer. 31:33). In this forceful sequence of imperatives, there is a movement from the private *heart* of the *individual* (v. 6), outward via the *family* in the *home* (v. 7; anticipating 6:20-25), to the public realm of *society* at the *gate* (v. 9), where public business, courts and markets were held (cf. the comments on the law being accessible and *near* in 30:11-14). Also there is a recognizable movement from the oral transmission of Moses' words (v. 7) to their witness in writing (vv. 8-9), which follows the larger purpose of Deuteronomy in moving from oral (1:5) to written tradition (27:8), in making the words of this Torah *dear* (see comments on 1:1-5).

The terms 'sign/symbols' and 'frontlets/emblems' (NIV = *foreheads*; v. 8) are first used in Exodus 13:9, 16 of the dedication of the firstborn, and are most likely to be understood in a metaphorical sense here as well (i.e. keep these teachings *at hand* and right *before one's eyes*; cf. 11:18; Prov. 3:3; 6:21; 7:3). Yet it appears that the difficulty of this interpretation is compounded by verse 9, which arguably could be understood in a literal sense (cf. 11:19-20). Traditionally, the Jews took both verses 8 and 9 literally with their *phylacteries* (Matt. 23:5) and 'Mezuzot' (boxes attached to the doorposts), each containing the Shema as their principal texts.

**10-19.** These verses serve to caution Israel that the positive commands of 6:4-9 can be quickly negated and undone. Thus we here have warnings at *three* important levels. And so the rhetorical effect of the whole passage is to sandwich the negative warnings of verses 10-19 between two very positive sections of Israel's response to Yahweh's uniqueness (vv. 4-9), and his love and grace in redeeming them (vv. 20-25), which is characteristic of the balance of Deuteronomy as a whole (Wright 1996: 101).

**10-13.** The first warning is found here in verses 10-13, and highlights the danger of *forgetting* the Lord in the light of his bountiful and 'ready-made' provision within the new Eden of the Promised Land, mirroring his anticipatory love and provision in creation (Gen. 1:1 - 2:25), and recalling the oath he swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to give them the land. Craigie (1976: 173) points out that

verses 10b–11 have a certain *poetic* quality about them, in which the pleasantness of the land is portrayed, but this is then shattered with the words of verse 12: *Be careful [keep watch] that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you ... out of the land of slavery.* Israel's new-found affluence and spirit of self-sufficiency and pride would quickly lead to forgetfulness about what Yahweh had rescued them from (*the land of slavery*), and for what reason. This in turn would dull their sense of covenant understanding and obligation before God in loving him exclusively and keeping his commandments (cf. 8:6–20; 32:10–18). In spite of the unfortunate paragraph break in NIV, verse 13 then provides the *contrast* and answer to this situation, which in the Hebrew order reads: 'The Lord your God shall you fear and him shall you serve and in his name you shall swear.' The terms *fear*, *serve* and *swear* all relate to an oath of allegiance or loyalty in worship (cf. 10:20–21; Ps. 63:11), with the middle term *serve* playing off the same root word *slavery*. The nature of *service* to Pharaoh in Egypt was slavery, but now to Yahweh, it is a call to grateful worship.

**14–15.** The second *do not* refers to the temptation to *follow other gods, the gods of the people around you* (v. 14). This recalls the first commandment at 5:6–7, and relates primarily to prospective idolatry within the land of Canaan which Israel is about to enter (13:6–7; 20:16–18; 31:16). The expression to *follow other gods* may well be derived from the ritual of processions after an idol. In the extra-biblical treaties, *to go after* has the idea of serving as a vassal. Therefore, if Israel forgot God, the temptation would be to show allegiance to Canaanite gods, and reap any benefits they could from them. To swear by God's name would mean renouncing allegiance to them (cf. Josh. 24:14–24; Harman 2001: 92–93). But even more importantly, these verses reflect the order of apostasy and rebellion in Deuteronomy, beginning at verses 10–13; that is, both enjoyment and satiety in the land (vv. 10–13) are a potent recipe for forgetfulness and self-sufficiency, leading to the worship of other gods (see 8:10–20; 11:13–21; 31:20; 32:13–18). Verse 15 then recalls the second commandment (5:9; cf. 4:24; 32:16), with the word order in Hebrew: 'For a jealous God is the LORD your God in your midst.' The consequence of such a jealous love will also reveal itself in zeal in bringing total destruction upon his people, and not just removal from the land.

**16.** The third *do not* relates to the incident at Massah (Exod. 17:1–7; Deut. 9:22; 33:8), or the place of ‘testing’, where there was a lack of drinking water. Here, Israel put the Lord to the test by saying, *Is the LORD among us or not?* The word *test* is used twice in this verse, and similarly in 8:2, 16, where it is *Yahweh* who initiates the *test* within the same context of providence within the wilderness. However, here in verse 16, the danger is instead that of doubting (or *testing*) Yahweh’s threat in verse 15 (Nelson 2002: 93).

**17–19.** This section picks up from 5:31 – 6:3, as well as 6:4–16, but now intensifies the call to obey the commands, stipulations (4:45; 6:20) and decrees of the Lord, with the words *Be sure to keep* (v. 17), found only here in this form in Deuteronomy. Israel would be doing *what is right and good in the LORD’s sight, so that it may go well with you* (v. 18a; found only here, and at 12:28 in reverse order). Verses 18b–19 then make a positive link between Israel’s obedience to God’s commands and the conquest of the land, but at the same time holding this truth in tension with the Lord’s promised oath of the land to the forefathers, as well as the Lord’s own victory within the land (vv. 10–11; cf. 4:1; 8:1; 11:8–9, 22–23; 16:20).

**20–25.** As a fitting conclusion to the whole section 4:44 – 6:25, an educational programme was to be set in place, first mentioned at 5:1, then continued at 6:1, 7, and culminating at 6:20–25. This would be conducted as a formal catechetical instruction to successive generations of children, based on a question-and-answer approach. But whereas Exodus 12:26 and 13:14 relate the child’s question to the peculiar ritual of the Passover and the firstborn respectively, the question at Deuteronomy 6:20 refers to the laws in general (the *stipulations, decrees and laws*, first mentioned at 4:45). On this basis, it would have been quite easy to imagine the answer moving directly from verse 20 to verse 24: ‘Why do we keep these laws?’ Answer: ‘Because the LORD commanded us.’ However, the full answer takes the same classical form as the Decalogue itself, by stating the facts of redemption on which Yahweh’s identity and claim on Israel were simultaneously founded (Wright 1996: 103–104). And so the child’s question is answered with a sort of historical credo, beginning with the terrible reality of Israel’s *slavery* in Egypt (v. 21), which underpins the motivational theology of Deuteronomy (4:20; 5:6, 15; 6:12, 21; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5, 10; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22; 26:5–9). This is followed

by an open demonstration (*before our eyes*) of miraculous *signs and wonders* – *great and terrible* (*rā'im*) upon Egypt, including Pharaoh and his house (v. 22; cf. 4:34). Then, in order to accentuate the Lord's favour upon Israel, the Hebrew of verse 23 begins: 'But us he brought out' *from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers* (1:8, 35; 4:31; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:8, 12, 13; 8:1, 18; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 13:17; 19:8; 26:3, 15; 28:11; 29:13; 30:20; 31:7, 20, 21, 23; 34:4). And so this first part of the reply relates to slavery in Egypt, signs and wonders, deliverance, and finally possession of the land promised on oath to the forefathers, thus completing and underlining the Lord's great faithfulness to covenant promise.

The children were then instructed as to the right and proper response to all these *decrees*, and *all this commandment*, in verses 24–25 (cf. 5:31; 6:1). In Hebrew, the first word of verse 24, as well as the last word of verse 25, is 'commanded', providing a frame for these verses. If Israel is careful to obey all that God has *commanded*, as well as *fear* him (5:29; 6:13), then this will produce 'good' (or well-being), as well as give 'life' (v. 24). This in turn will be Israel's *righteousness* (v. 25), meaning being put 'in the right' (passive), or having a right covenant standing and relationship with God (see 9:4–6; 24:13; cf. Ps. 24:4–5).

### Meaning

As the heart of Israel's faith and confession, the Shema at 6:4–5 extends the first two commandments in particular (5:6–10), giving essential expression to Israel's covenant faith. As such, the Shema can be understood as both a statement about Yahweh's *uniqueness* (as an answer to the question, 'Who is our "one and only" God?' = Yahweh), and also Israel's *response* to this uniqueness implied in the translation 'alone'. But at another important level, verses 4 and 5 can be seen as a *monotheistic* confession based on the Lord's *redemptive actions* in the past (4:32–40; 5:6–7; 6:20–25) in answer to the question, 'Who really *is* God?' The answer to this question is: 'Yahweh our God *is* God; he is the *one* (unique God), and beside him there is no other' (4:35, 39; 5:6–7). On this basis, the command to *love* Yahweh in verse 5 may also be seen as reciprocating the Lord's *prior love* in terms of Israel's election and exodus deliverance (4:37–38). These commands ('words') in verse 6 may have been meant to align

verses 4–5 with everything given up to this point (*today*), including the ‘ten words’ of chapter 5. They were to be impressed first and foremost upon the *hearts* of Israel, and also upon their children (v. 7), forming a frame with the catechetical instruction of 6:20–25. Here again, redemptive history is the interpreter of Israel’s laws. Finally, verses 10–19 form the centre of the passage with three warnings or ‘do not’s’. Do not *forget* the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, the land of slavery (v. 12); do not follow *other gods* (vv. 14–15), and do not *test* the Lord as you did at Massah (v. 16). These negative responses could quickly disable Israel from enjoying the positive benefits of 6:4–9 and 6:20–25.

### *iii. Israel’s election and its implications (7:1–26)*

#### *Context*

The language of verse 1a, *When the LORD your God brings you into the land*, reminds the reader that the setting of Moses’ discourse is the threshold of conquest. At the structural level, 7:1–26 (one holy people) may be seen as the development of 6:1–25 (one holy God).<sup>11</sup> In other words, chapter 6 tells us *who* God is, and chapter 7 reminds Israel *who they are*, and how they should relate to him within the Promised Land. Expanding on this, Olson (1994: 52–53) sees a further link between chapters 7–10 in terms of three *gods*, who will threaten Israel’s allegiance to Yahweh in the form of (1) militarism and the worship of military might (7:1–26);<sup>12</sup> (2) materialism and the worship of wealth (8:1–20); (3) moralism and the worship of self-righteousness (9:1–10:11). Each section is held together by a unifying monologue, ‘say in your heart’ (NKJV), beginning at 7:17 (fear of the enemy), 8:17 (false self-sufficiency) and 9:4 (conquest related to self-righteousness). As far as background is concerned, chapter 7 has a literary relationship to the conclusion of the Covenant Code (Exod. 23:20–33) and to Exodus 34:11–16, with expansions and omissions in line with its main ideas. Further, it sharpens the call for

11. Noting the connection between 5:31; 6:1; 7:11 with *commands, decrees* and *laws*.

12. The weakest of Olson’s three ‘gods’ (e.g. 7:17–26; cf. 1:26–31).

expulsion of the nations by introducing the institution of *ḥērem*. The chapter may be seen in the following way:

1–6	Destruction of false worship
7–10	Israel as God's chosen people
11–12	Obey the laws
13–16	Israel as God's blessed people
17–26	Destruction of false worship

### *Comment*

1. The opening words of this chapter seek to remind Israel that it was the Lord himself (Exod. 34:11; cf. 23:20) who was taking the initiative in driving out the inhabitants of Canaan. The verb *drive out* (Heb. *nāšal*) is used in verses 1 and 22 (cf. Exod. 3:5; Deut. 19:5; 28:40; Josh. 5:15; esp. 2 Kgs 16:6). The reference here to the seven nations may be rhetorical (with only six at 20:17), signifying completeness, as well as balancing with the seven references to the *LORD your God* in verses 18–23, who will drive these nations out before Israel (cf. 28:25 for a reverse holy war using the 'seven' language *against* Israel).

The *Hittites* might initially refer to the descendants of Canaan through Heth (Gen. 10:15), who had occupied Palestine for centuries past and were early identified with the area around Hebron (Gen. 23:1–20), and with other areas in the hill country as time went by. At this point, they may have been linked to the Hattians (or kingdom of Hatti) occupying Anatolia before 2000 BC. On the other hand, it is possible that during the period of the great Hittite empire (2000–1200 BC) the Hittites may have migrated to Palestine, as well as in the following centuries with the break-up of the Hittite empire (Kempinski 1979: 21–45). Whether any of these migrations should be linked to the biblical Hittites is difficult to determine. Perhaps the reference to *all the Hittite country* at Joshua 1:4 may have these settlements in mind, or could refer to the area north of the Lebanon which was under Hittite control at various times during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC. According to the report of the spies, the Hittites were located in the hill country to the north (Num. 13:29; Josh. 11:3). The *Amorites* appear as a group that covered the rulers of the five major cities of the

southern mountains (Josh. 10:5), including the *Jebusites* who were evidently a Canaanite group who lived in the hill country near Jerusalem. The *Perizzites* seemed to have lived in unwalled villages both east and west of the Jordan. The Canaanites were found along the coastal strip and Jordan valley (Num. 13:29). The Hivites are associated with Shechem (Gen. 34:2), Gibeon (Josh. 9:7; 11:19), and also in the north below Hermon in the region of Mizpah (Josh. 11:3). They are sometimes connected to the Horites, in which case they may be Hurrians. The Girgashites are little known, but are attested in Ugaritic texts, possibly originating in northern Syria or Asia Minor. They seem to be mentioned in Egyptian texts as allies of the Hittites (note that they follow the Hittites in order at Deut. 7:1 and Josh. 24:11).<sup>13</sup>

2–4. When the Lord had done his part, by delivering (*nātan*) the nations to Israel (v. 2), the Israelites were to do their part: *destroy them totally* (v. 2a; cf. vv. 16, 24; 9:3; 11:23–25; 13:15 [Israelites]; 20:16–17). This is the first occasion in the Pentateuch in which the Hebrew verb *ḥāram* ('totally destroy'; derived from the noun *ḥērem*) is issued as a command within the context of warfare. The further commands in verses 2b–4 prohibiting intermingling in any way, including *treaty* making, showing *no mercy* (as opposed to the temptation to show mercy at the centre of this trio) and *intermarriage*, appear to be illogical and superfluous, if the total destruction (*ḥērem*) of verse 2a has *already* been carried out. Perhaps these additional commands might be a recognition that the Israelites may *fail* to eliminate the Canaanites from the land completely, or that it might be a very long process, indicated at verse 22 (cf. Josh. 13:1–7; Judg. 2:1–3; 3:1–7). Even if that were the case, these commands are best seen as explaining the *ḥērem* requirement of verse 2a (McConville 2002: 153), leading to the heart of the argument at verse 4, where the practice of these activities would inevitably cause the people of Israel to turn away from Yahweh to serve other gods (cf. Exod. 34:14–16; Judg. 3:5–6). Consequently the Lord's anger will

13. Hess (1996: 27–28) notes that *three* of these groups (the Hivites, Perizzites and Girgashites) have a distinctive association with the second millennium BC.

burn (*ḥārā*) against you (2mp) and will quickly destroy you (2ms) (cf. 6:14–15; 7:4; 11:17; 29:27; 31:17).

5. In view of the danger of verse 4 becoming a reality, the destruction of the nations will involve not only their physical removal as persons, but also the destruction of their detestable forms of idol worship (vv. 16, 24–26; cf. 20:16–18). This verse therefore begins to highlight one of the main reasons why the nations of Canaan must be destroyed in a root-and-branch manner, and not just one without the other. However, should Israel fail to carry out the mandate to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan completely, or if it will take a long time to do so (v. 22), then the point of this verse also grows with meaning and importance. Verse 5 follows Exodus 34:13 with *break down their altars, smash their sacred stones* (*maṣṣēbôt*), which were standing stone pillars that somehow represented a male deity (cf. 2 Kgs 3:2). But Deuteronomy has replaced the neutral *cut down* (*kārat*) with a more intense ‘hew down’ (*gāda*), and has added the distinctive notion of *burning their idols in the fire*. The Asherah poles symbolized the fertility goddess Asherah, and stood at Canaanite places of worship alongside the altar of Baal (Judg. 6:25, 28). They may indicate a tree (16:21) or a pole (Exod. 34:13), but were to be cut down and burned (12:3). Together the stone pillar and wooden image would have represented the male and female element in the fertility cult (reversed at 16:21–22; cf. Jer. 2:27), a counterpart to the inhabitants of the land (vv. 16, 24–26). Deuteronomy seeks a complete destruction of the wood and stone (male and female) idols of the land (cf. 16:21–22), as these may compromise Israel’s understanding and worship of the one unique Lord based on the first two commandments.

6. The word *for* (*kī*) introduces the explicit rationale for the practice of *ḥērem*, which is first of all linked to Israel as a people *holy* (*qādōš*) to the Lord (set apart and belonging to Yahweh) as a consequence of belonging to a unique and holy God from whom holiness derives (Exod. 3:5; Lev. 19:2; Deut. 6:4). In Deuteronomy, holiness is not just a status conferred upon Israel, but it also carries with it responsibilities (14:1–3), as well as the positive keeping of all God’s commands (26:18–19). This has particular relevance with regard to the *detestable* practices of the Canaanites in worship, in which holiness imposes an obligation upon the people of Israel, especially

within the context of holy war at 7:25–26 and 20:16–18, and it ties in with the demands of verses 2–5. Being ‘set apart’ is then defined in terms of Israel’s election, or being *chosen* by God as his *treasured possession* (*sĕgullá*).<sup>14</sup> Both *holy* and *treasured possession* are terms first used of Israel at Exodus 19:5–6, but interestingly, the middle description of Israel as a *kingdom of priests* is not used in Deuteronomy (see Introduction, ‘Theology: the people of God’, pp. 62–63).

**7–11.** The reason for Israel’s special election is further explained in terms of Yahweh’s own action and character, and not on the basis of any merit that Israel might claim. The ultimate cause of that choice lay in the mystery of divine love (Thompson 1974: 130). This has already been declared at 4:37, but is now introduced by the new word *affection* (*hāšaq*) (cf. 10:15; 21:11), which suggests a more intense form of love at work in Yahweh’s choice and election of Israel. Other nations were greater in number than Israel, and in comparison the Israelites were the *fewest of all peoples* (v. 7; cf. 26:5). But in verse 8 Israel’s election was due first to the fact that the Lord had set his sovereign love (*‘āhab*) upon them (highlighting grace), and secondly, it was to keep the oath which he swore to the fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – highlighting promise), culminating with Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, *the land of slavery* (highlighting justice and mercy). The action of God is described as *redeeming* his people. The verb ‘redeem’ (*pādā*) comes from the business or legal world, and is a favourite expression in Deuteronomy (7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 21:8; 24:18; cf. *gā’al* at Exod. 6:6; 15:13; Deut. 19:6, 12).<sup>15</sup> It stresses the ransom price in connection with the legal freeing of a slave (from *the land of slavery* in Egypt), conferring the rights and privileges of independent status (cf. 15:12–18).

**9–10.** These verses strongly recall 5:9–10, with some differences and expansions. The *jealous God* (5:9) is now replaced by *the faithful God* (v. 9), who is totally dependable in his loyalty to the covenant (lit. ‘the covenant and the loyalty’). At 5:10 ‘faithful love’ (*hesed*) stands alone, but now at 7:9 the word *covenant* (*bērīt*) is added, thus

14. Witnessed in Akkadian (*sikiltu*), and of a vassal in a Hittite treaty text (Weinfeld 1991: 368).

15. For the legal background of this verb, see Cazelles *TDOT* Vol 11: 484–485.

combining two terms that define each other relating to covenant, variously translated *covenant of love* (NIV) or 'covenant loyalty' (NRSV).<sup>16</sup> This covenant loyalty is shown to those who love him and keep his commands.

The connection in 5:9b–10 between divine punishment and divine covenant loyalty is now reversed in favour of divine grace. In the present context (v. 10), punishment is moved back to the last place, and retribution is now directed only towards the responsible individual ('to his face'), and not towards the children of sinful parents (cf. 24:16). Moreover, now the Lord will *not be slow* to *destroy* in judgment those who *hate* him (cf. 1:27). The word *hate* within the context of covenant terminology means 'to reject, and repudiate as a covenant partner' (cf. 5:9; 9:28–29; Merrill 1994: 181). And so the radical alternatives of *love* (v. 9) and *hate* (v. 10) leave no middle ground or room for half measures (Nelson 2002: 102). The pattern in verses 9–10 also follows the order of the blessings and curses in chapter 28.

**11–12.** At the centre of this chapter stands the command to obey *the commands, decrees and laws* (v. 11; cf. 5:31; 6:1). But obedience to the law is not the means of gaining this covenant, but rather the means of maintaining and enjoying it: *the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you*. Further, verses 11 and 12 mirror each other at the centre of this chapter and, in doing so, provide a conclusion to verses 1–6 and 7–10, as well as an introduction to verses 13–16 and 17–26.

**13.** The Lord's *love* expressed at verse 8 in connection with the oath made to the Patriarchs is now expanded in verse 13 in terms of *blessing* and *increase of numbers* already associated with that covenant (cf. Gen. 12:2). Israel's obedience to the laws will then enable Yahweh to show love and loyalty based on this covenant. The blessings of verses 13–15 are more expansive than those found in Exodus 23:25–26, and not only explicate the *land*, but include fruitfulness in family, field (using the common description of abundance as *grain, new wine and oil*; 11:14; 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 28:51; cf. 6:11; 8:8) and flock (v. 13). At the same time, these blessings discredit any rival

16. Weinfeld (1991: 370) translates, 'a gracious covenant'.

claims of alien gods and rites of fertility (cf. Hos. 2:7–9). Behind the terms of verse 13 loom the names of the rival gods Dagan (*dā gān* = grain) and Tyrosh (*tīrōš* = new wine), whose powers and gifts are claimed for Yahweh (*HALOT* 4: 1727–1728). The same can be said for *the calves* [offspring, *šeger*] of *your herds*, and *the lambs* [fertility, *‘aštērōš*] of *your flocks*, which appear to reflect the names of the gods Shagar and Ashteroth (the pl. of the name for Astarte). The fact that these particular terms and blessings are repeated in the blessings and curses of chapter 28 (vv. 4, 18, 51) makes the point that the power of these blessings operates entirely under the control of Yahweh, as the true and only God, and not that of the demoted gods of the ancient world (Nelson 2002: 103).

**14–16.** There is a clear connection between practical blessing and the theme of election in verses 14–16. This begins with the statement: *You will be blessed more than any other people* (v. 14a; cf. 4:7–8; 15:6; 26:19; 28:12–13; Exod. 23:25–6). Barrenness will be unknown among the people (for both male and female) and their animals (v. 14b). Diseases such as those that plagued the Egyptians (cf. Exod. 15:26; Deut. 28:60) will be removed from them and transferred to their enemies (v. 15). But the blessings of verses 14–15 can quickly change for the worse, if obedience to the law at verses 11–12 is not followed, as the reverse order of these blessings is witnessed at 28:58–63. Finally, in verse 16 Moses returns to verses 1–5 with a new ferocity (compare *show them no mercy* v. 2b with *do not look on them with pity* v. 16b). The added rationale now given is that the worship of other gods would only prove to be a *snare* to Israel, anticipating verse 25.

**17–19.** This section takes us back to 1:26–31, where *fear* of the inhabitants of Canaan paralysed Israel and cost them their first opportunity to possess the land. The question, *How can we drive them out?* (v. 17b; cf. 8:17–18; 9:4–7), assumes that the human perspective of *fear* at 1:28–29 is still an issue, even for the new generation, as verse 19b testifies. The remedy proposed for such *fear* is to *remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt* (v. 18). This recalls the reference to Egypt at verse 8, drawing attention to Yahweh’s faithfulness to covenant promise. But here in verse 19, this tradition is used differently in order to emphasize the extent of Yahweh’s mighty power, exercised in various ways throughout the

entire exodus experience. Furthermore, the threefold *great trials* (4:34; 7:19; 29:3; not found in Exodus), the miraculous *signs and wonders* (plagues) and the *mighty hand and outstretched arm* (figurative speech for God's powerful hand in judgment and deliverance) were witnessed first-hand by Israel (v. 19a; cf. 4:34b; 29:3), in order to demonstrate that the Lord *will do the same to all the peoples you now fear* (v. 19b).

**20.** Those of the enemy who are not destroyed directly by the Israelites will be destroyed by the *hornet* (*šir'â*) (LXX followed by NIV). The only other instances of this word are found at Exodus 23:28 and Joshua 24:12. Probably this is a metaphor for a terror or 'panic' (McConville 2002: 161), supported in context by verse 23 (cf. 11:25; also Exod. 23:27–28, linking *terror* to *hornet* in direct conflict; Josh. 2:11; 5:1; 9:24; 10:9; 24:12; Judg. 7:17–25; 1 Sam. 14:15–23).

**21–24.** The folly of being *terrified* by enemies, and the failure to trust in God, is brought out with ironic force in verse 21, in which Yahweh himself is presented as the *awesome* God, and thus the one to be *feared* (cf. 1:29; 20:3; 31:6; Ps. 47:2–4). Somewhat surprisingly for this chapter, the ideal of verses 1–6 is now juxtaposed with the reality of a piecemeal conquest of the land in verse 22a: *little by little* (cf. Exod. 23:27–30). The initial conquest would be sudden (cf. 9:3), but the complete conquest would be more gradual, while the Israelites grew sufficiently in number, in line with the promise of verse 13. In doing so, *the wild animals* would not be allowed to *multiply around you* (v. 22b; cf. Gen. 1:28), which would have posed a threat to this promise, as well as this new Eden becoming a wilderness. The Lord will ensure victory by using the weapon of *panic*, but only as a joint venture with Israel (v. 23). This will be achieved by making enemy *kings* the particular targets of destruction (v. 24; cf. Josh. 12:7–24). Canaan was a series of city-states ruled by individual kings. To *wipe out their names from under heaven* is a frequent curse, referring to total extinction, and is related to idolatry in the rest of Deuteronomy (9:14; 12:3; 29:20 [ET]; cf. 1 Sam. 24:21–22). Perhaps these kings symbolized oppressive power and idolatry (cf. 17:14–20). Whether or not that was the case, their defeat as the power symbols of their city-states would mean the disintegration of their armies and the social life of the land. If Canaan's kings can become easy prey, *No-one will be able to stand up against you* (v. 24b).

**25–26.** These verses build upon and develop verses 5 and 16. They also extend the argument of verses 23–24. The dangers of false worship have provided the rationale for the opposition to the nations from the start. Verse 25 now develops the command of verse 5 to include the misappropriation of the silver and gold covering the idols, which is *detestable* (*tô'ēbā*) to the Lord. Objects used in idolatry were to be destroyed together with the idolaters. Therefore the temptation to *covet* (cf. 5:21) the silver and gold on the idols, especially by bringing these items into the homes of the Israelites, implying full adoption (cf. Achan at Josh. 7:20–21), will likewise bring upon the Israelites the same judgment of *hērem*. For this reason, Israel must *utterly abhor* and *detest it, for it is set apart for destruction* (v. 26; cf. Josh. 6:18–19; 7:24–26).

### Meaning

At the structural level, 7:1–26 (one holy people) may be seen as the development of 6:1–25 (one holy God). In other words, chapter 6 tells us *who God is*, and chapter 7 reminds Israel *who they are*, and how they should relate to him within the Promised Land. Framing this chapter is the destruction of false worship (v. 5 and vv. 25–26), involving the principle of *hērem* (or *total destruction*) of both the people and their idols and places of worship. The radical nature of such a root-and-branch removal of idolatry from the land was necessary, lest Israel's sons and daughters marry the inhabitants of Canaan, and so be led away to worship other gods. In fact, if this should happen, Israel herself would experience a reverse destruction from the hand of the Lord (7:4, 26). At stake here were the first two commandments, as well as Israel's call to be God's *holy* people and *treasured possession* (7:6). As such, Israel is not only God's chosen (7:7–10) and blessed people (7:13–16), but these blessings are contingent upon Israel's ability to follow the Lord's commands, decrees and laws in order to experience his covenant of love made with the forefathers (located at the centre of ch. 7, vv. 11–12). Finally, the exodus is also recalled as an encouragement not to fear the stronger nations of the land. Yahweh will begin to drive the nations out *little by little*, by giving even their kings into Israel's hands. As such, nothing can stand in Israel's path. But Israel must go forward in faith and trust.

*iv. Lessons from the wilderness for the Promised Land: the provision of manna (8:1–20)*

*Context*

This chapter has a number of links back to earlier chapters in Deuteronomy, and it especially shares in common the argument of 6:10–15, as well as links with chapters 7–9, with the expression *say to yourselves* or ‘say in your heart’ (7:17; 8:17; 9:4). Deuteronomy 8 is concerned with Israel’s past behaviour in the wilderness as a model for her future response in the land. Another way of looking at the chapter is to see that the wilderness, which was a place of testing, produced blessing in the end (v. 16b), whereas the land, which would be a place of blessing, would also be a place of *testing* of the people’s loyalty and humility (v. 14). There is therefore a twofold message in chapter 8: (1) remember God in the hard times of the past; (2) do not forget God in the good times in the future (Wright 1996: 121). And so two double alternating themes are employed to emphasize the call to obedience: (a) *remember/forget* (vv. 2, 11, [14], 18, 19); (b) *wilderness/Promised Land* (vv. 2, 7–10, 11–13, 14–16, 17–18, 19–20). The sequence alternates around these double themes, with verse 11 acting as a central hinge, emphasizing obedience to the law (cf. 7:11–12). Both chapters 7 and 8 end on the note of personal destruction as the penalty for idol worship at 7:26 and 8:19–20. Chapter 8 can be outlined in the following way:

Verse 1	Theological scheme (cf. 7:12–16)
Verses 2–6	<i>Remember</i> the wilderness as the place of God’s presence (past)
Verses 7–10	God will bring his people into the <i>Promised Land</i> (with positive ending of praise)
Verses 11–13	<i>Do not forget</i> God’s laws in the <i>Promised Land</i> (future)
Verses 14–16	Lest you <i>forget</i> God in the <i>exodus</i> and <i>wilderness</i> (with positive ending of well-being)
Verses 17–18	Beware of presumption: <i>Remember God</i> , the source of ability and blessing, thus confirming covenant oath (past)
Verses 19–20	<i>Do not forget</i> God by following other gods in the

*Promised Land* (with negative ending of false  
worship) (future)

*Comment*

1. The words *every command* (*mišwâ*) *I am giving you today* begin the chapter, reflecting the strong sense of purpose in seeking to persuade Israel to remember Yahweh and to keep his charge and laws, found at the outer frames of the chapter (vv. 1, 2, 6, 19–20) and also at the centre (v. 11). Obedience to these laws *will begin* at the point of their reception *today* (cf. 6:17–19; 8:1; 11:8–9, 22–23; 16:20). As such, they will enable the Israelites to enjoy life and numerical growth in the land (cf. 7:13–15). Also, they will allow them to *enter* and *possess* the Promised Land (cf. 11:8–9), as the outworking of the covenant promise made on oath with Abraham (vv. 1 and 18). In this respect, verse 1 not only reflects 7:12–16 in particular, but also, together with 7:17–26, may have provided the model for the whole of 8:1–20.<sup>17</sup> But while chapter 7 urges Israel on to activity and courage, chapter 8 wants them to understand their dependence upon the grace of God (O’Connell 1992: 265).

2–6. As Israel was to follow *every* (emphatic) command of verse 1, now the emphasis in verse 2 is on Israel’s remembrance of *all the way* the Lord led them these past forty years in the wilderness. This was in order to *humble* and *test* them, to *know* what was in their hearts, whether they would keep his commands (cf. Exod. 16:4, 28). Together with the frame of God’s *commands* (vv. 2, 3, 6; cf. v. 16) and God’s *way* (vv. 2a, 6b), the word *know* becomes a controlling word for this section (vv. 2b, 3 [three times], 5a). This indicates the need for both Yahweh and his people to learn something from one another that will make the wilderness experience a beneficial one for the time to come in the Promised Land. As such, verses 2–6 become the basis of Moses’ argument and appeal for the rest of the chapter.

2. A strong sense of purpose introduces this account of the wilderness wanderings, compared to that of 1:19–46. Here God’s people learn for the first time that the Lord needed to *know* what was in their hearts, whether they would obey his commandments or not.

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17. Note the unusual ‘*ēqeb*’ at 7:12 and 8:20, possibly unifying the section.

In order to achieve this educative purpose, the Lord *humbled* (*ʿānā*) and *tested* (*nāsā*) his people. Here the humbling process is directly linked to *causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna* in verses 3 and 16–17 (cf. 1:31), implying utter dependence upon God, in contrast to pride and self-sufficiency. At Exodus 16:4, the word *test* related to the manna would prove that it was the Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt (Exod. 16:6). It is first used in the Pentateuch of God's testing of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac at Genesis 22:1. This reference is significant for the present context, in that the result of Abraham's test leads God to say, *Now I know that you fear God* (Gen. 22:12, emphasis added). As with Abraham, God wanted to prove the worth and intentions of his people only for positive ends (v. 16b; cf. Gen. 22:15–18). Thus the wilderness became an ideal classroom for such a test. But the irony was that, whereas the Israelites thought that they were testing God (6:16; cf. 33:8), it was God who was testing them.

3. This verse at the centre of verses 2–6 provides a central theme for the whole chapter. The testing involved the humbling process of causing hunger, the most basic need of humankind, and then feeding Israel with manna which was unknown to both present and past generations (v. 3a). The object of this exercise was to *teach* (lit. 'let you know') that humankind in general (*hā'ādām*), and not just Israel, does not live on bread alone, but on everything *that comes from (mōšā')* the mouth of God. What does this mean?

There are at least four different levels of meaning here relating to that which *comes from* the mouth of God: (1) the manna itself (vv. 3a, 16); (2) Israel's deliverance from the land of slavery (v. 14); (3) the Lord's acts of providence in the wilderness, illustrated by the provision of water at Massah (v. 15b; Exod. 17:1–7; Deut. 6:16); (4) all the *commandment* which alone secures Israel's life and success within the land, found at the frames of this chapter (vv. 1, 2, 6, [11], 19–20). The first three of these suggestions sum up the totality of Israel's physical well-being, with deliverance (v. 14), water (v. 15b) and food (v. 16) probably reflecting the order of greatest need. But ultimately, the continued blessing of all of these will be entirely dependent upon Israel's ability to keep all the *commandment (mišwā)* in the land to which they are going. This is given further weight if *mōšā'* (*comes from*) is not just a wordplay relating to the divine acts of verses 14

and 15, but may also be understood as a transposition of the consonants of *mišwâ* (*commandment*).<sup>18</sup>

Also, the reference to the water of Massah (*testing*) at verse 15b, just before the manna of verse 16a, is immediately followed at 6:16 by the need to keep all the commands, and to do what is right and good in the Lord's sight, that it *may go well with you* (6:17–19). This further association with the manna at verses 3a and 16b, with similar language, would suggest that the *humbling* and *testing* relating to the manna has its final reference point with verse 2b: *In order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands*. On this basis, the final weight of verse 3b seeks to emphasize the greater need to obey *every* life-giving word that comes from the mouth of God, of which the provision of manna in the wilderness may be seen as an encouraging beginning towards this end (30:15; 32:47).<sup>19</sup>

4–5. Included with the miraculous provision of manna was the total care package of clothes that did not wear out and feet that did not experience swelling during these forty years, unique in the Pentateuch (8:15; 29:5 [ET]; Neh. 9:21; cf. Matt. 6:25–34). This provision of God's grace was educative and not punitive in purpose, as the beginning of verse 5 indicates: *Know then in your heart*, which links back to verse 2. There the Lord needed to know what was in Israel's heart. Now Israel has learned something as well from this total wilderness experience of humbling and testing, which is further interpreted as a father exercising *discipline* over his growing son, for good purposes (vv. 2, 3, 16; cf. 4:36, 39–40; Exod. 4:22; Prov. 3:11–12). This is different from the picture at 1:31 which relates to the fatherly protection and care for a young child who needs carrying.

6. Finally, this verse rounds off this section by repeating the words of verse 1 in reverse order, with the charge to the new generation to keep the commandments. The command to walk in the Lord's ways and to fear (reverence) him follows verse 2, involving

18. See Van Leeuwen (1985: 55–57).

19. Wright (1996: 123) correctly points out that the form of the sentence is not so much a contrast as a climax: 'not bread only, but everything going forth from the mouth of God', etc.

the process of humbling and testing for the purpose of determining whether Israel would keep his commands (cf. 6:13–19).

**7–10.** The opening word *kei* (*for*) might also reflect its use at 6:10 (*when*) at the head of a similar passage (6:10–12). In this way, the Shema at 6:4–5, and associated covenant obedience, is also extended to this passage as Israel prepares for new life within the land (6:6, 17–19; 7:11–12; cf. 8:1–2, 3b, 6). The section is framed by *good land* (vv. 7a, 10b), and its purpose is to contrast the richness and abundance of the Promised Land (cf. 11:8–12) with the desert. It is a land with natural reserves of water, which would guarantee crops of grain and fruit, a place where *bread will not be scarce* (v. 9a), again echoing the implications of verse 3b for life and success within the land. Further, Israel will *lack nothing* (v. 9b), with the final provision of tools and technology made possible by the accessible supplies of *iron* (Deut. 19:5; 27:5; 28:23; 33:25; cf. Josh. 6:19, 24; 8:31; 17:16, 18; 22:8), as well as *copper* in the nearby hills, especially in the Arabah below the Dead Sea. Finally, when Israel has *eaten* and is *satisfied* (cf. 6:11b), they are to praise the Lord for the *good land* he has given them (v. 10). Here the response of praise is not an end in itself, but serves to counter any tendency towards a spirit of ‘forgetfulness’ (cf. 6:12) and lack of gratitude. Such praise finally acknowledges God’s grace and goodness towards his people, illustrated by the *good land* that he alone has given them.

**11–13.** Verse 11 is pivotal within the chapter, separating verses 10 and 12 with the similar language of *eat ... satisfied ... good*. But now the point of the whole chapter is focused specifically on ‘forgetfulness’ (v. 11a). This has two levels of meaning: (1) failing to keep Yahweh’s commands, laws and decrees (v. 11b; cf. 4:9, 23); (2) forgetting the total history of the Lord’s dealings with his people, consisting of the hard times of the past (vv. 2–5, 14–16), as well as the good times of the future (vv. 7–10, 12–13; cf. 6:10–12). This forgetfulness in the future will also include the attributing of wealth creation to one’s own strength (v. 17), and running after and serving other gods (vv. 19–20). Wright (1996: 127) plausibly argues that, whereas verses 7–9 emphasize the natural resources of the land, leading to the praise of God who gives Israel these blessings (v. 10), verses 12–13, on the other hand, emphasize Israel’s own productive use of the resources given, resulting in the abundance

of *building* fine houses and settling down (v. 12b; cf. 6:10–12), as well as the *multiplying* (root *rbh*) of flocks, silver and gold, and *all you have* (v. 13). However, if verse 13 is seen as an extension of 7:13–14, then the blessing in these areas is due first and foremost to the covenant grace and enabling love of the Lord himself, thereby denying any sense of pride and self-achievement to Israel (cf. vv. 17–18).

**14–16.** Whereas the blessings of the land in verses 7–9 had led to the praise of God in verse 10, verse 14 begins to reverse that response, following verses 12–13, in terms of self-praise in the form of pride and self-sufficiency (v. 17). Seen in this way, the good land itself could become a source of renewed testing for the Israelites, in which the Lord was taking a big risk with his people. In fact, pride (in the emphatic position in the Hebrew text), which is related here to the *heart* and will (and not to the mind), leads in turn to forgetfulness (v. 14). In the light of this, these verses beg the question: ‘How could Israel forget all that God had done?’ Indeed, it was now a case of ‘heart over mind and memory’! This leading question is then heightened by means of rhetorical effect and the use of irony, in order to provide an antidote to such pride and forgetfulness. The antidote is to be found in the memory of Israel’s foundational past history, spelled out even more graphically than before, for example deliverance from the *slavery* of the exodus (v. 14b), guidance in the vast and dreadful desert with its *venomous* [fiery]<sup>20</sup> *snakes and scorpions* (v. 15a), water out of *hard rock* (v. 15b), and miraculous manna. These are linked to a corresponding discipline in the training of dependence upon God, and obedience to his commands and word (v. 3), in order that it *might go well with you* (v. 16). These descriptions suggest that the wilderness period was as testing in the physical sense as Israel’s former life in Egypt had been. For this very reason, the Lord was preparing his people to trust him in every way, so that Israel’s final *good* as his covenant people might become a reality in the *good land* (vv. 7a, 10b). Indeed, there is an ever-present danger that, when the people experience the good for which God was preparing them, they might forget the lessons that had led to that good and,

20. Specifically the ‘red spitting cobra’. Provençal, ‘*šārāp*’ (2005: 371–379).

in so doing, would thereby forfeit the good land that God had prepared for them (Craigie 1976: 189).

**17–18.** The heart of pride at verse 14a is now given flesh and definition in terms of self-effort and sufficiency (v. 17), in total contrast to the recital of divine acts in verses 14b–16. Verses 17–18 are tied together by the words *power* and *wealth*, as gifts of Yahweh that cannot be claimed as personal possessions, as to do so would be to elevate self to the status of God. Thus, the thinking of verse 17 does not come from God, but rather needs to be radically revised in terms of a revival of memory, in *remembering* the Lord your God (v. 18), for it is he who gives Israel the ability to produce wealth. This began at the exodus itself, when the Lord made the Egyptians favourably disposed toward the Israelites, so that they did not leave Egypt empty-handed (Exod. 3:21–22; 12:35–36). So this blessing could be seen as a confirmation of the Lord's covenant promises with the forefathers, beginning at Genesis 12:1–3, and applicable to the current Moab generation, as it is *today* (v. 1), and to each succeeding generation.

**19–20.** Finally, these closing verses form a frame with verse 1 at the beginning, also reflecting a movement from the singular form of address to the plural. This may have also been in the interests of balancing *promise* in verse 1 with *threat* at the end in verses 19–20 (Weinfeld 1991: 388). The blessings and curses are an important part of covenant understanding for Deuteronomy in the latter part of the book at chapters 27–28. Seen in this way, these verses may be understood as working out the implications of obeying the first two commandments (5:7–10; 6:10–15; 7:1–5) and the Shema (6:4–5). In a sense, we have now come full circle in these verses. The final stage, involving pride and self-sufficiency leading to forgetfulness, will be the temptation to endorse fully the worship of other gods by *following after*, *worshipping* and *bowing down* to them (v. 19). Like the nations around them, this would lead to Israel's total destruction (v. 20), first mentioned at 6:15, and then developed from 7:12–26 (see comments on v. 1).

### *Meaning*

This chapter addresses the concern that lessons learned from Israel's past experience in the wilderness (vv. 2–5), especially verse

3 (living by *every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD*), will apply *equally* to life within the land (vv. 12–18). But in time, the land itself will become a place of testing. Israel's problem will then be one of pride within the heart, which will lead to *forgetfulness* and a situation of self-effort and sufficiency (v. 17). The only real antidote to this problem is a renewed obedience to God's commands (v. 11; cf. 7:11–12), as well as a revival of *memory* as this relates to Israel's slavery within Egypt and the extraordinary wilderness experience of Yahweh's care and miraculous provision (vv. 14–16). Framing all of this is the foundational promise on oath to the forefathers of the gift of the land, as well as endowing Israel with the ability to produce wealth within the land (vv. 1, 18). The final warning is that forgetfulness will lead to the worship of other gods, and consequently to Israel's own destruction within the land (vv. 19–20; cf. 7:26).

***v. Further lessons from the wilderness for the Promised Land: the golden calf incident (9:1 – 10:11)***

*a. Conquest: the outcome of Yahweh's will, not of Israel's righteousness (9:1–6)*

*Context*

The preface to this entire section (9:1–6), and specifically 9:4, continues to develop the internal monologue or anticipated questions relating to the issue of pride, with the literal Hebrew expression 'to say in your heart' at 7:17; 8:17 (cf. 15:9). These phrases relate to such matters as how the land might be taken, and fear in the face of the enemy (7:17–26), followed by pride, self-sufficiency and forgetfulness with regard to the ability to create wealth within the land (8:17–18), and concluding here with the issue of Israel's moral self-evaluation or claim to self-righteousness in order to justify its new claim to tenancy within the land (9:4–6).<sup>21</sup> The connection back to 5:1 and 6:4–5 with *Hear, O Israel* is most appropriate, for the three

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21. Olson (1994: 52–3) has called these 'the gods of militarism, materialism, and moralism', which serve as organizing centres for chapters 7–11 (also see fn. 12, p. 141).

inner voices of 7:17, 8:17 and 9:4, which speak to the communal 'heart' of Israel, seek to divert Israel's 'heart' away from trusting and following the Lord (Olson 1996: 53). But finally, the description of Israel within 9:1-6 as a *stiff-necked* people (v. 6b) provides the key to understanding the discussion of the golden calf at 9:7-24, followed by its resolution at 9:25 - 10:11.

### Comment

1-6. The opening words of verse 1, *Hear, O Israel*, are last seen at the beginning of the Decalogue at 5:1, and then at 6:4-5. Both texts remind us of the importance of keeping the first two commandments in connection with the taking of the land (6:6-9, 13-19, 20-25; 7:11, 12-16; 8:1-3, 6, 11, 19-20). It therefore comes as no surprise that these words also preface the further description of Yahweh's taking of the land, as well as Israel's role within this process in verses 1-3. These verses also appear to be a resumption of 1:28-30, in which the previous generation's fear of the walled cities and the *Anakites* prevented them from seeing the good land. Now with the present generation, there is a further opportunity to take the land, in spite of previous failure. However, the words of verse 2, *you know about them*, may suggest that a possible failure of nerve about the *Anakites* could also lead the present generation in the same direction. But this is immediately offset by the opening words of verse 3: 'But you shall know today' (*Be assured*, NIV). The effect of these words may be to replace fear with trust, with the description of God as *the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire* (cf. 1:32-33; also 5:25-27). The phrase *like a devouring fire* is repeated from 4:24, where the context is a warning to Israel about idolatry which can destroy them (6:15). But now, in contrast, the focus is on Yahweh's initiative and victory over the peoples of the land, which is completed by Israel as they drive them out and annihilate them *quickly* as the Lord has promised (cf. 7:1-2, 17-24). The reference to *quickly* need not contradict *little by little* at 7:22, as the former may refer to the initial attacks upon Canaan, whereas the latter speaks of the ongoing process of elimination. The same adverb *quickly* is repeated at verses 12 and 16 with reference to the people's apostasy in the golden calf episode (but used only once in Exodus). This may suggest that a contrast is being

made between what Israel can do in faith (and obedience), and what it has done in the past in terms of rebellion (McConville 2002: 182).

4–6. Two key words dominate the argument of this section: *possess* (vv. 1, 3, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6a; seven times) and *righteousness* (vv. 4, 5, 6). However, there is a difficulty with the translation of verse 4 on account of the conjunction at verse 4b. The NIV translates: *After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, 'The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.' No [rather], it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you.* The verse contrasts the internalized speech of Israel, laying claim to its covenant loyalty on the one hand (v. 4a), and the counter-claim of the wickedness of the nations on the other (v. 4b; cf. Gen. 15:8–16).<sup>22</sup> This then allows Yahweh to continue the counter-claim in verse 5, but now following the same order as verse 4a/b. Israel's claim to the possession of the land will not be due to any *righteousness* or *integrity* of heart on their behalf (v. 5a), but because of the wickedness of the nations, as well as Yahweh's commitment to the covenant promise made to the fathers (v. 5b; cf. 1:19–46). Finally, at verse 6 Israel's claim to righteousness has now completely evaporated into a *stiff-necked* people, as a prelude to the golden calf incident (9:13).

### Meaning

In this brief section two points are emphasized. First, within the conquest of holy war, the real victor would be Yahweh, and Israel would be his agent only. Second, since it is Yahweh who would give the victory, Israel ought not to claim that she was led to victory because of some inherent virtue or righteousness that she possessed. Rather, Israel's victory must be attributed to Yahweh's faithfulness to the promise made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and his consequent grace towards Israel (cf. 9:13–14; 10:10–11), as

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22. Following Nelson (2002: 115). Compare McConville (2002: 174), who retains *before you* (v. 4b) as a continuous internal discourse by Israel which, it is argued, could have been an original 'before me'.

well as the enemy's wickedness. Finally, the reference to Israel as a *stiff-necked* people (v. 6) prepares the way for the golden calf incident to follow (9:13–14).

*b. The stubbornness of Israel in the golden calf incident (9:7–29)*

*Context*

Despite the fact that scholars have long recognized the textual complexity of Deuteronomy's version of the golden calf narrative when compared to that of Exodus 24:12–18 and Exodus 32 and 34, we may observe that the final form of the text still works as a coherent narrative.<sup>23</sup> To begin with, there is some telescoping and condensing of the Exodus account. For example, the section in Exodus 32:17–35 relating to Joshua, the discourse with Aaron, the *drinking* of the gold-contaminated water, Moses' request to be blotted out of God's book, judgment at the hands of the Levites, and the visitation of a final plague have all been omitted from Deuteronomy. It appears that Israel's rebellion and the gravity of their sin at Horeb (vv. 7–17, 21–24) are set against the piety and intercession of Moses (vv. 9, 18–20, 25–29). This also includes the need for God's forgiving grace for Israel to continue as a nation (9:13–14, 19), in order to possess the land sworn on oath to the Patriarchs (9:25–29; 10:10–11).

The final form of the text reveals a narrative structure, beginning with the making of the covenant (9:7–11), then the breaking of the covenant (9:12–24), and finally followed by a renewal of the covenant (9:25 – 10:11). This structure can best be seen as having an overall concentric design, but at the same time incorporating overlapping structural links and brackets between the different sections.<sup>24</sup> Clearly the account is aiming at literary and rhetorical effect, rather than a strict harmonization with the account in Exodus 32 – 34.

23. See Nelson (2002: 119–121) for a helpful analysis of sources, structure and plot in 9:7 – 10:11.

24. E.g. between vv. 7, 8, 13 and 22–24; vv. 13 and 27; vv. 12 and 16; vv. 15, 16 and 21.

- A. 9:7–14 Israel's history of rebellion, the first forty-day fast, the receiving of the first two stone tablets, and the possibility of Israel's destruction.
- B. 9:15–17 Moses' descent from the mountain, view of the golden calf, and the *breaking* of the stone tablets.
- C. 9:18–20 Moses' second forty-day fast for the sin of Israel and Aaron.
- B. 9:21 Moses *crushes* the golden calf and throws it into a stream.
- A. 9:22 – 10:11 Israel's history of rebellion, continuation of the second forty-day fast, the remaking of the two stone tablets (now with ark container, and Levites as guardians), and finally Israel's destruction averted, so that they might enter and possess the Promised Land.

### *Comment*

7–8. *Remember this and never forget* recalls the same second-person singular imperatives at the frames of 8:2 and 8:19, and is followed here by plural language from the second part of verse 7 onwards. The singular form of address was probably meant to press home Israel's covenant responsibility to keep God's commands as the people of God. But from the time they left Egypt until reaching *this place* (the valley near Beth Peor; cf. 3:29; 4:3), their conduct had been one of continuous *rebellious* against the Lord (v. 7). The same participial form of this verb is used at 9:24, which provides a frame for this whole section (9:7–24) in terms of Israel's history of covenant rebellion, including Kadesh Barnea (v. 23), which would have given the Israelites direct access into the Promised Land from the south. But in verse 8, the place above all other places where the people should have demonstrated a proper fear of God, as well as prove faithful, was Horeb, the place of covenant formation through the reception of the law (cf. 5:23–29). Although the golden calf episode was not the first of Israel's acts of provocation, it is mentioned first because of the sacredness and importance of its covenant formation context based on the giving of the law (cf. 4:9–24; 5:23–33). At the same time, it was the most outrageous, breaking the first three commandments, thus meriting the burning wrath of

the Lord, and resulting in the destruction of Israel (v. 8; 4:24; 6:15; cf. Exod. 32:10).

9–10. These words summarize Exodus 24:12–18. Moses was summoned by the Lord to the top of the mountain to receive the two stone tablets, which are here called *the tablets of the covenant* and contain the ten words which were previously given directly to Israel in an oral form from the midst of the fire, on the day of the assembly (v. 10b; 4:10–13; 5:22). But here we learn for the first time of Moses' own testimony that during this period of forty days and nights, *I ate no bread and drank no water* (v. 9b; cf. Exod. 24:9–11, 18). Moses may have been modelling 8:2–3 before Israel, and Israel rebelled while something sacred was going on. Further, these two stone tablets (probably duplicate copies of the covenant as in the extra-biblical treaties) were inscribed by *the finger of God* (v. 10), which in this context indicates the Lord's direct 'ownership' and 'revelation' of his covenant and will (cf. Exod. 31:18; 32:16; Dan. 5:5; John 8:6), as an extension of the revelation of his direct acts of 'creative power' in the exodus event (Exod. 8:19; Ps. 8:3; Luke 11:20).<sup>25</sup>

11–12. At the end of the forty-day period, the Lord gave Moses the two stone tablets (v. 11), reinforcing their divine origin. Then verses 12–14 closely follow Exodus 32:7–10, but with some differences. Moses was to go down the mountain *at once* (not in Exodus; cf. v. 12b), for *your people whom you* (Moses) brought up out of Egypt have become corrupt (v. 12), which is tantamount to expressing covenant repudiation (cf. Exod. 3:7–8; 29:46). The reason given is that Israel has *quickly* turned away from *the way* that the Lord had commanded them (v. 12b), relating to the core Ten Commandments, and more specifically here to the second commandment (5:8, 33; cf. Exod. 32:4), and have made a *cast idol* (or 'molten image' with contemptuous nuance) for themselves (vv. 12b, 16; Exod. 32:2–4, 24; cf. 1 Kgs 12:28–30). Calf ('*égel*') and bull images were common in the Ancient Near Eastern world, especially in Egypt and Canaan. It can be argued that the calf (or 'mighty bull') was not seen here as a fertility symbol by the Israelites, but was intended as a symbol of *power*, and of God the Divine Warrior and Protector who leads the

25. See Woods (2001: 22–66).

people to their restful habitation.<sup>26</sup> Whether this calf or bull actually represented the deity, or was thought to be a pedestal or throne for Yahweh, is difficult to determine.<sup>27</sup> But even if the original motive for making the calf was non-idolatrous, the people began to worship it, and even took the name of this god upon their lips, thus effectively violating the first two commandments, and possibly the third as well (cf. Exod. 32:8). Here in verse 12, Deuteronomy only records the Lord's words with reference to the *making* of the *idol*, which is also repeated by Moses at verse 16 with similar words.

**13–14.** In verse 13, the reference to Israel as a *stiff-necked* people is first used within the context of the golden calf incident at Mount Sinai/Horeb (Exod. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27). It serves as a metaphor for those who are set in their own disobedient ways, without openness to correction or the path of truth (Prov. 29:1). The word *indeed* (NIV) may express surprise or confirmation on God's part (v. 22). Verse 14 begins with the words *Let me alone*, perhaps suggesting an initial negative barrier to any intercession on Israel's behalf but, at the same time, raising the possibility that Moses' prophetic duty to intercede on behalf of Israel may have been the next logical step (cf. 1 Sam. 12:23; Ezek. 22:30–31). But here Yahweh threatens to do to Israel what he has already threatened to do to the nations and *blot out their name* from under heaven (7:22–24; 29:20 [ET]; cf. 2:25). In other words, they would no longer be called a people with identity, place and worth. Verse 14b concludes, *And I will make you [Moses] into a nation stronger and more numerous than they*, suggesting a radical abandoning of the Abrahamic covenant and a fresh start with Moses himself (cf. Exod. 32:10). Moreover, these words replicate Noah and the flood narrative, beginning again with one faithful person.

**15–17.** So serious is the present situation that the mention of Moses' intercession on the mountain at Exodus 32:11–14 is postponed in the light of God's previous order to descend the mountain

26. Janzen (1990: 597–607) argues that this image of the mighty bull would also be designed to fill their enemies with *dread* (Exod. 15:14–15).

27. Sprinkle (2004: 248) argues a case for the calf being a representation of Yahweh, on the basis of Exodus 32:4–5.

at once (v. 12b), while it was *ablaze with fire* (v. 15; cf. 4:11; 5:23), so that Moses could 'see' and confirm first-hand (v. 16a), what God has already *seen* (vv. 12–13) with regard to Israel's *sin* in the making of the cast calf idol (cf. Exod. 32:19). Thus the required twofold witness would be satisfied (cf. 17:6; 19:15). The calf is placed at the centre of these verses (v. 16) to illustrate its importance, framed by the two stone tablets of the covenant (vv. 15 and 17), which eloquently testify against it. Moses then repeats God's words at verse 12b that Israel had *turned aside quickly from the way that the LORD had commanded you* (v. 16b). This effectively meant the breaking of God's covenant with his people Israel before its ratification, which then resulted in the smashing of the two stone tablets signifying the broken covenant (v. 17). This practice was followed in the case of treaty breaches in the Ancient Near East, and if the covenant was renewed, a new document was required.

**18–20.** The mention of Moses' forty days and nights of fasting at this point, positioned between the shattering of the two stone tablets of the covenant (v. 17) and the *crushing* to dust of the golden calf (v. 21), illustrates the gravity of Israel's great sin and guilt in the breaking of the first two commandments (5:7–10), and possibly the third (5:11; cf. Exod. 32:8). Also, just as Israel had sinned during the sacred time of Moses' original forty-day fast, so now Moses returns to a forty-day fast in order to reverse the sinful consequences of the first. At the same time, it illustrates God's mercy and grace (v. 19b), and therefore the importance of Moses' selfless, courageous and life-saving intercession in prayer for both Israel (v. 19a) and Aaron (vv. 20),<sup>28</sup> in the light of the Lord's great anger and wrath (cf. Jas 5:16b). In fact, on both occasions, the same words are repeated: *angry enough ... to destroy you* (v. 19a); *angry enough ... to destroy him* (v. 20a). These verses would prove the strongest form of counter-argument against any form of merit or self-proclaimed *righteousness* on Israel's behalf at 9:4–6.

**21.** The golden calf is called the *sinful thing* (v. 21), in line with Deuteronomy's emphasis on Israel's *sin* in making the golden calf at

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28. Unique to Deuteronomy, highlighting Aaron's greater guilt and sin in making the calf idol (Tigay 1996: 101).

verse 16. In this way, the golden calf has been used as a frame for the forty days and nights of fasting and prayer at verses 18–20, illustrating Israel's great sinfulness and need for extraordinary prayer and intercession. Even though Aaron may have taken the lead in such great sin, it is described as *that sinful thing of yours*, the calf *you had made*. Moses' action in smashing the *sinful thing* would also serve as an illustration of what line of action was to be followed in such cases for the future (cf. 7:5, 25; 12:3, etc.). Deuteronomy's emphasis on simply casting the gold dust into the stream that flowed down from the mountain, rather than forcing the people to drink it (Exod. 32:20; cf. Num. 5:16–28), might reflect a ritual form of cleansing by the life-giving water flowing from God's presence, similar in concept to the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (also see Deut. 21:4; cf. Lev. 16:20–26; 2 Kgs 23:12). However, the non-drinking of the gold dust here may simply serve as a statement that *all Israel* is guilty on this occasion, without any need of trial or ordeal (Barker 2004: 88).

**22.** The Horeb incident did not stand alone. Israel's rebellion can be documented before that time after leaving Egypt (cf. Josh. 24:14). Chronologically the order should be Massah (Exod. 17:1–7), Taberah (Num. 11:1–3), Kibroth Hattaavah (Num. 11:4–34) and Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13:1–14:45). Why then does verse 22 begin with Taberah instead of Massah, and then conclude with Kibroth Hattaavah? The solution could be that the prayers of Moses saved Israel from the *fire of the LORD* at Taberah (*burning*; Num. 11:1–3), and thus it is fittingly placed first in the list, following the emphasis on similar themes in verses 18–20. At Massah (*testing*; Exod. 17:1–7) the people raised the issue of thirst, and tested the Lord saying, *Is the LORD among us or not?* (cf. 6:16; 33:8). Then at Kibroth Hattaavah ('*graves of craving*'; Num. 11:31–34) the anger of the Lord *burned* against the people and they were struck with a severe plague for craving food other than manna. This would nicely anticipate the continuation of Moses' prayer at 9:25 and the possibility of Israel's further destruction, also reinforcing the message of 8:3 that humankind *does not live on bread alone* (the above related to food and water) *but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD*.

**23–24.** The last point also relates to Kadesh Barnea (v. 23; cf. 1:26, 32) which recalls the importance of the spy account (1:19–46) with more narrative detail given to this event than to verse 22. The

words of Moses at verse 24, *You have been rebellious against the LORD ever since I have known you*, might be intended to balance the Lord's words at 9:13 (see comment on v. 13), as well as provide a frame to verse 22, especially as this relates to the wilderness period.

**25–29.** Verse 25 backtracks to Moses' intercessory prayer at verse 18, and now these verses give flesh and detail to that prayer (cf. Exod. 32:11–14). The passage is framed by words that relate to the exodus event, with *your people, your inheritance, you brought out* at verses 26 and 29. Even the standard poetic pair of *mighty hand* (v. 26) and *outstretched arm* (v. 29) is split in order to provide a further frame for the section (cf. 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:26–29; 11:2; 26:8). The reason for Moses' prayer was the very real threat of Israel's destruction because of the golden calf (v. 25b; cf. v. 19). In this prayer, he offers three motivations which go to the heart of the Lord's priorities. (1) The first relates to the exodus and redemption of God's people by the *Sovereign LORD*, framing the prayer (vv. 26 and 29; cf. Amos 7:5–6). The intimacy of this covenant relationship is expressed by the terms *your people* and *your own inheritance that you redeemed* (*pādā*) from Egypt (7:8; 9:26; 13:5 [ET]; 15:15; 21:8; 24:18).<sup>29</sup> In expressing it this way, Moses now challenges the words of God in verse 12 (2) The second and central request is an appeal for Yahweh to remember his *servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* (v. 27a). This probably recalls the covenant oath sworn to the Patriarchs at verse 6 (cf. Exod. 32:13), but here the word *servants* by itself might be intended to emphasize their loyal service to their covenant Lord, anticipating 10:12–13. (3) The third request (v. 27b–29) appeals to the Lord to overlook the *stubbornness* (related to *stiff-necked* or obstinate; v. 6), *wickedness* (applied to the nations at v. 5) and *sin* of the people in the making of the golden calf (vv. 16, 18). At stake was the Lord's reputation in the eyes of the Egyptians as either powerless or diabolical (cf. Exod. 32:12; Num. 14:13–16; Josh. 7:9). Rhetorical effect is achieved by the suggestion that the Lord was not able to take his people into the land promised to them and, in addition, he *bated* his people (cf. 1:27) enough to destroy them in the desert (cf. Exod. 32:12). The prayer concludes at verse 29 by appealing to the language and theme of verse 26, and

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29. See commentary on *pādā* at 7:8.

also combines the ideas of Israel's election and the manifestation of the Lord's great power in the exodus event (cf. Exod. 32:11). The only logic that makes sense of this combination is God's continuing commitment to his covenant people in spite of their sin and waywardness. Finally, the Lord's great mercy, in conjunction with Moses' intercession, had spared Israel from extinction (cf. Exod. 32:14).

### *Meaning*

The golden calf incident picks up the theme of Israel's continuous proclivity toward *rebellion*, from the day they left Egypt until their arrival at Moab (vv. 7, 22–24). But the situation relating to Horeb is especially recalled, because it was there that God threatened to *destroy* Israel completely (v. 8) and begin again with Moses because of her idolatry in the making of the idol. Theologically, this was seen as a negation of the Horeb covenant, especially the first three commandments (5:7–11). The idol (or *sinful thing*) was witnessed by both the Lord and Moses (vv. 12, 16). Israel had behaved as a *stiff-necked* people and had *quickly* turned aside from the commands of God (9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27), leading to the breaking of the stone tablets even before the covenant could be ratified (v. 17). Also, Aaron, Israel's chief priest, was implicated in the making of the cast idol (v. 20), and the subsequent judgment which would serve as a further warning against any claim to self-righteousness on Israel's part. Alternating with Israel's rebellion (vv. 7–17, 21–24) is the intercessory prayer of Moses (vv. 18–20, 25–29), which finally leads to the making of more stone tablets and a new command to journey towards the Promised Land (10:10–11). Overarching the whole episode is the importance of the stone tablets containing the Decalogue, as well as the Lord's grace replacing judgment in terms of Israel's future within the land.

### *c. Covenant renewal (10:1–11)*

#### *Context*

This section continues a positive movement begun at 9:25, in contrast to the negative itinerary in 9:1–24. It also picks up the renewal of the covenant from Exodus 34:1–4. But the events which

follow are not presented in exact chronological sequence: for example, in Exodus 37:1–9 the ark is made by Bezalel after Moses returned from the mountain. The material in this section has been rearranged in such a way as to emphasize the transition from rebellion and covenant breach to covenant renewal and the possibility of continuance (McConville 2002: 187).

### *Comment*

1–5. *At that time* (v. 1) serves to link the following material to the intercession of 9:25–29. Both the form and content of the original stone tablets would continue, signifying the renewal of the covenant between both parties. Also, verse 4 emphasizes the point that the Lord himself inscribed the tablets as before, and then gave them to Moses (cf. 5:22; 9:10–11). Within these verses, the construction of the ark as the lodging place of the stone tablets is interwoven with the account of the preparation and engraving of the tablets that were later to be deposited there. But why the interest in the ark here (vv. 1–3, 5, 8) and at 31:9, 26? There are three possible suggestions. (1) At one level, Deuteronomy may be reflecting secular practice in which it was normal to lodge copies of the treaty document in the sanctuaries of the contracting parties, under the all-seeing eye of the deities. The hard and durable *acacia* wood of the ark may also provide a parallel to the permanent quality of the two stone tablets. (2) Therefore the covenant is secure, inaccessible, permanent and available, but only Moses, and later the Levites (31:9–13; 33:10), will give teaching from it and about it. (3) Thirdly, it is misleading to follow the modern critical viewpoint of Weinfeld (1991: 37–44) that the ark in Deuteronomy has been ‘demythologized’ into a container only. Already the importance of meeting God through his word has been vividly emphasized at 4:9–14 and 5:22–33. This is no less spectacular or theologically important than to meet him in a cloud or sitting between cherubim. Also, coming at the conclusion of the golden calf incident, the ark may be seen as a legitimate symbol of God’s presence among his people, whereas the calf is not (Hamilton 2005: 399) (see Introduction: Theology, pp. 57–59).

5. Again, the importance of the ark is emphasized here, providing a frame for the reception of the tablets given on the mountain, in a highly condensed statement of events which took place over a

period of time (cf. Exod. 37:1-9). This also helps to explain the reference to the Levites in verses 6-9.

**6-9.** At first reading, these verses appear to be unrelated to the preceding narrative, as witnessed by the NIV, which places them in parenthesis. However, on closer examination, they seem to play a role in *reverse* to that of the itinerary mentioned at 9:22-24. Now, because of Moses' successful intercession on behalf of Israel, the people may resume their journey to the Promised Land. Also, by mentioning the death of Aaron (v. 6b), the narrative makes it clear that not only was Moses' intercession for Aaron successful (9:20), but at the same time the priesthood may continue through Eleazar. As with 9:22, the place names at verses 6-7 occur in a different order from the list in Numbers 33:31-33. This may have been employed to frame *the wells of the Jaakanites* (v. 6a) with *Jotbathab* (v. 7b), *a land with streams of water*. Moreover, the designation of *Moserah* as the place of Aaron's death (v. 6b) may have been the name of a wide area, or even a designation of Moses rather than a commonly used name (Harman 2001: 125). In any case, it must have been either associated with, or located in, the region of Mount Hor (Num. 20:22-29; 33:37-39; Deut. 32:50).<sup>30</sup> Finally, the duties of the Levites are mentioned (vv. 8-9), which begin to link up with the ark of the covenant from verse 5. Their inclusion here might have served the purpose of highlighting their allegiance to the Lord (as distinct from that of Aaron) in the matter of the golden calf (Exod. 32:25-29). The role of the Levites was threefold: (1) to carry the ark of the covenant and instruct people in the law (31:9-13; 33:10; cf. Num. 3:31; 4:15); (2) to stand before the Lord to minister (Num. 3:1-37; 18:1-7; Deut. 18:5); (3) to pronounce blessings in the Lord's name and decide all cases of dispute and assault (21:5; cf. Lev. 9:22; Num. 6:23). Finally, because of these responsibilities, the tribe of Levi had no inheritance in the land (v. 9). They were in effect a firstborn offering to God, conveyed first to Moses (Num. 3:1-13), and then to Aaron (Num. 18:20-24).

**10-11.** These verses bring to a conclusion the essence of Moses' forty days and nights of fasting and prayer begun at 9:18, 25, now

30. See Driver (1996: 119).

with the specific answer: *It was not his will to destroy you* (v. 10b). Also, whereas verse 10 resolves the golden calf incident, verse 11, with reference to the land, resolves the spies' incident at 9:23–24, taking the reader back to 1:7–8 and 2:24. This meant that God's people could now proceed on their journey to enter the land sworn on oath to their fathers.

### *Meaning*

This section provides a sequel and reversal to 9:7–29, with Moses now ascending the mountain with two new stone tablets, which are then inscribed by the finger of God and given to Moses as before (10:4; cf. 5:22; 9:10–11). But for the first time they are then deposited in the ark for posterity (not found in Exodus 34). Furthermore, the notice is given that the high priesthood will continue after Aaron (10:6), and the tribe of Levi will continue to *bless* the nation *as they still do today* (10:8). Israel will not be destroyed after all, owing to Moses' faithful intercession (10:10), but will continue to journey both blessed and refreshed towards the Promised Land (vv. 6–7; cf. the reverse of 9:22–24). Finally, the deposit of the two tablets in the ark may reflect a practice in the secular realm, where the renewal of a covenant after its breach involved the preparation of new treaty documents and the taking of a new oath of allegiance (cf. 31:9–13, 26–29; cf. Josh. 24:1–17). This would also support the idea that this section anticipates the conclusion at verse 12, with the important question: *And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you?* (Thompson 1974: 143).

### ***vi. A call to commitment: 'What does the LORD your God require of you?' (10:12 – 11:32)***

#### *Context*

This section builds up to a grand climax, completing the first part of Deuteronomy like a grand theological symphony, with 10:12 resembling the beginning of 4:1, with the words *And now* (*wě 'attâ*) after the first recital of Israel's history in chapters 1–3. In this way, 10:12 – 11:32 resembles 4:1–40, with similar structure and vocabulary, and also with application following history. But now 10:12 – 11:32 moves on to the practical implication and outworking of

9:7 - 10:11, which will also resonate with language from previous passages, such as chapters 5 - 7.

a. 'What does the LORD your God require of you?' (10:12-22)

### Comment

The commands in this section are a reinstatement and filling out of the Shema (6:4-5), thus enabling Israel to begin again after the rehearsal of the golden calf episode in 9:7 - 10:11. But at the heart of this section is the issue raised at 9:6 with regard to Israel's standing before God as a *stiff-necked* people, just before the golden calf episode, thus providing a frame with 10:12-22. This would suggest that the central command to Israel in this section relates to verse 16: *Circumcise your hearts ... and do not be stiff-necked any longer*. In this respect, we may follow the concentric structure of these verses proposed by Barker (2004: 103):

A	Verses 12-13	Basic command
B	Verses 14-15	Introductory reason for verse 16
C	Verse 16	Command: circumcise the heart
B'	Verses 17-19	Supplementary reason for verse 16
A'	Verses 20-22	Summary, basic command and reason

**12-13.** *And now, O Israel what does the LORD your God require of you?* (v. 12a). These words begin to work out the implications of 9:1 - 10:11, in the same way that 4:1 follows the historical recollections of chapters 1 - 3 (cf. Mic. 6:8). What now follows is a fivefold response, which may have been meant to parallel the fivefold forty days and nights of fasting by Moses in 9:7 - 10:11. The Lord asks for five things which are frequently addressed throughout the book. The first is *fear* (reverence), which importantly sets the foundation for all the other attitudes that follow (4:10; 5:29). Fear of the Lord then logically leads to the travel metaphor of *walking* in all his ways (5:33; 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16), which in Deuteronomy is contrasted with *turning aside* from the way (2:27; 5:32-33; 11:16, 28; 17:11, 17; 28:14), especially illustrated in the golden calf incident (9:12, 16). At the centre of the unit is the command to *love* God, which illustrates its importance from the Shema (6:4-5), as well as

its anchor in God's election and choice of Israel, to which Israel must respond in kind. Israel was to love God because God first loved her (vv. 15–16; cf. 30:6). Following this, Israel was to *serve* the Lord your God with *all your heart and with all your soul* (v. 12b), which is the first occasion since 6:5 in which this language is used for some attitude other than *love*. This would begin to indicate that each of these responses represent interrelated attitudes, first worked out for each of the five responses at 6:13–19 following the Shema at 6:4–5. The fifth response of obeying the Lord's commands and decrees *for your own good* (v. 13) indicates that the law was not a burden to be borne, but was Israel's *life* in all its fullness (32:47). But basic to all obedience is fear (reverence) of God (5:29) and love of God (6:4–19). People in whom these attitudes are found will *walk* in God's ways, *serve* him, and *keep* his laws (Thompson 1974: 147).

**14–19.** Verses 14–19 contain two pairs of matching triplets (vv. 14, 15, 16 and vv. 17, 18, 19). Each begins with a hymn-like exaltation of Yahweh, with matching superlatives (vv. 14 and 17; e.g. *God of gods and Lord of lords*), followed by a portrayal of God's action or character (vv. 15 and 18), and concluding with a command for Israel to respond in an appropriate way (vv. 16 and 19). However, as indicated in the outline above, both sets of triplets revolve around the first response at verse 16, finally leading to the command to show love for the alien (v. 19).

**14.** The first superlative establishes the Lord as the sovereign creator and owner of the cosmos, including the extremities of the heavens (lit. 'the heavens and the heavens of heavens') as well as the earth and everything in it. The immediate context would suggest its monotheistic and elective purposes from 4:35–39.

**15.** *Yēṭ*. (Heb. *raq*). In surprising contrast to the stupendous wonder of the Lord's cosmic ownership of the universe is the fact that Yahweh should have focused *affection* ('be attached to' or 'have pleasure and delight in') on the insignificant ancestors of insignificant Israel. This verse echoes 4:37–39 and 7:6–8 in expressing the wonder of Israel's election. In the latter passage, the surprise was that God should have chosen Israel though they were so small. Here, the surprise relates to God's greatness in terms of his cosmic ownership of the entire universe that he should choose insignificant Israel (cf. Exod. 19:5–6).

16. This verse returns to the problem of Israel's stubbornness (9:6, 13, 27), and may even have been suggested by the reference to the ancestors in the previous verse (cf. Gen. 17:9–14) (Nelson 2002: 137). Its place here is central in the argument of verses 14–19, as well as for the frames of verses 12–13 and 20–22. As a conclusion to the first triplet (vv. 14–16), it relates to Israel's unique call and continuing election before Yahweh. Here, the language of circumcision is used in a metaphorical way, and is directed at Israel's condition of being *stiff-necked* (or stubbornly disobedient), which goes back to the golden calf episode at Exodus 32–34. This in turn is related to the *heart*, where the actual process of circumcision must be carried out, if Israel is to be delivered from being *stiff-necked*. The language suggests that every obstruction to fearing and loving the Lord, as well as obeying his will, must be cut away, if Israel is to survive as God's covenant people (cf. 30:6).

17. Whereas the first triplet and superlative open with the Lord's ownership of, and sovereignty over, the *highest heavens* (v. 14), the second triplet begins with the Lord's relationship to all other spiritual realities, in language similar to *God of gods and Lord of lords* (cf. Ps. 136:1–26). In effect, this superlative use of language is really affirming the monotheistic truth expressed about Yahweh at 4:35 (*The LORD is God: besides him there is no other*, cf. 32:39) and at 6:4 (*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one*). In other words, Yahweh is the only supreme God and ruling Lord in heaven and on earth (4:39; cf. 3:24; Ps. 136:2–9, 15–20). Verse 17 then goes on to describe God as *great*, *mighty* and *awesome*, emphasizing his exalted nature. Two of these adjectives (*great* and *awesome*) have already been used at 7:21 within a military context. The middle term, *mighty* (*gibbōr*), also has military overtones (e.g. Ps. 24:8; Isa. 42:13). But there is a surprising link between these military characteristics and the remaining two moral attributes of God, who *shows no partiality* and *accepts no bribes*, illustrative of the ideal judge (cf. 1:16–17; 16:19). This link might be a natural consequence of the Lord's supreme authority over the heavens and the earth (v. 14), in which Yahweh stands as the *Judge of all the earth* who will always do right (Gen. 18:25; Ps. 146:5–10). At the same time, it might also reflect the ideal of kingship in the Ancient Near Eastern world, in which the king, as the representative of the gods, was responsible for protecting the weak and vulnerable (cf.

Ps. 72:1–20; 2 Sam. 14:1–33).<sup>31</sup> But in Deuteronomy, it is Yahweh who initially fulfils this role. In the meantime, the enforcement of Yahweh's impartiality and the question of bribes are the responsibility of the judges and officials within the law courts (1:16–17; 16:18–20; cf. Exod. 23:3, 6–8).

**18–19.** Yahweh's power and kingship as protector are surprisingly exercised towards three groups of people. He defends the cause of the *fatherless* and the *widow* (often mentioned in ancient texts together with the *poor*), as well as continually *loving* (participle) the *alien* (cf. 24:17). The reference to the *alien* may be viewed as the converse to verse 15, in which the Lord both *loved* and showed his *affection* towards Israel, but now shows this same love (and affection) for the alien by providing him with *food and clothing*. These actions begin to define the God of verse 17b as one who shows *no partiality* towards Israel and non-Israelites alike (v. 18b). These three groups of people did not enjoy the rights afforded to others and were without legal protection (cf. 24:17), also suggested by verse 17b. This provides a sharp contrast and counter-cultural position to that of some Ancient Near Eastern royal texts, in which the exaltation of national gods is often followed by the exaltation of human kings. But Yahweh's love and attention is towards the weak and vulnerable, and he extends this royal responsibility to Israel in verse 19: *And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt* (cf. 23:7). This requirement moves beyond that of not *oppressing* aliens in Exodus 22:21 [ET], to the more radical call to *love* them (cf. Lev. 19:34), on the same basis as loving your own people as yourself (cf. Lev. 19:18). But the particular reference in verse 19 to loving the *alien* may be a reflection of God's love for his people when they were strangers in Egypt, thus providing an extension to verse 15 and, even more specifically, an answer to verse 16 (see comments on v. 16).

**20–22.** Verse 20 repeats much of the frame at verse 12, beginning with the fear and service of God, and follows 6:13 by including

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31. Most famously illustrated by the prologue of the law code of King Hammurabi (1728–1686 BC) in *ANET* 1950: 163–165, but it is silent about the issue of bribes or gifts. Also see Fensham (1962: 129–139).

the taking of oaths in his name (see comment on 6:13). The new element introduced here is the need to *hold fast* (*dābaq*) to the Lord, first introduced at Genesis 2:24 with regard to husband and wife. In Deuteronomy the expression is first seen at 4:4 with reference to the covenant bond, and then at 11:22; 13:4 [ET]; 30:20 with the idea of not being seduced by other gods. Here it replaces the concept of love at verse 12. Then, in the rhetorical style of Deuteronomy, verse 21 picks up verse 17 and draws attention to the great acts (*great and awesome wonders*) performed by the Lord in Egypt and in the wilderness, of which the present generation were eyewitnesses (cf. 4:34; 26:8). Therefore *He is your praise* (v. 21a), within this particular context, most probably refers to Yahweh as the worthy object of Israel's praise in worship (cf. 8:10), rather than that he is the reason why Israel will receive praise from the nations (see 4:6–8 and 26:19).<sup>32</sup> Finally, the resumption of the phrase *and now* links the need for wholehearted love and obedience to the Lord in verse 12 to the affirmation of God's faithfulness to covenant promise in verse 22 (cf. Gen. 46:27; Deut. 1:10).

### Meaning

The section 10:12–22 provides an important fivefold response to the Lord's gracious dealings with *stiff-necked* Israel from the golden calf episode of 9:7 – 10:11. Central to this response is Israel's need to *fear* and *love* (= *hold fast*; v. 20) the Lord afresh from the heart (v. 16), which will in turn result in Israel's *serving* the Lord with all their heart and soul (resembling the language of the Shema). Moreover, it will enable Israel to *walk* in all his ways, and *obey* the Lord's commands and decrees for their own good (v. 13). Thus, here the love commandment is developed fully in the context of covenant faithfulness. For this reason, the Lord alone (and no other god) should always be Israel's *praise* (vv. 20–21). This follows not only because of his love to their forefathers and election of them, but also on account of his unparalleled intimate involvement in his laws (cf. Shamash or Marduk in the Hammurabi stele represented as handing the laws in a somewhat detached way to the king). Rather,

32. So with Wright (1996: 151), against McConville (2002: 201).

Yahweh's zeal for fairness and justice, and love for the alien, the fatherless and widow, as Judge and King, is something that Israel must replicate and follow.

*b. An appeal to the past: the relation of obedience to blessing (11:1-12)*

*Context*

Chapter 11 concludes the great introduction to the law that began in 4:1-40, and continues to expound the summary introduced at 10:12-22. The point of the whole passage is the careful consideration and observance that Israel must give to loving God and keeping all his commands (cf. 4:9; 6:1-8; 7:12-16), in order that they might make the right choice relating to conquest and life within the land. In the light of such choice, the chapter introduces for the first time the opposites of blessing and curse, which belonged to standard law code and treaty formulations, but are also introduced into Israel's own covenant understanding with the Patriarchs at Genesis 12:3. Thus chapter 11 ends (vv. 26-32) by setting out the blessing and curse option, which is then developed more fully in chapters 27-28.

*Comment*

1. The middle term *love* from 10:12 is now given prominence, but the second-person singular form of the imperative, appealing to corporate Israel, may also be a direct quotation from 6:5. Its immediate reference is to the keeping of the Lord's *requirements* or 'charge' (*mišmeret*), which is found only here in Deuteronomy (cf. Gen. 26:5). The other three legal terms of *decrees* (*ḥuqqîm*), *laws* (*mišpāṭîm*) and *commands* (*mišwôt*) recall their first combinations at 5:1 and 30 as a frame to the Decalogue, as well as at 6:1-3 (cf. 'every day' at 6:2), immediately before the Shema of 6:4-5 enjoining *love* for God, with the identical words, *Love the LORD your God* (6:5a).

2-7. These verses demonstrate the importance of eyewitness testimony to the public nature of the events of the exodus and wilderness period by the present Moab generation, reinforcing the case for immediate obedience in verse 2 (*today*) to God's commands (v. 1). It was they and not their children who experienced the Lord's discipline (*mîsār*) through his mighty acts as a means of instruction

(cf. 8:5). These are also called *signs* ('ōtōt) at the beginning of verse 3,<sup>33</sup> performed in the *heart* of Egypt, resulting in a *lasting ruin* on them (v. 4b), as well as in the *middle* of all Israel during the wilderness (v. 6; cf. Num. 16:30). The distinction between the present Moab generation and their *children* (vv. 2–7) makes an interesting rhetorical contrast with 5:3, thus strengthening the further tie with 5:1–3, where the present generation is distinguished from their fathers (cf. 1:34–40). The appeal to Yahweh's saving acts as a basis for the call to obedience is typical of Deuteronomy, with only two elements mentioned here. The first is positive, relating to the detail of the crossing of the Reed Sea (v. 4). The other is negative, with a reference to the rebellion and punishment of Dathan and Abiram (v. 6). Both examples include a challenge to the authority of Moses, and the earth swallowing up its victims. The omission of Korah the Levite might be because the issue is a question of sovereignty and not cultic leadership, as the previous reference to Pharaoh and his army would suggest (Merrill 1994: 207).

**8–12.** Verse 8 repeats and reinforces the command of verse 1 by reminding Israel to keep (now 2mp) 'all the commandment' (sing.) (cf. 5:31; 6:1, 25; 7:11; 8:1) today, indicating the wholeness and comprehensiveness of the law. Verses 8 and 9 remind Israel of the balance between obedience to the law as a condition for entering and enjoying the land and the unconditional nature of the land as gift in fulfilment of the promise of the land given to the fathers. Both are always held in tension throughout Deuteronomy as opposite sides of the same coin. In this respect these verses resemble 6:1–3, but the new element is the idea of *strength* to go in and possess the land (v. 8), as well as the enjoyment of longevity within the land (v. 9). It would appear that the *strength* to go in and possess the land is directly linked to Israel's scrupulous obedience of the commandments, and so expresses the need for both physical and moral courage to obey 'all the commandment' (Josh. 1:7; 23:6; cf. Deut. 8:1–5). The discussion of the land in verses 10–12 is prefaced by its description as *a land flowing with milk and honey* (v. 9b; see commentary at 6:3). An important contrast is then made in verses 10–12 between the circumstances

33. For the special use of *signs* here, see Helfmeyer 'אוֹת' in *TDOT* 1:177–178.

of Egypt, where human effort (by foot) virtually assured the irrigation of crops from the Nile, and the geography and climate of Canaan, in which the land of *mountains and valleys* (which could not be irrigated by human effort) was dependent upon the seasonal rains *from heaven*. This would indicate Israel's greater need of dependence upon the provision of the Lord, who is God in heaven above and on the earth below (4:39; 10:14).<sup>34</sup> It is described as a land that the Lord *cares for* (lit. 'seeks after') all the year long, suggesting its Edenic qualities (v. 12; cf. 6:10–12; 7:13–15; esp. 8:7–9). This description of the land is offered as a prelude for the argument that follows in verses 13–17.

*c. The Shema and future blessing (11:13–21)*

*Comment*

**13–15.** Verse 13 performs the function of verses 1 and 8 before it, but intensifies at this point with the use of the infinitive absolute: *If you faithfully obey* (or 'indeed obey') the commands I am giving you *today* (cf. v. 8). Surprisingly at this point, Moses' speech imperceptibly becomes Yahweh's speech, as the *I* of verse 13 merges into the *I* of verses 14 and 15. This may be partly accounted for if we understand the language of verse 13b (*to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul*) as a repetition of its use at 10:12 as a command of the Lord (see v. 1 above). In contrast to Baal, the Canaanite god of the storm and rain, Yahweh alone would be responsible for sending the rain on the land *in its season*, illustrating his total care for the Israelites (v. 14; cf. Lev. 26:3–4; Jer. 5:24). This would include the autumn rain (October–November), bringing to an end the long dry summer, and enabling ploughing to take place, followed by the *spring* or 'later' rains, which appear as storms in March–April, marking an end of the rainy season and enabling the final period of growth before the harvest. It would also include important showers and storms *between* these periods. Such rain would result in agricultural produce – *grain, new wine and oil* (see

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34. Craigie (1976: 209) interestingly sees 11:10 as an answer to Numbers 16:13–14.

commentary on 7:13) – followed in verse 15 with the provision of grass for the cattle. It is difficult to know whether the words, *and you will eat and be satisfied*, relate to the eating of the fattened cattle, or whether both cattle and people alike will *eat* and be *satisfied* (cf. 7:14). Possibly both meanings are meant to overlap, keeping in mind that the verbs *eat* and *be satisfied* are also found alongside warnings relating to the increase of herds and material wealth (6:11–12; 8:12–14). And so the total blessings of the land were not a reward for faith, but were enjoyed and appropriated by a life of faith and obedience in the light of the Lord's covenant of love made with the forefathers (7:12).

**16–17.** The opening words *Be careful* (v. 16a), coming after the previous words *eat* and *be satisfied* (v. 15b), follow the same order found at 8:10–11, and especially 6:10–15 with similar language of judgment. However, here in verse 17 the language appears to conceal a strong polemic against Baal, the Canaanite god of rain, with the heavens being *shut* up, so that there will be no rain and produce, and the people will soon perish from the *good* land the Lord is giving them. Lack of rain, failure of the crops and the destruction of life were standard curses all over the Ancient Near East, and were written into many of the treaties which have been preserved (Thompson 1974: 154). In addition, the language of verse 16 indicates the ever-present danger that Israel will be *enticed* or 'seduced' (*pātā*) by other gods (found only here in Deuteronomy; cf. Exod. 22:16). Israel would have been continually tempted to inquire about the gods who appeared to give agricultural success to the land and inhabitants of Canaan. But this would only lead to Israel's loss and destruction (cf. 1 Kgs 18:1–46; Hos. 2:5–9; Amos 4:7–9).

**18–21.** These verses parallel and repeat 6:6–9 with slight variations. Their importance here, beginning with verse 18, *Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds*, recalls 6:6 and its link with the Shema itself at 6:4–5 (Merrill 1994: 210). According to one view, this might suggest some kind of closure at this point, following the Horeb narrative beginning at 6:4, with *Hear, O Israel* (Weinfeld 1991: 453–454). An important difference here is the use of the plural verb forms, making the application to all the people more definite, compared to the singular use of the verbs at 6:6–9. But this might be a stylistic way of rounding out the application of this important

passage, both in a personal and corporate way, which is characteristic of Deuteronomy's style. The repetition of this passage at both ends of this long section therefore serves as a warning of the danger of embracing Canaanite gods. It also renews Israel's call to love, fear and serve the Lord alone, by *teaching* and keeping his commandments, in the home, when on a journey and in public life. Finally, in verse 21 this passage includes a motive for observing the commandments, not found at 6:6–9. The promise of long life in the land for both parents and *your children* may reflect 6:2 (4:25, 40; 5:16; 5:33; 11:9; cf. Ps. 89:29).

d. *See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse (11:22–32)*

### Comment

**22–25** The opening injunction to *carefully observe* (v. 22a) repeats the same form of the verb last used at 6:17, while the words *to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways and to hold fast to him* (v. 22b), reassert the same language used at 10:12 and 20. This particular combination of words now makes the final appeal for the preparation and possession of the land, in which obedience to 'all this commandment' or *walking in all his ways* is flanked by *love* and *holding fast* to Yahweh. These concepts were especially relevant to the issues of idolatry and life (blessing and curses) within the land (cf. 4:4; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20). A new element is found in verse 24: *Every place where you set your foot will be yours*. This anticipates Joshua 1:3–5 and 14:9,<sup>35</sup> indicating the north-south (the Sinai wilderness to Lebanon in the north) and east-west (the Euphrates in the east to the Mediterranean) boundaries to the land (cf. 1:6–8; 2:5; 34:1–4; Gen. 15:18–19). These ideal borders were only fully realized in the days of David/Solomon (2 Sam. 8:1–14; 1 Kgs 4:21–24). Verse 25 finally reminds Israel that *no man will be able to stand against you*, as Yahweh will strike *terror* and *fear* upon the inhabitants of the land, recalling 2:25 and 7:17–24 (cf. Exod. 15:16).

**26–32.** Three main points mark out 11:26–32 as a distinct section,

35. Could be a symbolic declaration of 'dominion' over, and 'legal ownership' of, the land (cf. Deut. 1:36; 33:29).

providing a kind of hinge between chapters 4 – 11 and 12 – 28, with both sections ending with a reference to blessings and curses, in line with covenant and treaty language. In this respect, Thompson (1974: 159) shows how 11:26–32 stands in a chiastic relationship to 12:1 – 28:68 in the following way (slightly modified):

(a) 11:26–28	Blessing and curse pronounced in Moab
(b) 11:29–30	Gerizim and Ebal
(c) 11:31–32	Command to obey the commandments
(c) <sup>1</sup> 26:16–19	Command to obey the commandments
(b) <sup>1</sup> 27:1–8, 11–26	Gerizim and Ebal
(a) <sup>1</sup> 28:1–68	Blessing and curse pronounced in Moab

**26–28.** The imperative *See* (v. 26a; cf. 4:5; 30:15) marks a decisive new beginning, followed by the participle *setting*, suggesting a note of renewed imminence and urgency relating to both the occupation of the land and the choice now to be made (Lohfink 1963: 232–233). Secondly, what Yahweh now *gives* is not the land, but the *blessing and curse* (cf. Gen. 12:1–5) (McConville 2002: 205). Thirdly, as mentioned above, the language of *blessing and curse* at 11:26–28 parallels that of 28:1–68, and the mention of Mounts Gerizim and Ebal at 11:29 finds a parallel with 27:1–8, 11–13. Further, the expression *I set before you today* (v. 26) has already appeared at 4:8 with regard to Israel’s righteous laws, and occurs again at 30:15 and 19 with regard to blessings and curses when the present covenant is renewed. Here, the singular form of *blessing* and *curse* is used in anticipation of their more detailed exposition later on (28:1–68). The verb translated *obey* (v. 27) is actually the verb ‘to listen’ or ‘hear’, and can carry the meaning ‘hear and obey’ (cf. Matt. 7:24, 26). The curse, however, makes its appearance here for the first time and it is presented as a direct contrast to the blessing. This would strongly suggest that it had always been the Lord’s plan to bless Israel rather than bring curse upon her (cf. 7:9, 12–16). However, the introduction of the *curse* here foreshadows Israel’s future failure to live as God’s holy people at two levels: (1) by disobeying the commands set before Israel (v. 28a); (2) by turning from *the way* and following after other gods *which you have not known* (v. 28b; cf. 13:2, 6, 13; 28:64; 29:26; 32:17; Amos 3:2).

**29.** Verse 29 (sing. in a pl. context) then transfers the thought of

blessing and curse to the future within the land of Canaan, as this relates to Mounts Gerizim (in the south) and Ebal (in the north) (cf. Josh. 8:30–35). Six tribes were to *proclaim* (*nātan*) the blessings from Mount Gerizim, and six to pronounce the curses from Mount Ebal (27:11–13; cf. Josh. 8:30–35).<sup>36</sup> Possibly these mountains were chosen because of their association with Shechem, centrally located in the midst of the land of Canaan, where Abraham built his first altar, and first encountered the Lord, as well as received his first promise of the land (Gen. 12:6–7). Also, Jacob may have been implicated at this site as the place where he bought his first plot of ground in the Promised Land (Gen. 33:18–20), as well as built an altar, appealed to his family to put away false gods, and called for allegiance to Yahweh (Gen. 35:1–4).

30. In order to anticipate any future confusion about the location of Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, Moses tries to pinpoint their precise location with four identifying features: (1) *across the Jordan* (from the vantage point of Moab); (2) *west of the road, towards the setting sun*. This expression may mean either the north/south road traversing western Palestine, or the old east/west ‘Sunset Road’ from Gikal to Bethel; (3) *near the great trees of Moreh* located at Shechem (Gen. 12:6). This is the most significant marker, because it makes a further strong connection with Abraham at Genesis 12:6–7. On this basis, it serves as a signal for the taking of the land in verses 31–32, including Israel’s protection and well-being within it (Friedman 2001: 604); (4) In the light of (2) above, the reference to *Gilgal* might best be understood simply as a *directional* marker pointing out the road which passes through the Gilgal of the Arabah (near Jericho), on the way to Shechem, which was inhabited by the Canaanites, as distinct from any other Gilgal (Merrill 1994: 215).

31–32. These verses (second-person pl.) bring to a close the lengthy section which began with the *decrees* and *laws* first mentioned at 4:1, thus providing a frame to chapters 4–11 (see introductory comments at 10:12–11:32). But whereas 4:1 made the keeping of the commandments the condition for present life and the future

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36. Richter (2007: 348–349) plausibly suggests that *ntn* (‘place’) may communicate the installation of a monument in line with 27:1–8.

*possession* of the land, verses 31–32 address the need to continue to keep the commandments *after* Israel is settled in the land,<sup>37</sup> which thereby forms a bridge with 12:1 and the laws that follow (cf. 5:1, 31 and 12:1; 26:16–19).

### *Meaning*

Chapter 11 echoes language from the beginning of chapters 5–6 and 7, as well as from 10:12–22. As such, the chapter seeks to present a final challenge to the present generation to *love* the Lord by *holding fast* to him in the light of being seduced and led astray by other gods within this land. Only by carefully observing the law will Israel have the *strength* to go in and possess the land (v. 8), and live long and secure lives within it (v. 9). Further, it is a land that is totally dependent upon God for rain, peace and security (v. 11). Therefore, to love and serve him with all one's heart and soul will seal the blessing of rain and fertility of the land (vv. 13–15), as well as its possession (vv. 22–25). Idolatry is the only thing that will stand in the way (vv. 16–17). Then, by repeating 6:6–9, verses 18–21 emphasize the great need to bind and *teach* the laws to the children, as a frame for the entire section. For the first time, the curse is then introduced and linked to the blessing (vv. 26–29), although it has been anticipated in previous chapters. However, here the curse is introduced in order to outline and anticipate the possible outcomes of the covenant commitment, the blessing and the curse (11:26–32). These provide a frame for the whole law section at 27:11–13 and 28:1–68. Only then will the hearers be ready to heed the laws for themselves, and respond to them (cf. 27:14–26).

## **C. The Law of God: the detailed covenant stipulations (12:1 – 26:19)**

### *Context*

These chapters may be seen as a more detailed outworking (*decrees and laws*) of all that has been encountered in the first eleven chapters, and especially with the renewed covenant made in the plains of

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37. With NRSV at verse 31: 'When (*ka*) ...'

Moab centring on the ten words of 5:1–31. The present generation were reminded that it was *not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today* (5:3). Therefore much of the law of Sinai is given fresh application in these chapters.

(1) In terms of continuity, Deuteronomy 12:1 is closely linked with 11:31–32, repeating the references to the gift of the land, and to the *decrees* and *laws*, thereby linking covenant promise with obedience at the beginning of the main body of laws. The following chiasmus proposed by Seitz (1971: 40) is helpful:

- A    *You* (pl.) (11:31)  
 B    Gift of land (*'eres*) Yahweh *is* giving you (11:31)  
 C    Keep (*šāmar*) the decrees and laws (11:32)  
 C'    Keep (*šāmar*) the decrees and laws (12:1)  
 B'    Gift of land (*'eres*) Yahweh *has* given you (12:1)  
 A'    *You* (pl.) (12:1)

(2) As with the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:24–26; cf. Lev. 17:1–9), this law code also follows the tradition of beginning legal codes with altar laws (vv. 5–6, 11, 13–14, 17–18, 26–27), thus focusing on purity of worship from the outset. Also, the Holiness Code (Lev. 17–26) and the law code in Deuteronomy (Deut. 12–26) end with similarly placed calendrical regulations (Lev. 23; 25; Deut. 16; 26), which suggests a deliberate shaping to emphasize a form resembling the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 23:10–19).<sup>38</sup>

(3) As with chapter 7, Israel is warned not to copy the religious practices of Canaan. McConville (1984: 60) draws the following helpful parallels between Deuteronomy 12 and 7:

- |         |  |        |  |
|---------|--|--------|--|
| 12:1–4  | Command to destroy the people and religion of Canaan.              | 7:1–5  | Command to destroy the peoples and religion of Canaan. |
| 12:5–12 | Israel's holiness reflected in command to worship at chosen place. | 7:6–11 | God's choice of Israel as a holy people.               |

38. See Watts (1995: 552). Also see Lev. 17–26 on blessings and curses.

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|--|--|
| 12:13–28 Enjoyment of<br>abundance of the<br>land as a corollary of<br>holiness, and applied<br>to cultic realm in<br>terms of ‘free’ slaughter. | 7:12–16 Enjoyment of<br>abundance of the land<br>as corollary of holiness. |
| 12:29–32 Warning against<br>ensnarement of<br>foreign Canaanite<br>religion.   | 7:17–26 Warning against<br>ensnarement by<br>foreign religion.             |

***i. The law of the central sanctuary: no other gods and idols***

***(12:1 – 13:18; cf. 5:7–10)***

We may now outline chapter 12 in the following way, noting that the first half (12:1–12) uses the second masculine plural, whereas the second half (12:13–32) uses mainly the second masculine singular, except for the words *see that you do* (‘be careful to do’) at verse 32 (2mp), which match those at 12:1. However, verse 32 concludes with second masculine singular verbs *do not add* to it or *take away* from it (cf. 4:1–28 = mainly second masculine pl., esp. 4:2; and 4:29–40 = second masculine sing.).

- 12:1 These are the *decrees and laws* (cf. 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 11:32; 26:16)
- 12:2–4 No pagan worship – *You must not worship the LORD your God in their way*
- 12:5–7 Centralization in the *present* – vowed offerings, eating and rejoicing
- 12:8–12 Centralization in the *future* – vowed offerings, eating and rejoicing (concluding with the Levites)
- 12:13–19 Centralization and secular slaughter in the *present* (concluding with the Levites)
- 12:20–28 Centralization and secular slaughter in the *future*
- 12:29–31 No pagan worship – *You must not worship the LORD your God in their way*
- 12:32 *Do not add to it or take away from it* (cf. 4:2)

### Comment

1. This important chapter is framed by the *decrees and laws* from earlier chapters (4:1–2; 5:1; 6:1–3; 11:32), noting how 4:1–2 also provides a frame at verses 1 and 32. Also, the change here with the perfect verb (*has given*) for the giving of the land (cf. 11:31 *is giving*, present participle) suggests a new phase in the argument, which is now focusing upon the laws for life within the land. This chapter opens and closes by stressing the importance of obeying these commands (vv 1, 32), which is characteristic of Deuteronomy (e.g. 4:1, 40; 5:1, 32; 6:1, 25; 11:1, 32).

2. The first act to be undertaken (v. 2) is the complete destruction of all the *places*,<sup>39</sup> which were regarded by the nations as holy because of a special identification with deity. These were usually located in groves of trees (representing fertility) and on high hills, which were considered to be closer to the dwelling places of the specific gods. Later in this chapter, these *places* will be replaced by the sevenfold reference to the *place* (*māqôm*), where the exclusive worship of the Lord must take place (vv. 5, 11, 13, 14, 18, 21, 26). It is for this reason, as indicated by Driver (1996: 139), that the destruction of Canaanite places of worship was ‘a fundamental and necessary condition for the pure and uncontaminated worship of Jehovah’. Therefore, as Merrill (1994: 220) correctly points out, we may see here a reversal of the first two commandments in operation, namely 5:7 (*You shall have no other gods before me*) and 5:8–10 (no idol worship). Thus, the idols and their shrines first had to be demolished (vv. 2–3), and then a single, central place for Yahweh had to be established (vv. 4–7), one to which the whole covenant community would come at different times and for different purposes (vv. 8–12).

3. The command (v. 3) to destroy altars, sacred stones and Asherah poles virtually repeats the language of 7:5 (cf. Exod. 34:13), with the addition here of *wipe out their names from those places*. Here, *place* and *name* are strongly connected. Therefore, the effect of destroying the externals of worship at a particular *place* is to destroy the *name* of the god worshipped there (McConville 2002: 218). It

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39. Note that Deuteronomy avoids the term ‘high places’ (*bāmā*) typical of the historical books (Joshua-Kings), but see commentary on 33:29.

also means that the functioning reality of other gods has been rendered ineffectual, and it calls for a new order in which one name replaces all other names (Miller 1990: 131).

4. This verse (*you* = 2mp) serves as a bridge from verses 2–3 to 5–7. It also parallels verse 31 (*you* = 2ms), where its further elaboration is found, highlighting the detestable practices of Canaanite worship (cf. 18:9–13 addressed to Israel in the sing.). This only reinforces the great need for every individual Israelite first to carry out the command of verses 2–3 in a radical and thoroughgoing manner, before verses 5–7 can be properly implemented (cf. 7:25–26).

5. A contrast is then drawn with the following words: *But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling* (NIV). Should the word *lěšikenô* (found only here) be translated as a noun (*for his/its dwelling*; NIV/NRSV)? In that case, the noun *šēken*, not otherwise attested, is presupposed here. Or should it be translated as a verb (*šakēn*), ‘make his name to dwell’ (RSV)? With the latter option, because of its unique usage here, interpreters often emend its present form to *lěšakēnô* (Piel infinitive construct = ‘to make dwell’ plus 3ms suffix) in conformity with verse 11 (*lěšakēn šēmô šām* = ‘to make a dwelling for his name’). Thompson (1974: 166) suggests that the verb used in verse 11 and at 26:2 may have been used here originally. But McConville (2002: 211) takes verse 11 to support the use of the noun in verse 5 as meaning ‘to put his name there as *its* dwelling place’ (i.e. a reference to the name). The merit of reading the noun in verse 5 means that the Hebrew text (MT) does not require emendation (even though it is an exegetical solution) as with the verb reading.

But what then is the meaning of *to put [šúm] his Name there* (12:5, 21; 14:24) or ‘to make his name dwell [*šakan*] there’ (12:11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2; cf. Isa. 18:7)? The immediate contrast with verses 2–3 indicates that, as Israel is to destroy both the *places* (v. 2) and the *names* of the other gods (v. 3), so they are to seek Yahweh’s *place*, so that his *Name* may dwell there. Richter (2002: 42) appeals to the Akkadian idiom *šuma šakānu* to translate ‘to place his name’ (belonging to the ancient monumental traditions), in which case Yahweh’s ownership and sovereignty are being asserted over land and people (e.g. 28:10; 2 Sam. 12:28; 1 Kgs 8:43). But possibly the phrase that comes closest to the present text (v. 5) occurs in two Amarna letters (EA 287.

60–63 and 288. 5–7, mid-fourteenth century BC). In these texts the Canaanite king of Jerusalem, Abdi Heba, acknowledges Pharaoh's ownership and lordship over Jerusalem by 'setting his name in it forever' (thus implying ongoing ownership and responsibility towards it, even though he is not physically present in the area of Jerusalem). This would support Nelson's (2002: 152–153) argument that 'to make his name dwell' (*šākan*) and 'to put/place his name' (*šūm*) are equivalent expressions and do not imply anything about Yahweh's presence or absence at the place where the name has been situated (e.g. something like = 'the Lord's place/sanctuary'; cf. 1 Sam. 1:9). But at the same time, they exclude any concept of Yahweh's 'real absence' with repeated references to the performance of sacrificial acts 'before Yahweh', that is, in Yahweh's presence (vv. 7, 12, 18). This is supported by the use of *šākan* (= 'make his name dwell') within the festivals of 16:2, 6, 11, in which all the young men appear *before the LORD* at 16:16 (cf. *all Israel* at 31:9–13).

In the light of these arguments, the most important thrust of the words of verse 5 relates to the *LORD's* choice of *the place* of worship (12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23, 24, 25; 15:20; 16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11 = a total of twenty-one occurrences), which distinguishes Israelite from pagan worship (see comments on verses 2–3). Israel is to *seek* (2mp) the place of the Lord's choosing (v. 5), which may imply pilgrimage to a designated sacred place motivated by *obedience* and *resolve* (e.g. 16:16; 31:9–13), but Deuteronomy does not indicate the place (even though Mount Ebal is named at 27:1–8). This is finally seen in contrast to Israel's temptation to *seek* (2ms) or enquire as to *how* these nations *serve* or *worship* their gods (v. 30). The reference *from among your tribes* would suggest that only one place was in mind for specially prescribed cultic forms of worship at any given time (vv 6–7, 11–12, 13–14, 26–28), rather than multiple and simultaneous places of worship. It is possible that the tabernacle and ark moved from place to place, before a more permanent sanctuary was set up at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1; cf. Jer. 7:12).<sup>40</sup>

40. Richter (2007: 342–366) associates *the place* with Mount Ebal as Israel's first central sanctuary, on the basis of her translation of the phrase *to place his name* linked to an inscribed monument.

6-7. The word *bring* (*bô'* = come; cf. 26:3, 9, 10) helps to make the point that Israel's worship is a grateful response to the gift of the land given by Yahweh alone. So the people's worship and offerings should be brought to Yahweh's sanctuary, thus creating a frame for the law section (chs. 12 - 26). The list of sacrifices mentioned here is presented in a non-technical fashion (cf. Lev. 1 - 7), and is therefore not meant to be an exhaustive presentation of sacrifice (e.g. leaving out the *sin* and *reparation* offerings from Lev. 4 - 5, and not mentioning the *blood* of the burnt offerings until v. 27). However, the pairing often stands for the whole range of sacrifices, since they are the principal types. These are expressed in three sets of paired terms, followed by firstlings, making seven in all. Of these offerings or gifts (*qorbān*), Deuteronomy will discuss tithes further in 14:22-29, firstlings in 15:19-23 (cf. 26:1-11) and vows in 23:21-23 [ET]. In parallel to the beginning of the Hebrew text of verse 6a, 'and bring there', verse 7a begins: 'and eat there'. The point of all of these prescribed offerings is that they must be offered only at the chosen place *before the LORD* (the Lord's sanctuary), thus avoiding the error of attributing them to the gods and idols representing fertility powers within the land (cf. Lev. 17:1-9). Only Yahweh had *brought* the people to the land, and would give it its fruitfulness and fertility. Therefore, only Yahweh should be the 'destination' of their reciprocal 'bringing' of his bounty in gratitude and worship (Wright 1996: 164). But overriding all these points is the picture of Israel at worship as a community in their households (= sons, daughters, menservants, maidservants and Levites; cf. 16:11, 14), *feasting* and *rejoicing* before the Lord (v. 7). Finally, Israel at worship, in obedience, togetherness, prosperity and joyful feasting, is a cameo picture of the covenant people in active and harmonious relationship with God (McConville 2002: 223).

8-10. The command, *You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit* (v. 8; cf. Judg. 17:6; 21:25), contrasts with verses 5-7; similarly verse 4 contrasts with Canaanite worship in verses 2-3. Even so, verse 8 seems a little odd for the present Moab generation, with given structures in place, unless the point of these words reflects the wilderness setting of a passage such as Leviticus 17:1-9 in connection with the Tent of Meeting. This would also lend support to Deuteronomy's special *place* for future worship, which can be

gained only after Israel has achieved *rest* from all her enemies (cf. 25:19), and has thereby obtained her *inheritance* within the land of Canaan (vv. 9–10). It is to this place that all the offerings of verses 6–7 must be brought, repeated at verses 11–12. This argument is especially supported at the beginning of the next section (vv. 13–14), which parallels verse 8.

**11.** The list of sacrifices here is almost identical to that of verses 5 and 6, except that the phrase *all the choice possessions you have vowed* (NIV) replaces *what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings and the firstborn of your herds and flocks*. The summarizing phrase in this verse may emphasize either the importance of the vow itself (cf. 23:21–23), or that of the sacrifices offered in fulfilment of the vow, highlighting the *choice* (*mibhār*) possessions (v. 11b), providing an echo and frame to Yahweh's *choice* (*bāhar*) of worship place (v. 11a). Such gifts would therefore be seen as a response to Yahweh's gift of the land and choice of worship place (v. 6; cf. 26:1–11).

**12.** The command to *rejoice before the LORD* has meaning only in terms of the designated *place* of worship in repeating verse 7, but the *families* ('households') of verse 7 is expanded here not only to refer to the offerer's family, but also to the servants (both male and female) and Levites (cf. 5:14; 10:18). This list is further expanded to include the aliens, orphans and widows at 14:27–29 and 16:11, 14, who, together with the Levites, are said to live in your *towns* (lit. 'within your gates'). Thus, the householder, to whom these words would be primarily addressed, had both a moral (v. 4) and social responsibility (v. 12; 16:11, 14) to order worship aright before Yahweh.

**13–19.** At this point there is a change to the second-person singular (except for v. 16), and for this reason most scholars believe that it constitutes the oldest block of material in the chapter. On this basis, the plural form of address in verses 2–12 may have been added later. But it is better to see other rhetorical and didactic issues at work between these sections, especially the use of repetition (see Introduction: Literary features, pp. 34–36).

**13–14.** These verses may be seen as concluding the sequence of exhortations begun in verses 2–7 and 8–12, while at the same time providing a bridge into this new section (vv. 13–19). For the first time, a negative command is given in verse 13 with regard to the sacrifice

of *burnt offerings* (representing all other offerings) at any *place* that the Israelites saw fit, which probably refers back to verses 2–4, 8 (cf. Lev. 17:1–9). Rather, they were to offer them only at the place the Lord will choose *in one of your tribes* (v. 14), which aligns with *from among all your tribes* (v. 5), referring to Yahweh's choice of place. This might be seen as a reformulation of the old altar law at Exod. 20:24–26 (= *wherever I cause my name to be honoured*). Also, following Nelson (2002: 154), a chiasmic arrangement may be detected in verses 13–19 as follows:

- v. 13 'Be careful lest'
- v. 14 'But only (*ki'im*) at the place ... you shall offer'
- v. 15 'slaughter and eat within your towns'
- v. 16 'do not eat the blood'
- v. 17 'you must not eat in your towns'
- v. 18 'Instead (*ki'im*) ... you shall eat ... at the place'
- v. 19 'Be careful lest'

**15.** This verse establishes a major change in religious and dietary practice (Tigay 1996: 124). Here we may observe an alteration to the previous legislation given at Leviticus 17:2–9, where the children of Israel were a pilgrim people within the wilderness setting. Now, the (profane) slaughter or *sacrifice* (*zābah*) of animals otherwise suitable for the altar sacrifice (cf. Lev. 17:5) may be carried out on a par with the gazelle and deer (cf. 14:5) in any of their towns, according to the blessing of the Lord. Furthermore, the people need not be ritually clean in order to participate. This concession only has real meaning in the light of the anticipation of a central sanctuary at verse 18 (cf. vv. 5, 11, 14), and the impracticality of getting there frequently from distant places.

**16.** The principle of not eating blood lies deeper than sacrifice, in that the blood represents the life of the animal and must not be consumed (Lev. 17:10–14; cf. Gen. 9:4–6; 1 Sam. 14:31–35; Acts 15:20). Rather, it is to be poured out on the ground like water (cf. 1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Sam. 23:16).

**17–19.** These verses parallel verses 13–15 and also recall verses 11–12. The permission to eat in *any of your towns* (v. 15) does not extend to other sacrificial products, such as the tithe (now expanded) of the grain, new wine and oil, the firstborn of their herds and

flocks, and other vowed and freewill offerings, including special gifts (vv. 5–6, 11; cf. 7:13). Instead, they are to be eaten only at the place the Lord chooses (cf. 14:23). The unusual form of the prohibition (Heb. *lo' tūkal lē* = lit. 'you are not able to') occurs six times elsewhere in Deuteronomy (16:5; 17:15; 21:16; 22:3; 22:19; 24:4). Verses 18 and 19 repeat verse 12 with regard to eating and rejoicing. As with verse 12, these verses also conclude with the need to *be careful* (cf. v. 13) not to neglect the precarious and dependent state of the Levite as long as they live in the land.

**20–28.** The new element in support of the permission to slaughter freely relates to the promise of *enlarged territory* (v. 20; cf. Exod. 34:24; Deut. 19:8–10). This anticipates verse 21, where the reason for such free slaughter is spelt out more clearly in terms of proximity to the central sanctuary. However, the text does not define what *too far* means (cf. v. 15). This may have been left to the individual (14:24). The Temple Scroll of Qumran defines the distance as three days' journey. In any case, those who could not participate in the ritual feasts of the central sanctuary could slaughter (*zābah*)<sup>41</sup> animals from the *herds and flocks* as already commanded (v. 15), and eat them as they would the gazelle or deer, without consideration for issues of ritual purity (v. 22).

The only restriction placed upon such eating was the question of blood (vv. 16, 23–25) which contained the life principle of the animal, and made atonement for life (Gen. 9:2–4; Lev. 17:4, 11). Therefore it was not to be consumed, but poured out like water on the ground as belonging to God alone who gives life. The importance of keeping this command would determine Israel's life and blessing within the land (v. 25).

Finally, verses 26–28 return to the argument of verses 17–19 with regard to vowed sacrifices ('holy/consecrated things'; v. 26; cf. 26:13 = tithe) which must be offered at the altar and place of God's choosing (Lev. 17:1–9).

**29–32.** This closing section repeats the opening theme (vv. 2–4), and also provides a bridge for the next section (cf. 11:31 – 12:1;

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41. See Tigay (1996: 125). It may also be an attempt to harmonize non-sacral slaughter with Leviticus 17:1–9.

5:32 – 6:3). Now the Lord is seen as *cutting off* the nations before them (v. 29; 19:1; cf. Gen. 17:14; Lev. 17:1–14). The words *be careful* (v. 30; cf. vv. 13, 19) introduce the danger of Israel being *ensnared* by ‘stumbling into a trap’ (cf. 7:25) (Tigay 1996: 127), by *seeking* (sing.) after their gods (v. 30; cf. v. 5 = pl.), and asking the deliberate question, *How do these nations serve their gods?*, which points to the three situations described in the next chapter (13:2, 6, 13 [ET]). Verse 31 echoes verse 4, but here a reason is given for not worshipping the Lord in their way. This relates to the most *detestable thing* conceivable, namely child sacrifice, to motivate the elimination of pagan worship (2 Kgs 3:27; 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; 23:10).<sup>42</sup> Finally, verse 32 provides a frame to verse 1, as seen in 4:1–2 (only in reverse). However, in the Hebrew Bible, chapter 13 begins with 12:32, which also provides a suitable introduction to the case of the false prophet who might be tempted to add or take away from God’s word. In the extra-biblical treaty of Esarhaddon of Assyria, a similar prohibition is found, with a curse for tampering with any of the stipulations of the covenant.

### Meaning

Theologically, chapter 12 resembles the other law codes of the Pentateuch, beginning with altar laws which seek to establish the purity of Israel’s worship and its commitment to the first two commandments, before moving on to other laws. But in order to do this, it was necessary to reverse the first two commandments in terms of ridding the land of the idolatrous forms of worship, before seeking the place which the Lord had chosen to place his name. In this way, the chapter also follows the pattern of chapter 7. Within chapter 12, the place where Yahweh chooses to place his name is not given, even though Mount Ebal is later suggested (27:1–8). But this suggestion also excludes the move to see the ‘centralization’ of worship as the goal of the chapter (e.g. Jerusalem). Rather, the emphasis is upon Yahweh’s sovereign *choice* of place (not one place versus many), where his name will produce a new order

42. Nelson (2002: 161) says that the expression here clearly refers to lethal sacrifice, in contrast to the more ambiguous ‘pass through the fire’ of 18:9–10 (cf. Lev. 18:21; 20:2–5).

of things in replacing the names of foreign gods (pure worship versus false worship). It is this place which Israel must *seek* (v. 5), and not the gods of the land (v. 30) and the detestable practices associated with their worship, chief of which is child sacrifice (v. 31). The place of the Lord's choosing is to be sought for the prescribed sacrifices which have been vowed to the Lord, at which place Israel is to *eat and rejoice before the LORD* as households, including the Levites (cf. 14:29). But on the other hand, Israel may now eat the meat of non-sacral slaughter in any of their villages or towns. Thus, cultic and non-cultic interests are served side by side with *sacrificial* slaughter in Deuteronomy. This was an important concession for new life within the land, based on distance factors in relationship to the central sanctuary (vv. 20–21). The only condition placed upon both types of sacrifice was that the blood of their sacrifices was not to be eaten, as the blood contained the life of the animal (cf. Lev. 17:4, 11) (also see Introduction: Worship, p. 70).

### *13:1–18. Three temptations to worship other gods*

#### *Context*

We have already noted how 12:29–31 begins to serve as a bridge for this section, especially with the question at 12:30 about how the nations serve their gods. This anticipates the *three* temptations to worship other gods at 13:2, 6, 13 [ET]. Further, these three temptations also address the situation of *ensnarement after* the nations have been destroyed at 12:30, which at first sight seems rather unexpected and odd! But this can now be accounted for if the temptation to worship other gods comes from either a vocal prophet (vv. 1–5), a family member (vv. 6–11), or a town led astray by rabble-rousers (vv. 12–18). The concern in this chapter is still with purity of worship and the first two commandments (5:7–10), but, whereas chapter 12 focused on the sin of idolatry, here the emphasis is more on the idolater. Also, the movement in this chapter is from the private individual to the family, and then to the more public domain. Finally, the danger here is not from the outside, but from deeds done in their midst or *among you* (vv. 5, 11, 14 [ET]).

### Comment

**1–3.** The first person mentioned who might incite rebellion is the prophet (*nābī*). It was possible for a prophet to speak his own words, or to speak in the name of other gods (Jer. 2:8; 23:13). Such a prophet was to be put to death (18:20). The particular scenario in these verses posed a subtle and devious twist to the authenticity of the true prophet, because the presence of *dreams* (Num. 12:6) and the performance of *signs* and *wonders* (Deut. 4:34; 34:11; 1 Sam. 7:10; 1 Kgs 18:36–39) belonged to the prophets to test the covenant loyalty of God’s people (Thompson 1974: 174). In this respect, such a prophet should be believed (18:21–22). Nevertheless, any prophet who then proceeded to advocate the worship and service of other (foreign) gods was unequivocally false, and therefore his words were to be rejected. Rather, such a situation was a *test* from the Lord (v. 3; cf. 8:2) in order to determine whether Israel would *love* Yahweh *with all* [their] *heart and with all* [their] *soul* (6:5; 10:12). Such a concept was at home in the Ancient Near Eastern tradition of treaty and covenant, in which loyalty was paramount.

**4.** Verse 4 then picks up the temptation language of verse 2, and now applies the terms *follow* (unique here in Deuteronomy) and *serve* to the Lord, reversing the word order of 10:12–13 by placing the Lord first in all the clauses of the verse. *Serve* within this context does not relate so much to cultic practice as to specific obedience to divine commands (cf. 6:13–19; 10:12–13).

**5.** Finally, such a prophet must be put to death (v. 5 [ET]; cf. 18:20; Jer. 28:15–17) for he has preached *rebellion* (NIV), or better, uttered ‘lies’ or ‘falsehood’ (*sārā*) with regard to the Lord’s revealed will (19:6; cf. Jer. 28:15–16; 29:32; Isa. 59:13) at two important levels.<sup>43</sup> The first relates to Yahweh’s great act of *salvation* in redeeming Israel from the slavery of Egypt (v. 5a). At this level, Israel owed favours to no other god, for both its past and future salvation (5:6). The second relates to turning from *the way (derek) the LORD your God commanded you to follow* (v. 5b). This refers to *all the ways* that the Lord had instructed Israel to walk in, the commandments, decrees and laws (10:12–13). But this

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43. See commentary on the third commandment at 5:11. VTE also warns against prophetic figures leading the people astray (Weinfeld 1972: 97–98).

context especially relates to the first three commandments (5:7–11), as well as the Shema (6:4–5, 13–15). Finally, Israel is exhorted to *purge* (lit ‘burn out’; cf. 6:15; 7:4) the *evil* (that which contaminates society and damages relationship with Yahweh) from among you.

**6–9.** An even more difficult temptation concerns the male family head with wife and children, brothers and close friends (v. 6). Such a male family head could be *secretly* enticed by any of these next of kin to worship *other gods*, whether from near or far (v. 7). This would contravene the first (5:7) and second (5:9) commandments. Such a situation would be easy to cover up and, for this reason, difficult to detect within the wider community. A list of five prohibitions (v. 8)<sup>44</sup> counterbalances the five next of kin at verse 6. This is then followed by a strong command (Heb. infinitive absolute) at verse 9: *You* [sing.] *must certainly put him to death* (LXX = ‘report him’; cf. Jer. 20:10). The idea here of one person acting alone in carrying out the death sentence within a context of treason finds a parallel in VTE 130–146. However, verse 9b would suggest that a scenario similar to 17:2–7 is operating here as well. The seriousness of idolatry is such that mere *enticement* (v. 6) is enough to trigger punishment, with no actual apostasy required.

**10–11.** The story of the Levites killing their brothers and next of kin in the golden calf episode (Exod. 32:25–29) may well be reflected here. Finally, verse 10 repeats the reference to the Lord’s redemption of Israel from Egypt and the land of slavery (v. 5a), and is also linked to the first case by being called ‘this evil thing among you’ (v. 11; cf. v. 5b = *the evil from among you*). However, the reference in this second section serves to *motivate* and *deter* Israel from the practice of this *evil* again.

**12–18.** The final scene of enticement to covenant breach involves a whole city. Apostasy could grip a whole town under the influence of *wicked men* (Heb. ‘sons of Belial’), occurring here for the first time in the Old Testament (v. 13).<sup>45</sup> The expression could mean ‘without worth’, ‘destructive’ or ‘meanness’ (15:9), and is used

44. The language forbidding compassion is reflected at 7:2, 16; 13:8; 19:13, 21; 25:12.

45. Emerton (1987: 214–217) prefers ‘destructive’ or ‘wicked’.

of people who foment mischief against established authority (1 Sam. 10:27), as well as bear false witness (1 Kgs 21:10). All these meanings would suit the context well here, leading a whole town after other *gods you have not known* (v. 13). There is emphasis in verse 14a with the use of three verbs, *inquire*, *probe* and *investigate it thoroughly*. If the charge proved true that this *detestable* (*tô'ebâ*) thing *has been done* among you (v. 14b), which probably means not just the town's openness and consent to being enticed, but also the act of going after and worshipping other gods (cf. 17:2–7), then the whole town and its livestock were to be *put to the sword* (indicating sacral war), and placed under *herem* or total destruction (v. 15), as though it were a Canaanite city, for this was the same judgment reserved for the Canaanites (cf. 7:1–5; Exod. 22:20 [ET]). In these terms, it was to suffer a fate like that of Jericho (Josh. 6:17–21), in which everything would be destroyed by fire, as a kind of sacrifice or *whole offering* (*kālîl*) to Yahweh (cf. Lev. 6:22–23 [ET]; 1 Sam. 7:9).<sup>46</sup> It was to be left a *ruin* (lit. 'tell') for ever, never to be rebuilt (v. 16; cf. Josh. 6:26). Finally, nothing was to be excluded from the sacred extermination, so that no individual Israelite was to profit personally from the booty (7:25–26; cf. Achan; Josh. 7:20–21). Only in this way would the Lord *turn from his fierce anger*, with a triad of blessings to follow (bridged by use of alliteration), including *mercy*, *compassion*, and *increase your numbers* (countering the loss of a whole city) as promised on oath to the forefathers (v. 17). Finally, verse 18 provides a fitting frame and conclusion to chapters 12 and 13, with the call to *obey* all of God's commands (cf. 12:1, 32; 13:4, 18).

### Meaning

The temptation to worship other gods need not be culturally driven from the 'outside'. Chapter 13 warns us that the most sinister enemy can lie 'within', beginning with Israel's religious leadership (in this case the *prophet*), family members and close friends, and finally a whole town. Each must be resisted and shown no pity, the penalty being death itself. This only served to reveal the radical seriousness

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46. Also the fate of Gibeah and the towns of Benjamin at Judges 19:1 – 20:48 was instigated by a 'rabble'.

of the sin of idolatry as a total breach of covenant loyalty and love towards the Lord, who alone had saved Israel from the slavery of Egypt.

*ii. Purity laws and the misuse of God's name (14:1–21; cf. 5:11)*

*Context*

This chapter links back to 12:31 and 13:14 in terms of *detestable* practices and religious customs related to the sin of idolatry within Canaan (cf. 7:25–26). This is taken up in the frame verses of 14:1 and 21c, and also the word *detestable* (14:3) is now extended to *certain foods* which are declared unclean and not to be eaten (vv. 3–21a). In this way, 14:1–21 patterns chapter 12, in which the concept of Israel as a 'holy people' (cf. Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6) frames the religious and social life of Israel in terms of the 'eating theme' and the further development of non-sacral slaughter.<sup>47</sup> These twin concerns of 14:1–21 now implicate the third commandment about the *name* of God (5:11) at two important levels. First, the purity laws prohibit the crossing of boundaries at the frames in terms of *life and death* (14:1 and v. 21c), and then between *clean* and *unclean foods* (vv. 3–21a). Similar concerns are reflected at Leviticus 21:5–6 in the same order (within a cultic context), in terms of the practices of Israel's priesthood. But especially with regard to the shaving of the head and the cutting of the body, they must not profane the *name* of their God (Lev. 21:6). And now Israel, as the *holy* people of God, and his *treasured possession*, should not bear the character and name of the Lord in pagan, unclean or hypocritical ways (Harman 2001: 155).

Within the chapter, the food law section (vv. 4–21a) is in the plural form of address, which thereby seeks to particularize commands for *individual* application. The passage is then enclosed by the singular form of address (vv. 2–3 and 21b/c), which seeks to emphasize *collective* matters of election and communal behaviour.

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47. For example, 12:1–4 and 31 (boundaries of life and death) provide a frame for the 'eating theme' of 12:7, 15–18, 20–25, 27; and 14:1–2 and 21b (boundaries of life and death) provide a frame for the 'eating theme' of 14:3–21a.

Finally, the whole passage is introduced by the second-person plural in verse 1. After the introduction of verse 1a, *You (pl.) are the children of the LORD your God*, the dietary regulations are enclosed in a concentric frame:

Do not *cut* yourselves (2mp) (v. 1b)

You are a people holy to the LORD your God (2ms) (v. 2)

Do not *eat* any *detestable thing* (2ms) (v. 3)

Do not *eat* anything *already dead* (2mp) (v. 21a)

You are a people holy to the LORD your God (2ms) (v. 21b)

Do not *cook/boil* a young goat in its mother's milk (2ms) (v. 21c)

Within this concentric structure we may notice a *paired* relationship between singular and plural forms (e.g. vv. 1b and 21c; vv. 3 and 21a), but verses 2 and 21b are consistent in conveying the election of Israel in the singular. Furthermore, older legal or apodictic laws may be reflected in verses 1, 3 and 21. The creatures are presented according to the *three* realms in which they live: land (vv. 4–8), water (vv. 9–10), and air (vv. 11–20). The realms of land and water divide into what is permitted (vv. 4–6, 9) and what is forbidden (vv. 7–8, 10).

Finally, the *sequence* of the forbidden foods in Deuteronomy 14:3–20 is identical to that of Leviticus 11:2–23 and may be seen as follows:

1. four-footed land animals (Lev. 11:2–8; Deut. 14:4–8)
2. water creatures (Lev. 11:9–12; Deut. 14:9–10)
3. birds (Lev. 11:13–19; Deut. 14:11–18)
4. flying insects (Lev. 11:20–23; Deut. 14:19–20)

### *Comment*

**1–2.** The opening words, *You [pl.] are the children [sons] of the LORD your God* (cf. 1:31; 8:5; 32:5, 19, 20), recalls the language of Exodus 4:22–23, where Israel is called the *firstborn son* (sing.) of God. This is linked to the singular (*you*) of verse 2, used in Deuteronomy to remind Israel of their special election status and covenant standing before God as a nation (cf. 7:6; 26:18). Here the plural *sons* (used in a distributive sense) reminds them of their *individual* responsibility

to live as members of the covenant, providing a frame at verse 21 (with pl. and sing. *you* in the same order). The opening frame at verse 1 begins: *Do not cut yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead*. While the first part of this injunction (*do not cut yourselves*) related to the entire assembly of Israel (Lev. 19:28), the second part (*shave the front of your heads*) referred to the priests (Lev. 21:5–6). But here both are now extended to the lay populace as a holy people (also v. 21a; cf. Lev. 22:8). These practices were associated with funeral rites and mourning for the dead (1 Kgs 18:28; Jer. 16:6; 41:5). Mourning itself was not discouraged, but there is explicit instruction not to lacerate the body, which was created in the image of God (cf. Lev. 19:27–28; 21:5–6). The practice of laceration was part of the practice of pagan religions (cf. Tammuz at Ezek. 8:14). This is seen especially in the Canaanite fertility cult of Baal at 1 Kings 18:28, where the prophets of Baal lacerate themselves until the blood flowed, while calling on the *name* of Baal. With these associations, the implications for Israel are clear. In particular, the practice of laceration, in which Israel would effectively bathe itself in its own blood (providing a parallel to the young goat cooked in its mother's milk at v. 21c), would have failed to carry out the command of 12:3 to wipe out the *names* of the gods from the land. At the same time, such practice would be associated with the *name* of these gods, while profaning the *name* of a holy God (Lev. 21:5–6). Motivating this prohibition is the all-important issue of *sonship* and kinship, with the emphatic order in the Hebrew, 'Sons you are of Yahweh' (v. 1a), in parallel with the beginning of verse 2a: 'For a people holy you are to Yahweh.' This establishes a contrast between prohibited acts performed on behalf of deceased kin (*lāmēt*), and the central worship of Yahweh.<sup>48</sup> Finally, Israel's unique calling from all the peoples of the earth, and her standing before God as his *treasured possession* (Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6), involved both the privilege and responsibility of bearing Yahweh's name alone, and not that of any other god (6:13–15).

3. The instruction, 'You shall not eat' (NRSV) any 'detestable' thing (v. 3), is linked by association to apostasy (13:14) and its religious

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48. See Blenkinsopp (1995: 1–16), who importantly develops this point for Deuteronomy 12–26.

practices (12:31; cf. 7:25–26). Already this link has been made between 14:1 and 12:3, 31, as well as in Leviticus 21:5–6 relating to the third commandment. The principle connecting the food laws with idolatrous practices is solely on account of Israel's *holy* standing before God. Israel was called to demonstrate her holy status and separateness from the nations, even down to what she ate at meal-times. In this way, the clean/unclean food distinctions would have symbolically reminded Israel of her election from the nations. Although it is difficult to work out why some animals, birds and fish were considered *clean* or *unclean*, as this is not explained to us, the importance of this classification for Israel was that this was Yahweh's sovereign choice. Therefore, Israel must simply abide by what her sovereign Lord had declared either clean or unclean (cf. Acts 10:9–16; cf. Lev. 19:22–25; Gen. 2:9, 16–17). It appears that the sovereign choice of meat menu, as arbitrary as this may have first appeared to Israel, may well find a parallel in the supernatural *manna* of the wilderness period. This was also unknown to both the wilderness generation, as well as to the fathers before them. But it was sent to *test* the people, and finally to teach them that *man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God* (cf. 8:3) (Kline 1963: 87).

**4–5.** The regulations in Leviticus are much more detailed, except in the case of the *clean* animals mentioned here. The first three, the ox, the sheep and the goat, are all domestic animals. But other wild animals were also permitted, and verse 5 mentions *seven* other kinds of animals that were probably encountered en route within the wilderness journeying, and may also have been found in the wooded hill country of Canaan. The mention of *seven* may be representative of a much larger range of wild animals. The deer and gazelle have already been mentioned together at 12:15, 22 as permitted food. The wild goat, the ibex and the mountain goat are mentioned only here. All of these are split-hoofed animals.

**6–8.** A template is now given for clean animals and consists of two elements, namely split hooves and chewing the cud (v. 6). However, verse 7 provides an exemption to this with animals that chew the cud but do not divide the hoof, such as the camel, the rabbit and the coney. If hygiene was an issue, it is interesting that the camel was included, as it was an important animal for Israel. The pig was excluded for the opposite reason. It has a split hoof, but

does not chew the cud. However, the further template in verse 8 of not touching the carcass of the pig was probably mentioned especially to exclude the pig, following Leviticus 11:8 (cf. Lev. 11:24–39). This might suggest that ritual considerations were also important. In the Ancient Near East, pigs were used in cultic situations in Canaan, Babylon, Egypt and also among the Hittites (cf. Isa. 65:2–5; 66:3–4a, 17).

**9–10.** The template for fish was straightforward. Those fish with fins and scales could be eaten, but others were regarded as unclean. The distinction seems to be between free-swimming fish and those that burrow in the mud, although sharks would have also been included in the unclean group. Preservation and hygiene may have been a factor here.

**11–18.** The birds are mentioned next, but with no definition of *clean* (v. 11). This breaks the pattern given so far. The list of twenty unclean examples (vv. 12–18) follows that of Leviticus 11:13–19. A number of these are difficult to identify with certainty (e.g. the NIV's *vulture*, *black vulture*, *red kite*, *black kite*, *horned owl*, *screech owl*, *white owl* and *desert owl*). However, most of these (except the hoopoe and the bat) were consumers of blood and dead flesh.

**19–20.** The fourth category mentioned is that of *swarming* or *flying* insects, the eating of which was forbidden. On the other hand, any winged creature (i.e. *flying insects*, not birds) that is clean may be eaten. This brief and ambiguous information *presupposes* fuller knowledge of the laws relating to clean and unclean foods in this category, which is greatly clarified in Leviticus 11:20–23. The division is between insects (swarmers) that *walk on all fours* (forbidden), and those, such as the locust, katydid, cricket and grasshopper, that *have jointed legs for hopping on the ground* (acceptable).

**21.** The topic of *death* in verse 21a not only provides a frame for verse 21c (*young goat cooked in its mother's milk*), but also presents a frame for verses 1–2 at the beginning of the chapter. Thus, the issue of life and death frames the chapter. At the beginning of verse 21, God's people must refrain from eating *anything you find already dead* (Exod. 22:31 [ET]; Lev. 22:8). On the other hand, such a diet was perfectly acceptable for the resident alien (Heb. *gér*) and foreigner (Heb. *nokeř*). Such an animal could be usefully disposed of (cf. 15:19–23). But clearly the issue for Israel was one of covenant relationship

and standing with Yahweh in the light of laws forbidding such practice (Lev. 17:10–16; cf. Deut. 12:23–25). The problem with a dead animal would have related to its proper slaughter and the ritually correct disposal of its blood. Such an understanding and practice helped to give definition to Israel as a *holy* people before God.

Finally, this section ends with the prohibition against cooking a young goat in its mother's milk (v. 21c). If a narrative link is to be seen in verse 1a with *Do not cut yourselves ... for the dead*, then one may discern a common theme of bathing oneself in one's own blood for the dead, and the cooking of the young goat in its mother's milk, leading from life (the mother's milk) to death. In other words, the appropriate boundaries between life and death are infringed or crossed at both ends. The verse also appears in Exodus 23:19 and 34:26, repeating the conclusion of the so-called Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22 – 23:19) within the same liturgical context of festival and offering, although here the festival instructions *follow* rather than precede it (14:22 – 16:17).

### *Meaning*

Deuteronomy 14:1–21 *extends* the argument of 12:31 and 13:14 with regard to additional *detestable* practices, thus giving added meaning to Deuteronomy's view of what it means for Israel to be a *holy* and elect people. In this section, the *name* of the Lord can be further profaned by infringing or crossing boundaries relating to life and death (at the frames; vv. 1–2 and v. 21c), and also by not observing certain laws relating to clean/unclean foods (vv. 3–21a/b).

### ***iii. The rhythms of life and Sabbath observance*** ***(14:22 – 16:17; cf. 5:12–15)***

#### *Context*

Within this section, the law of the tithe provides a frame for the Sabbath law of release, reflecting the concerns of the fourth commandment (5:12–15).<sup>49</sup> But at the same time, the tithe law also

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49. Note that the reference to *at the end of every three years* (14:28) provides a frame for *three times a year* (16:16).

provides a transition from the previous section by means of the motif of *eating*, which it shares with the dietary laws (McConville 2002: 246). This section breaks down into three groups of laws: (1) regulations concerning the offering of tithes of crops and firstlings of herds (14:22–29); (2) laws governing the sabbatical years of release for debtors, the poor and slaves (15:1–18); (3) laws concerning the offering of firstlings of livestock and the celebration of the three festivals of Passover, Weeks and Booths (15:19–16:17). This framework suggests that worship and life are integrally related (cf. 14:1–21; Exod. 20:22–23:19).

### *Comment*

#### **(1) Regulations for tithes of crops and firstlings of herds (14:22–29). 22–23.**

The law of the tithe begins with the emphatic *Be sure to set aside a tenth*, and the last two words *each year* (lit. ‘year, year’) stress that each year Israel was to bring a tenth of the harvest of all her fields (v. 22).<sup>50</sup> The law of the tithe (a tenth) has a long-standing precedent in the Ancient Near East (cf. Gen. 14:20; 28:22), and is found at Leviticus 27:30–33 (belonging to the Lord and sanctuary) and Numbers 18:21–29 (belonging to the Levites as their inheritance). However, Deuteronomy understands the tithe differently, by first developing 12:17–19 in terms of a *feast* at the place where God will choose as a dwelling for his name (v. 23; cf. 12:5). The concept of the tithe as a feast is peculiar to Deuteronomy. The primary content of this tithe relates to the grain, new wine and oil, to which have been added the firstlings of herd and flock in order to represent meat produce, repeating 12:17. Presumably only a small portion of the tithe was consumed as part of this meal. The stated purpose of this law is *that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always* (v. 23; cf. 4:10; 17:19; see also 6:10–12; 8:10–20).

27. A second extension of the basic command of verse 22 is the permission to *exchange* the tithe for money before going to the sanctuary. This made allowance for people who were too distant from

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50. Ugaritic notes a second root for *šr* (‘to pour out a libation’; Mayes 1979: 245).

the sanctuary, and could not carry the tithe of the abundant harvest with them (vv. 24–25). It reinforced the point that the tithe should not be a solemn burden but a joyful celebration. On arrival at the designated place of worship, the people could buy whatever they liked, and then each household was to eat in the presence of the Lord and rejoice (v. 26). Again, much of chapter 12 is reflected and complemented here.

**28–29.** As a frame to verse 22 ('year by year'), a third-year tithe (v. 28), unique to Deuteronomy, is mentioned. Its importance is also underlined by its repetition at 26:12–15, including a confession that this offering has not been made to the *dead* (26:14), which might provide a frame to the *dead* at 14:1. This tithe is not dependent upon coming to the sanctuary, but is stored in the different towns amongst the people, and it becomes a way of securing means for those who have no property of their own in Israel, including the Levites, aliens, the fatherless and the widows. This was not strictly a 'welfare' provision, but rather a means by which these groups could participate in the blessings of the land. Finally, this section ends with Yahweh's renewed blessing upon those responsible for the tithes.

**(2) Laws governing the Sabbatical years of release (15:1–18).** Chapter 15 follows the same social concerns and motivation as those found in the fourth (Sabbath) commandment (5:12–15). Lohfink has recognized the centrality and importance of this commandment for the Decalogue in Deuteronomy, calling it the 'Sabbath Decalogue'. Therefore, at a literary level, Deuteronomy underlines the importance of its social programme at the very heart of its law, as this finds expression in chapter 15, which itself now becomes the structural flagship for a number of smaller sections in a similar vein in the following chapters. The Sabbatical law in Deuteronomy 15 may be divided into three sections: the release of debts (15:1–6), the care of the needy (15:7–11), and the release of slaves (15:12–18).

**a. The release of debts (1–6).** 1. The focus is now on the Sabbatical (seventh) year, as this relates to loans and their release (v. 1). Thus Deuteronomy expands the scope of the law of the fallow year from release of land from the 'burden' of being ploughed (Exod. 23:10–11; cf. Lev. 25:1–7) to the release of human

beings from the burden of debt (cf. Neh. 10:31 [ET]). In this way, it picks up the humanitarian dimension of the original law, which was for the benefit of the poor in terms of food, only here it translates this concept into alleviating the prime component of poverty, namely debt (Wright 1996: 188).

2–3. The meaning of *maššeh yādô* (lit. ‘the debt or pledge of the hand’) in verse 2 is not entirely clear. According to Nehemiah 10:31 [ET], it refers to the power of the creditor, who must ‘let drop’, or ‘let go of’, any debt owed to him. But does this refer to an existing debt, or merely a release of what was pledged (or taken as security) against the loan (cf. 24:6, 10–13, 17–18)? Further, was this release a permanent cancellation, or only a deferral? Regardless of whether a straightforward loan or a pledge as security against a loan is in view (possibly the two need not be separated here), a good case can be made for the complete cancellation of any existing debts on loans owed to the creditor, on the basis of Yahweh’s proclamation at the centre of verses 2–3, as well as the strong differentiation made between the treatment of fellow Israelites or *brothers* (mentioned five times in vv. 1–11), and that of foreigners (or foreign traders). This also has support in verses 7–11, where the case of lending to the poor man *among your brothers* becomes an imperative, even though this debt approaching the seventh year would become permanently uncollectible (Nelson 2002: 195). In addition, the point of verses 2–3 may be seen in a *reverse* fashion with the Sabbath year release of the Hebrew servant in verses 12–18, who was not to be sent away *empty-handed*, but supplied liberally from *your flock, your threshing-floor and your winepress* (cf. Lev. 25:8–38).

4–6. The expression, *there should be no poor among you* (v. 4), states the *ideal*, while verse 11 states the *reality* with the words, *There will always be poor in the land*.<sup>51</sup> However, these should not be seen as contradictory statements. Deuteronomy rather views the ideal as a work in process and progress, like the taking of the land itself (7:22). But it is nevertheless achievable, because Yahweh will richly *bless* Israel (vv. 4b and 6) if they will only obey fully all the commands being given today (v. 5), at the centre of this *blessing* frame. As far as

51. Vogt (2008: 35–44) *excludes* aliens, orphans, widows and Levites from among the poor.

the poor are concerned, the law of verse 4 would not be necessary if this kind of obedience was fully implemented. In fact, such obedience would only lead to the prospect of becoming a ‘creditor nation’ (cf. 28:12, 44) rather than a dependent nation, with negative personal, economic, social and political consequences (v. 6).<sup>52</sup>

**b. The care of the needy (7–11).** This section targets the hypothetically *poor* person within Israel (vv. 7, 11). It is not clear whether such a person actually takes the initiative in requesting a loan from a creditor, or is simply brought to the attention of the rich and powerful. The first suggestion is probably to be preferred on the basis of verse 8, where the word *lend* is the same as that used at verse 6. The point of the passage is that the near approach of the seventh year for cancelling debts should not deter the rich and powerful from lending the *needy brother* all that he needs. If the loan is refused, the poor person may *appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin* (v. 9; cf. 24:14–15). Deuteronomy is clear that legal stipulations alone will not bring this about, but it is dependent on inner attitude, motivation and obedience of the *heart* (vv. 7, 9, 10), which controls the *hand* (vv. 7, 8, 11), the *wicked thought* (lit. ‘a word from Belial’; cf. 13:13) and the ‘evil eye’ (*ill will* NIV; v. 9; cf. Mark 7:20–23). In the end, the true motive for lending was not economic advantage, since loans were to be made without interest (23:19–20; cf. Exod. 22:25), but the genuine plight of one’s kindred. Final appeal is made through the relational language of *your brothers, your cities and your land* (vv. 7, 9, 11). Israel’s whole concept of covenant and life together was built upon the concept of ‘kinship’, and thus to disobey this law would begin to dismantle this sense of community from the foundation upwards.

**c. The release of slaves (12–18).** This law extends the principle of ‘remission’ (vv. 1–2) to those who have become slaves because of debt and poverty.<sup>53</sup> There is good reason to believe

52. The verb *rule* (Heb. *māšal*) occurs only here in Deuteronomy relating to economic prosperity and independence.

53. Here the NIV = *sells himself to you* (e.g. the slave’s labour for a period) is to be preferred to the NRSV = ‘is sold to you’ (Lev. 25:39–43; cf. Exod. 22:3). The *buying* of a Hebrew servant at Exod. 21:2 would most likely refer to a foreign ‘Habiru’ slave (Lev. 25:44–46).

that these debt slaves were the dependents of a debtor who could not repay a foreclosed loan (cf. 2 Kgs 4:1; Neh. 5:1-5), which might on occasions even involve the debtor himself (Amos 2:6-8; 8:4-6). The law of slave release (now including male and female) is based upon the first law of the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 21:2-11), which is no doubt placed in its prominent position to reflect the recent exodus deliverance from slavery in Egypt (cf. Exod. 20:2).

**12-14.** Therefore the reference to a 'brother' Hebrew (male or female) in verse 12 (cf. Exod. 21:3) need not carry the meaning of 'foreigner' but a fellow Israelite in an egalitarian way (cf. Lev. 25:39-45). This may be supported by the word *release* or *let go* (*šālah*) (Piel = intensive form), used three times in verses 12 and 13. It is the same word used of Pharaoh's final release of Israel from Egypt at Exodus 3:20, followed then by the expression of not departing from Egypt *empty-handed* (Exod. 3:21-22). Exodus 3:20-22 may well have inspired the wording and intent of the law found here at 15:12-15, which is not found at Exodus 21:2-11. If this is the case, the rhetorical effect may be that the rich and powerful should not end up like Pharaoh in terms of *hardness of heart* and a recalcitrant spirit towards their fellow Israelites, lest the situation in Jeremiah's day in which the Lord's name was profaned should repeat itself (Jer. 34:8-16). The measure of the master's gifts to the slave (v. 14) was predicated upon Yahweh's *prior* blessings to him, in recognition that the land and all its bounty was nothing less than the Lord's gift to Israel, which *began* at the point of the Lord's deliverance of Israel from the slavery of Egypt (8:10-18). The gifts themselves replicate Yahweh's *love* gifts to Israel, in terms of gifts from the flock, the threshing floor (i.e. from grain gathered in) and the winepress (cf. 7:13). These would enable a person to make a fresh start in life and benefit from the overall bounty and blessing of the land.

**15.** *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt* is a direct quotation from the fourth commandment in its Deuteronomic form (5:15). This commandment points out the *equal* status of slave masters and slaves with regard to Sabbath rest, and now finds its extended application with regard to the sabbatical year slave release. In this way it also follows the pattern of the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:2

– 23:19), where the law of slave release stands at the very beginning of the law code (Exod. 21:2–11) soon after the exodus experience, and as an appropriate first law for a society of escaped slaves! Finally, the word *redeem* (*pādā*) (7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 21:8; 24:18) is first used by Deuteronomy for the exodus deliverance, but is applied elsewhere for the release of slaves in general (Exod. 21:8; Lev. 19:20) or of the redemption of the firstborn (Exod. 13:13, 15; Num. 18:15–17). Thus, here it metaphorically stresses the ransom price involved in Israel's deliverance from the slavery of Egypt, and therefore appropriately addresses their own sense of moral, spiritual and socio/economic responsibility towards one another on the basis of Yahweh's prior actions.

**16–17.** An exception to the law of release is one in which the servant does not want to leave for either relational or economic reasons, *because he loves you and your family and is well off with you* (v. 16; lit. 'for it is good for him'; cf. Exod. 21:5–6). In this case the servant's ear (male or female), the symbol of obedience (Ps. 40:6), was affixed to the door (possibly of the master's house), as a symbol that he/she was joined to the master's house for life (v. 17) (lit. 'a servant for life').

**18.** The final exhortation not to *consider it a hardship* (Heb. *qāšar*) to set your servant free makes a link with the *hardening* (*qāšar*) of Pharaoh's heart, as well as the sending away,<sup>54</sup> and the Israelite sacrifice of firstlings at Exodus 13:15. These ideas also provide a cue for the next law on the sacrifice of firstlings at verses 19–23 (McConville 2002: 264). The section ends with the assurance of the Lord's blessing for those who obey these commands (vv. 4–6, 10, 18).

### (3) The laws of firstlings and festivals (15:19 – 16:17)

**a. The law of the firstborn (15:19–23).** There are several possible reasons why this law is included here. The law of the firstborn was initially given to Israel at Exodus 13:11–16 within the

54. Because the servant's work has been worth either *twice as much* (*mišneh*) (NIV) as that of a hired hand, or the 'equivalent' (NRSV) of a hired man, saving the master six years of wages.

context of the Passover, which also celebrated the sparing of Israel's firstborn sons on the night of the exodus. Immediately after this comes the Passover festival (16:1-8), which heads up the section on Israel's festivals (16:1-17).

But more subtle links can be made here with the idea of exemption from work (cf. the *service* of the slave in v. 18 with the work of the ox in v. 19, using the same root word used for Israel's bondage in Egypt). Also, in the sabbatical year the debtor was not to be 'pressed' (*tiggōš*) for payment (vv. 2-3), just as the firstborn sheep was not to be 'fleeced' (*tāgōz*) (McConville 1984: 95-98).

**19-23.** Deuteronomy's interest in the law of the firstborn relates to the *herds and flocks* (v. 19), which are the provision for the *eating* of the firstborn by each family (cf. Num. 18:15-18) in the presence of the Lord at the central sanctuary (v. 20). However, if the firstborn animal has a defect of any kind, it must not be sacrificed to the Lord (v. 21), but no restriction is placed upon the eating of these same blemished animals in the towns, as if they were gazelle or deer, in accordance with the instruction of 12:15-28. The rule concerning the blood still held true. It could not be eaten, and must be poured out on the ground like water (cf. 12:16, 23-25).

**b. The pilgrim feasts (16:1-17).** Previous lists of the feasts of Israel also confirm links with the theme of Sabbath (cf. Exod. 23:14-18; 34:18-26; Lev. 23:1-44). Here, the three feasts conclude the section relating to the fourth commandment with regard to the Sabbatical principle (5:12-15), thus emphasizing the holy rhythm of life. Deuteronomy reworks these traditional timetables (especially found in Exod. 23:14-18 and 34:18-26) in terms of appearing *before the LORD* at the central sanctuary (vv. 2, 5-6, 11, 15-16). Other typical themes are also present in this section, such as the exodus from Egypt, rest, rejoicing before the Lord, the marginalized (fatherless, widows, aliens, Levites), and God's blessing as both gift and motivation for action.

**(i) The Passover (16:1-8).** The opening word *observe* reminds the reader of the fourth commandment (*Observe the Sabbath day*, 5:12). Moreover, the month of *Abib* (late March or early April) was the time when Israel came out of Egypt, and reflects the law about the Feast of Unleavened Bread at Exodus 23:15 and 34:18. Here,

however, this feast refers directly to the Passover, mentioned four times (vv. 1, 2, 5, 6), which may be following the order of Leviticus 23:5-8. The phrase *by night* (vv. 1, 6) may also reflect the *narrative* of the institution of Passover, where a direct connection is made between the Passover meal (Exod. 12:6-11) and the eating of unleavened bread (Exod. 12:14-20, 39), because of leaving Egypt *in haste* (*ḥippāzôn*; v. 3; only at Exod. 12:11; Isa. 52:12). However, these feasts now reflect the blessing of the land in terms of *flocks and herds* (v. 2; cf. Exod. 12:3-5, 32; 13:3-10; Josh. 5:10-12). Also, they no doubt cater for the greater numbers of a communal gathering at both feasts. But the Passover sacrifice, in particular, was radically affected by the law of centralization (vv. 2, 5-6), hence its further prominence here (Nelson 2002: 205). In this way, it also became a pilgrimage feast (*ḥag*), limited to the *evening* on the first day, thus preserving the uniqueness of the exodus experience (vv. 4b, 6b; cf. Exod. 12:6-20).

The reference to the exclusion of yeast *in all your land for seven days* (v. 4a) most probably reflects the *intention* of Exodus 12:19-20. In other words, wherever people are throughout the land within their homes, the significance of the meaning of Passover is still being enacted. This interpretation might finally influence the meaning of the reference to *tents* at verse 7, but this best refers to temporary dwellings that were occupied during the festival week (vv. 3, 7b and 8; cf. 5:30). The reference to 'cooking' the meat (v. 7; NRSV) most likely retains the meaning and context of Exodus 12:6-11 (i.e. *roasted* over the fire; NIV), as Deuteronomy uses words and ideas from this section. Finally, the way in which Deuteronomy has expressed the seven days of the feast of Unleavened Bread (v. 8) as six plus one may be a deliberate means of drawing attention to the concept of Sabbath principle and rest (cf. Lev. 23:36).

(ii) **The Feast of Weeks (16:9-12).** Deuteronomy follows the tradition at Exodus 34:22 and Numbers 28:26b in calling this feast the *Feast of Weeks*, which would further suit the sabbatical emphasis in this section. But there is no indication in verse 9 that its starting date is linked in any explicit way with Passover and Unleavened Bread (but cf. v. 12). It simply begins by counting off seven weeks from the time the sickle (is a 'first' sickle implied?) is put to the

standing grain. It included the offering of the firstfruits of the harvest to God, and thus was also known as the *Feast of Harvest* (Exod. 23:16a) or the *day of firstfruits* (Num. 28:26a). But Deuteronomy does not explicitly mention the offering of firstfruits here, although this will be taken up later on (cf. 26:1-11). This may mean that it was connected with the offering of firstfruits, in which the first ripe grain of the harvest (probably barley) was presented to God (cf. Exod. 34:22 = *wheat*). Thus the period of fifty days (later known as *Pentecost*; cf. Acts 2:1) appears to have been the interval between the beginning of the barley harvest and the end of the wheat harvest (Lev. 23:15-16).

Deuteronomy's interest in this pilgrimage feast (*ḥag*) is threefold. First, it was a celebration of all that God had given in terms of their harvest within the land (v. 10). In grateful response, they were to bring a *freewill offering in proportion* (*missâ*) to the blessings the Lord had given them (cf. v. 17). Perhaps the nature of this offering as a voluntary gift would also provide a *testing* (*massâ*) of their love for Yahweh as the true provider of all their harvest, and not the gods of the land (cf. 6:10-16). Secondly, Israel was to *rejoice* before the Lord at the place of his choosing as a whole family, including servants, Levites, aliens, the fatherless and widows (v. 11; cf. 12:7, 12; 14:26-27). Thirdly, Israel was to *remember* that they were slaves in Egypt (v. 12), which not only echoes the fourth commandment (5:15), but is the only feast (perhaps because it is the middle one of the three) to be made a memorial of the deliverance from Egypt.

**(iii) The Feast of Tabernacles (16:13-17).** As with the previous feast, no precise dating is given for the feast that marked the end of the agricultural year (called the *Feast of Ingathering* in the earlier codes at Exod. 23:16b and 34:22b). The detailed legislation relating to this feast is given in Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 23:33-43; and Numbers 29:12-38. This seven-day celebration of grain harvest and other produce began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Lev. 23:34). Whereas the Feast of Weeks marked the first of the harvest season for wheat, the Feast of Tabernacles signified its culmination. The name *tabernacles* (Heb. *sukkôt*) denotes the huts or booths which were used during this festival. But Deuteronomy focuses on the agricultural nature of these *booths* and this festival, whereas at Leviticus 23:42-43 the command to live in booths for

seven days also served the purpose of reminding their descendants that they lived in booths when the Lord brought them out of Egypt. The importance attached to this feast may be seen at Deuteronomy 31:9-13, where it is singled out from the others for the solemn seven-yearly reading of the book of the law.

The motivation for keeping this pilgrimage festival is similar to that of the Feast of Weeks. This includes a joyful family celebration in response to Yahweh's blessing at the central sanctuary, together with the Levites, aliens and the fatherless and widows who live in the towns (vv. 14-15a). The seven days of festival are possible because (Heb. *kei*) the Lord is the one who blesses the harvest and the manual work that they put into their agricultural pursuits (cf. 6:10-12; 8:17-18). For that reason, Israel will surely be joyful (v. 15b; cf. John. 15:11).

**16-17.** This summary of the three annual feasts draws upon phrases from Exodus 23:15b, 17 (cf. Exod. 34:20b, 23). These include: (1) the obligation on all the men to appear before the Lord three times a year (cf. 16:11, 14), to which Deuteronomy has added *at the place he will choose* (v. 16a); (2) the instruction not to appear before the Lord empty-handed (*rêqām*) (v. 16b; cf. 15:13), to which Deuteronomy has added, *Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you* (v. 17). The expression *empty-handed* thus connects the vertical giving and grateful tribute to God for his blessing of the land (v. 16b) with the horizontal giving to a fellow Israelite in need (15:13), which falls within the central passage (15:1-18) of this outworking of the fourth commandment.

### Meaning

The passage 14:22 - 16:17 expounds the fourth commandment of Sabbath observance (5:12-15) in terms of *rhythms of time* as this relates to: (1) the offering of tithes of crops and firstlings of herds (14:22-29); (2) laws governing the *sabbatical* years of *release* for debtors, the poor and slaves (15:1-18); (3) laws concerning the offering of firstlings of livestock and the celebration of the three festivals of Passover, Weeks and Booths (15:19 - 16:17). The structuring of these three sections suggests that the worship of Israel at the frames cannot be divorced from the social life of Israel at the centre (15:1-18), also emphasized by their intertextual links. Thus,

to truly love, worship and serve God (6:4–5) also involved the love of one's fellow Israelite as well as the alien, on the basis of Israel's remembrance and grateful response for her deliverance from the slave status of Egypt (esp. 10:12–22; 15:15; 16:12; cf. 5:15). This point is reinforced by the distinctive and pre-eminent presentation of the *Passover* feast (16:1; cf. 16:16), as this also links up with the fourth commandment (16:1; cf. 5:12 = *observe*). Finally, the three annual feasts are given new meaning in terms of: (1) the law of the central sanctuary; (2) the blessing of their agricultural status as well as that of history; (3) the emphasis on joyful and inclusive worship before the Lord; (4) the reciprocal nature of obedient response and giving, and blessing from the Lord.

*iv. The honour of parents and leaders (16:18 – 18:22; cf. 5:16)*

*Context*

This section may be regarded as a separate unit because of its subject matter relating to the political and religious organization of Israel, and may be seen to reflect the fifth commandment and the *principles* of authority structure contained in it (5:16; cf. 21:18–21 also implicating civil authorities). These laws and commands (relating to the judge, priest, king and prophet) are considered by some scholars to make up Israel's *constitution*, but this view needs to be balanced by the fact that they belong to the overall structure and concerns of the book, and may not have had an independent existence. The laws of this section may be divided up as follows, in a kind of chiasmic structure:

- A. Appointment of local judges by the people (16:18–20)
- B. False worship (16:21 –17:7)
- C. Central higher court of priestly Levites and judge (17:8–13)
- D. Appointment of a king (17:14–20)
- C. Central sanctuary; offerings due to priests and Levites (18:1–8)
- B'. Detestable worship practices (18:9–13)
- A'. Appointment of a prophet by the Lord (18:14–22)

**18–20. Judges and officials.** This section follows on from the appointment of judges at the beginning of the book (1:9–18). There the issue of social justice was considered of paramount importance as the people increased in number as a fulfilment of Abrahamic promise. Now it is expected that *judges* (possibly leading or head elders; cf. 19:12; Job. 29:7–25) and *officials* (*šōtērīm*; possibly some kind of recorder or scribal administrator, or clerks of court attached to the judges; cf. 17:9; 1 Chr. 23:4; 2 Chr. 19:8–10) will be *appointed* (presumably by some form of central authority on behalf of the people) in every town, literally ‘within your gates’, perhaps echoing the practice of judging at the gate.

**18.** Both judges and officials *shall judge the people fairly* (NIV; lit. judge ‘a righteous judgment’; *mišpāt šedeq*). While the word *mišpāt* refers to an individual judgment (a just decision), the word *šedeq* is the ethical quality that underpins such a decision, namely *justice* (cf. v. 20). This positive command also lays the foundation for three negative commands that follow in verse 19.

**19–20.** The first is that justice was not to be perverted (NIV), or ‘turned aside’ (Heb. *naṭā*). Justice was not to be denied to anyone. Secondly, there was to be no partiality (lit. ‘You shall not recognize faces’) or respecting of persons in allowing favouritism to influence judicial decisions. Thirdly, bribery is singled out as the worst form of judicial corruption, because it *blinds the eyes of the wise* (i.e. causing the wise to act as if they were foolish and uninformed) and *twists the words of the righteous*. This can mean either that bribery can persuade otherwise honest men to become liars, or that the testimony of honest witnesses becomes twisted by judges who have received bribes. The model for avoiding such practices is the Lord himself (10:17; cf. Exod. 23:1–8; Lev. 19:15).<sup>55</sup> Finally, the unit concludes (v. 20) with a homiletical flourish with the word *justice*: literally, ‘justice, justice’ (or *follow justice, and justice alone*) *that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you*.

**16:21 – 17:7. Worshipping other gods.** It might appear that

55. Goldberg (1984: 15–25) suggests that this prohibition of bribes is a unique element in comparison to other ANE conceptions of judges who expected bribes (cf. Prov. 17:8; 21:14–15).

these *three* laws with regard to proper worship are out of place here, but they illustrate the point that all of life (civil processes) stood in juxtaposition to that of worship (cultic). Also we may observe a 'judicial' framework to the following material: (1) a general prescription to provide honest local judges (16:18–20); (2) a prohibition against syncretistic and unacceptable forms of worship (16:21 – 17:1); (3) a case law instructing the judges with regard to the practice of apostasy and idolatry (17:2–7); (4) a tribunal (consisting of priests and a judge) at the central sanctuary to adjudicate complex legal disputes (17:8–13). Already we have noticed in the previous section (14:22 – 16:17) a similar juxtaposition of the cultic (at the frames) with issues of social justice at the centre.

**21–22.** Similar prohibitions with regard to the wooden Asherah pole and sacred stone (only here in the sing.) have already been encountered at 7:5 and 12:3 (pl.), but in reverse order of their position here. However, here the main point is that the very things that were designated for destruction at 7:5 and 12:3 should not be *set up* and *erected* beside the altar of the Lord. Such things (amounting to syncretistic worship) the Lord *hates* (v. 22b; 12:31; cf. 7:12 = reverse covenant vocabulary). At stake was nothing less than who God is and how he is to be worshipped (Thompson 1974: 201). The singular use of the verb would also be relevant to the individual judges and officials (16:18–20), who of all people should be careful to avoid idolatrous forms of worship, both at the level of revelation (cf. Ugaritic 'Asherah of deposits/oracles') and acceptable worship (cf. 7:1). On the other hand, these verses would also prepare the judges and officials for the case law scenario of verses 2–7.

**17:1.** The third apodictic prohibition relates to the sacrificing of defective or flawed animals, the mark of a careless and ungrateful people (cf. 15:19–23). Here, however, such an offering to the Lord is considered *detestable* (*tô'ēbâ*), the same word used to describe idolatry and apostasy in 17:4 (cf. 13:14), and Canaanite practices in 18:9–13. And so worship can be corrupted both by external means (an *Asherah pole* and a *sacred stone/pillar*) and internal means from their own flocks and herds (an *ox* or a *sheep*), all expressed in the singular.

**2–7.** This casuistic (*if ... then*) passage brings the primary sin in Deuteronomy's concept, idolatry and its attendant apostasy, into the sphere of the judicial process, with emphasis on the individual

(*man or woman*). Further, responsibility for the judicial process involves the whole community, with the singular *among you* at the frames (vv. 2 and 7). The interest in this case is more than purely legal, with the words *in violation of his covenant* (v. 2b) and *contrary to my command* (v. 3a; cf. 4:15–24). It would thus provide the supreme model of how all cases should be dealt with (Wright 1996: 206). Also the description of this apostasy as *this evil deed* (vv. 2, 5, 7) links with 13:5b and 11b (ET). Further, *this detestable thing* (*tô'ēbā*) in verse 4 has a link with 16:21 – 17:1 (esp. 17:1), and also with chapter 13 (esp. v. 14; cf. 2 Kgs 23:13).

**8–13. Law courts.** The central or high court is not a court of appeal for the accused, but a resource for local judges whose cases prove beyond their competence, based on the model of Jethro's original advice to Moses at Exodus 18:13–26 (cf. Deut. 1:17). In this case, the position of the central court judiciary is a replication of Moses' role at 1:17, in a similar manner to that of the prophet's role at 18:15–20. These cases are listed as *bloodshed*, *lawsuits* or *assaults* (lit. 'one kind of blood [homicide] or another, one kind of plea or another, one kind of striking or another'; v. 8b; cf. Exod. 21:18–25).

8. These cases appear to refer to matters of criminal and civil law (cf. 19:17; 21:5), involving distinctions between intentional and unintentional deaths and injuries, as well as conflicting legal rights or contradictory testimony. Such cases would be *too difficult* (lit. 'too wonderful'; v. 8a), indicating that they are beyond human knowledge (Job 42:3; Ps. 131:1; Prov. 30:18) or achievement (2 Sam. 13:2; Deut. 30:11).

9. At this court is a judge (sing.) (cf. 19:17 = judges and priests; pl.) and several priests who are Levites, who will give a combined verdict, but at verse 12 the reference is to *the priest* (sing.) who stands ministering before the Lord, or *the judge* (sing.). This verse could refer to the high priest (i.e. the chief of the Levitical priests, or *the priest*; cf. Num. 5:11–31) and chief judge (cf. 2 Chr. 19:5–11; Thompson 1974: 203). Opinion is divided as to whether this verse assumes a mix of priestly rituals and legal expertise (Nelson 2002: 221), or the one law bringing together the sacral and civil powers, with the final authority residing with the senior priest (McConville 2002: 292). Clearly, whereas Leviticus and Numbers do not assign priests a regular judicial role, in Deuteronomy the

priests also play a part in local and criminal cases (see 19:17 and 21:5), possibly owing to a number of factors, including the priests' expert knowledge of the law, as well as their previous experience in seeking to resolve insoluble cases (cf. Num. 5:11–31). Finally, in abolishing sacrifice at the local sanctuaries, Deuteronomy may have seen the need to expand the areas of priestly responsibility, especially as this related to the central sanctuary (Tigay 1996: 164–165).

**10–11.** The heart of the command comes in verses 10–11, with its insistence that the high court's decision be followed at every point. This is further expanded as the *law* (*tôrâ*) *they teach you* (presumably the priestly answer) and the judgment (*mišpāt*) *they give you* (presumably the ruling of the judge; v. 11). However, the final decision is understood as one given *jointly* (vv. 9, 10, 11). Also, the *law* which is *taught* here might imply the application of the larger body of law in the book of Deuteronomy, and not just a reasoned decision on the basis of the evidence presented (McConville 2002: 292). Both the local judges and officials (16:18–20), as well as the accused, must not turn aside from the ruling received, either *to the right or to the left* (cf. 5:32; 17:11; esp. 17:20; 28:14).

**12–13.** The sanction for failure to carry out the decision of the high court is death. In this way, the high court is presented as an instrument of the sovereign rule of Yahweh in Israel. This may well relate to priestly ritual originating before Yahweh (v. 12; cf. 10:8; 18:5; 21:5) (Nelson 2002: 222), as well as the priestly ruling from the Torah (see above). Refusal to comply with the decision is nothing less than deliberate defiance of God, or *presumption* (*zādôn*), also used at 18:22 with regard to the prophet who has made a false claim to have spoken in the name of God. Such *evil* must be purged from Israel (v. 12b), in order that all the people will hear and *fear* the Lord, and *not be contemptuous again* (v. 13).

**17:14–20. The king.** Structurally, this section on the king comes at the centre of Israel's constitution. This is all the more surprising, since the office of king, unlike that of the judge, priest and prophet at the frames of this section, appears to be divested of any real powers and authority within Israelite society (e.g. Ps. 72:1–20). The picture here of the king not only contrasts with that of Ancient Near Eastern models, especially with regard to the power structures

of Egypt (vv. 16–17), but also with the reality in ancient Israel (esp. Solomon who appears to fulfil vv. 16–17 by not heeding these instructions).

**14–17.** The law of the king begins with a distinctive historical introduction: *When* (or ‘if’; *kî*)<sup>56</sup> *you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you* (v. 14), which it shares with the law about the prophet (18:9–13, 14–22). But here the request for a king comes only after Israel has *settled* in the land, and the people say, *Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us* (v. 14b). This scenario is not unexpected, and therefore anticipates that there will be a king (cf. 12:20–25 relating to worship). However, the royal prerogatives of kings will be thoroughly limited, as seen in the permissive reply of verse 15. This begins with two positives and then a negative: (1) *Be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses*; (2) *He must be from among your own brothers*; (3) *Do not place a foreigner over you, who is not a brother Israelite*. This is then followed by a threefold limitation on the *practice* of kingship in verses 16–17: (1) the multiplication of horses (v. 16) would not only place in jeopardy Israel’s trust in their warrior King, Yahweh (Ps. 20:7; 147:10–11), but would bring about a reverse exodus (cf. 28:68; Exod. 14:13), with possible implications for further conflicts with other superpowers who opposed Egypt; (2) many wives (v. 17a) would increase the chances of leading the king’s heart astray, especially after idols (1 Kgs 11:1–13); (3) the accumulation of large amounts of silver and gold into the royal treasury (v. 17b), especially as a result of centralization, would naturally deprive outside areas of much-needed funds and lead to economic and social oppression, self-sufficiency and pride, and forgetting God (Deut. 8:11, 17–20).

**18–20.** Finally, as a corresponding structure to verse 15, in this section we again have two positives and a negative. (1) Upon accession to the throne, the king was to write for himself a copy of *this law* (*tôrâ*) (probably the whole text of Deuteronomy) that is kept by the *priests, who are Levites* (v. 18; 31:9–13; cf. 2 Kgs 11:12). (2) It was to be with him, and he was to read it all the days of his life, *so that*

56. Nelson (2002: 223) takes as both temporal (‘when’ you enter) and conditional (‘if’ these conditions are met; cf. 30:10).

he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and *these decrees* (v. 19; cf. 6:1–2 framed at 6:24 = *these decrees* as part of the catechetical instruction given to *children* enabling them to *fear* the Lord). Thus the king becomes the model Israelite and student of the law, as it were, *a child*, in modelling the *fear* of the Lord and righteousness (right covenant standing before God) to the nation (6:25; cf. 1 Kgs 3:7–14). (3) This is borne out in the negative: *and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left* (v. 20). This situation would not be possible if the king adopted and modelled the position and attitude of the humble son or child of 6:20–25. Finally, the promise of dynastic succession is promised for such obedience to ‘this torah’ (v. 20b).

**18:1–8. Offerings for priests and Levites. 1–2.** The opening expression (lit. ‘The priests, the Levites, the whole tribe of Levi’; NIV = *The priests, who are Levites – indeed the whole tribe of Levi*; cf. 17:9, 18; 18:1; 24:8; 27:9) is not primarily a statement about the role and function of priests, or whether all Levites may become priests. Rather, it asserts that the priests who are Levites, as well as the whole tribe of Levi, have no land inheritance (i.e. allocated tribal territory). Therefore, they must live off the offerings made to the Lord by *fire* as their inheritance (v. 1). The word *inheritance* is used four times in these verses in a step parallelism: (A) no inheritance with *Israel* (v. 1a); (B) the *offerings made by fire to the LORD* are their inheritance (v. 1b); (A<sup>1</sup>) they shall have no inheritance among their *brothers* (v. 2a); (B<sup>1</sup>) the *LORD* is their inheritance (v. 2b; cf. Num. 18:20). The meaning of the last expression, in parallel with verse 1b, is twofold: (1) it is an entitlement to the *offerings* made from the sacrificial worship at the sanctuary, except the whole burnt offering (see Num. 18:8–24 which notes some differences between priests and Levites, but Deuteronomy is closer to Josh. 13:14, where *offerings made by fire* relate to the whole tribe of Levi); (2) it is an entitlement to live in cities (forty-eight were provided throughout all the tribes, together with some surrounding pasture land; cf. Num. 35:1–8; Josh. 21:1–42).

**3–4.** Having considered the whole tribe of Levi in verses 1–2, these verses now summarize the *share* (*mišpāt*) due to the priests (cf. 1 Sam. 2:12–15). In verse 3, the priest is to be given the

shoulder,<sup>57</sup> the two cheeks and the stomach of the animal, but this differs from Leviticus 7:28–36 (cf. Num. 18:8–32), where the breast and right thigh are prescribed as the priests' portion of the peace offerings. The prescriptions of verse 4 have echoes in Numbers 18:12, except that Deuteronomy is unique in specifying a gift from the first fleece (cf. 15:19–23; also 2 Chr. 31:5 = firstfruits of honey only here). These gifts fall into three categories: food and drink, oil, and material for clothing (wool from the first shearing). These categories are often mentioned in Ancient Near Eastern legal texts as the basic necessities that people supported by others must receive (Tigay 1996: 170).

5. Finally, verse 5 states the theological and social point of this whole exercise: *for the LORD your God has chosen them ... out of all your tribes*. While the whole tribe of Levi is *set apart* (10:8) for its different ministries, both priestly and non-priestly, the Levitical priests (Aaronic), including their descendants, have been *chosen* (*bāḥar*) by the Lord, to *stand and minister in the LORD's name always* (cf. 17:12; 21:5). This completes a quartet of entities described as *chosen*, beginning with the people (7:6–7), then the central sanctuary (12:5, 11), followed by the king (17:15), and finally the Levitical priests (18:5; 21:5). In this listing, Deuteronomy submits the whole organization of Israel to the criterion of Yahweh's *choice*, giving priority on the basis of the covenant made with Abraham. In terms of overall structure, it is significant that the *choice* of the Lord's holy people (7:6–7) is finally framed here by the *choice* of the Levitical priesthood (18:5). Thus, Deuteronomy has chosen to interpret Exodus 19:6 in terms of the role model presented by the tribe of Levi as this relates to *dependence* and *benefits*, which Israel must likewise transfer to God. This, together with holy character, is how Israel should live as a kingdom of priests before God (cf. Num. 16:1 – 18:32) (also see Introduction: Theology, pp. 62–63).

6–8. It would appear that a distinction is being made between priests and Levites in 18:1–8. This is indicated by the structure of

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57. The right shoulder was a priestly due in Canaan also. In the Late Bronze temple at Lachish a pit was excavated, which contained a great number of right shoulder bones (Thompson 1974: 208–209).

this section, in which verses 1–2 refer to *all* Levites, verses 3–5 refer to Levitical priests, and verses 6–8 refer to Levites who would not perform any cultic function until they come to the place that Yahweh has chosen. There they may *minister* (*šārat*) in the name of the Lord their God, and join their brother Levites (most probably priests; cf. 18:1). However, the functions performed by the Levite within this context do not necessarily equate him with the priest (cf. Num. 16:9; 2 Chr. 29:11).<sup>58</sup> These verses should therefore be read as a continuation of verses 3–5: ‘Now if a Levite comes ...’ (v. 6) ‘*and* he serves ... like all his fellow Levites ...’ (v. 7), (then) ‘he shall have his due share to eat ...’ (v. 8). On this reading, verse 7 continues the protasis of verse 6, stating a further condition, while verse 8 presents the apodosis. Also, verses 6–8 describe a more spontaneous (*in all earnestness*; v. 6b), temporal and voluntary movement on behalf of the Levite, who *could* in fact serve alongside the other priests at the central sanctuary, if he chose to do so, unlike 2 Kings 23:9. Finally, the emphasis of the passage occurs at the beginning of verse 8, which states (lit.), ‘They shall eat equal portions’, even though additional income may have been received from personal, family property.

**9–13. Detestable practices.** These verses are framed by the idea of Yahweh’s gift of the land (vv. 9, 14; McConville 2002: 299). Therefore, Israel must occupy the land in a manner worthy of God’s claim upon their lives as his holy people and treasured possession (7:6), recalling the warnings of 12:29–31 and 20:16–18. Also, the laws of 18:9–13 serve as a transition from the function of the priests who minister before the Lord at 18:1–8 to the prophets in the next section who will speak the word of the Lord to the people (18:14–22). Thus, in this section pagan ways of discerning God’s will are condemned.

**9–13.** Israel must not *learn* to imitate the detestable ways of the nations (vv. 9, 12), which would imply a failure to *learn* to revere Yahweh and follow carefully all his commands and decrees. In this respect, Israel should follow the example of their model king (cf.

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58. See Duke (1987: 193–201), who correctly argues that the objective of Deut. 18:6–8 is not to grant the right of priesthood to Levites.

17:19). The need to hear a word from the deity was universally felt in the ancient world, which now leads to a list of pagan practices associated with *divination* of one kind or another, concluding with the *consulting of the dead* (vv. 10b–11).<sup>59</sup> The list intends to be exhaustive in order to emphasize a complete prohibition of such detestable practices (cf. 1 Sam. 28:3–19; Isa. 8:19–20; 2 Kgs 17:17; 21:6). In fact, it is precisely because of *these detestable practices* that the *LORD your God* is driving out those nations before you (v. 12b). Therefore, Israel is to be *blameless* (emphatic) before the *LORD your God* (v. 13; cf. Gen. 17:1). The frame of the *LORD your God* in these last two verses is a reminder to Israel that they must worship the Lord alone, as they belong exclusively to him, and therefore are to seek any necessary revelation from him alone.

**14–22. The prophet. 14–15.** These verses introducing the prophet serve as a continuation and contrast to the previous section, with the opening word ‘for’ (*kî*) in verse 14a, and reversing the order of *sorcery* and *divination* in verse 10. Here the detestable ways of the nations are clearly out of bounds for Israel, with the emphatic *But as for you* (sing.) (v. 14b) coming immediately after the verb *they listen*. This scenario then allows Moses to talk about how *Israel* should listen to God (v. 15). It begins: *A prophet* (emphatic position) *like me* (meaning Moses as the prototype of all true prophecy in Israel, standing at the head of a succession of prophets), the Lord your God will *raise up* (cf. the ‘choosing’ of the king and priest at 17:15; 18:5). Such a prophet will *come from among your own brothers* (cf. 17:15; 18:5), concluding with the words, *You must listen to him* (v. 15b; cf. v. 14a). Thus the instruction to *listen* makes a connection and contrast between verses 9–14 and 15–19.

**16–17.** The rationale for the raising up of the prophet is now given an historical connection by Moses: *For this* (lit. ‘as all’) *is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly*, here serving as a commentary on 5:23–27. Within the context of covenant making, and more specifically the giving of the Decalogue, Israel protested that, should they be exposed any further to the fire and voice of God, they would surely die (5:25; reversed here in

59. See Blenkinsopp (1995: 10–16) for a discussion of these terms.

v. 16b to *voice* and *fire*, possibly to emphasize the ‘word’ of the prophet at v. 15b; cf. vv. 18–20). Therefore, their appeal was for Moses to become a mediator between them and God, and to stand in the council of God to receive all his further commands, decrees and laws (5:31; cf. Jer. 23:18). Thus, Moses’ authority as prophet and lawgiver is established in a twofold manner, both by the people and by God’s approval as *good* (v. 17; cf. 5:28).

**18–19.** This unit now expands on the previous verses, drawing particular attention to the divine source of the prophet’s words, and therefore the solemn responsibility to pass on every word (*everything*) that had been commanded by the Lord (v. 18; cf. 4:2; 12:32 [ET]; 13:1 [MT]; cf. 1 Sam. 3:1–21). This meant that any rebellion against such words was to be treated seriously, and God himself would call to account any who refused to *listen* (cf. v. 15b) to his words (v. 19; cf. 17:12; Amos 7:10–17; Luke 11:50–51; Acts 3:22–23).

**20.** On the other hand, a prophet who *presumes* (cf. 17:12 = hearer’s contempt of court) to speak in the name of the Lord anything not commanded by the Lord, or the prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. The first case is more ambiguous and subtle, as well as heinous and, for that reason, can ultimately be discerned only by the Lord (see Jer. 28:1–17), but the second case can presumably be identified by the community (13:1–5; cf. Jer. 23:13–40).

**21–22.** The criteria for establishing whether a prophetic word (prediction) is true or false are stated negatively, as it cannot be reversed to imply that if a prophet’s word came true, he was necessarily a true prophet *for that reason alone* (cf. 13:1–5). The litmus test here is fulfilment during the lifetime of the prophet (cf. Num. 23:19). If during this time the prophecy did not come to pass, then the prophet was not a genuine spokesman (*like Moses*) and the people need not *fear* him (v. 22b; cf. 34:10–12; see also Jer. 23:16–32). Here *fear* may refer to threats of national or individual judgment, or may relate to a reverent obedience of prophetic commands (see 18:15b, 19; Nelson 2002: 235).

### *Meaning*

The section 16:18 – 18:22 reminds Israel that entry into the Promised Land will pre-eminently require the appointment of

judges and officers to maintain law and order as authority figures within Israel (cf. 1:9-18) and, in this sense, reflects the fifth commandment relating to the honour and respect due to parents (here spiritual guardians who must be obeyed; cf. 21:18-21, also implicating civil authorities). The concern for social justice is reflected ultimately by the setting up of the national court at the central sanctuary for cases that prove too difficult for the local courts (17:8-13). The question of kingship (17:14-20), at the structural heart of the section, is not *whether* Israel should have a king, but rather what *kind* of king he must be. He must be the *LORD's choice*, and the typical symbols of power and wealth must give way to dependence upon Yahweh. In this way, he should be different from the typical oriental monarch, by being an exemplary student of the law. Furthermore, the prophet *like Moses* (18:14-22) will be raised up by the Lord as the acceptable alternative to the pagan practices of divination and sorcery, and as a response to the *voice* and *fire* of Horeb. He will convey to the people (and king) the word and will of Yahweh. And finally, all of the authorities (judge, priest, king, prophet) are mutually responsible for making sure that the nation does not adopt the magical practices of the Canaanites (16:21 - 17:7; 18:9-15), which might lead to idolatry. The section concludes with a reminder of the authority with which Moses can make these demands. He alone stands as mediator between God and Israel at Horeb (Sinai), and that is why Israel must listen to him now and to his successors in the future (18:15-22; cf. 34:10-12).

***v. A respect for life (19:1 - 22:8, with 22:5 transitional; cf. 5:17)***

*Context*

This section is an exposition of the sixth commandment: *You shall not murder* (5:17). As such, it forms the beginning of five terse commandments (5:17-21) which are joined by the recurring conjunction *waw* (*and*), and are further set apart from the previous five commandments by their thematic focus on relationships with one's neighbour. Moreover, this is the longest of the expositions on the commandments (some seventy-two verses), underlining its importance with regard to the issues of physical life and death within the land (cf. 30:15). The section as a whole is ordered

according to the priority system of socio-economic worth of institutions (19:1 – 21:9), free citizens (21:10–21), criminals (21:22–23), animals, birds and human beings (22:1–8; Kaufman 1979: 135). Despite the complexity of these various laws, the main concern is the protection of innocent life and blood, for homicide is one of the most polluting sins. It is said to defile the land, so that if it is not treated properly, it would make it impossible for Israel to remain in the land. The section can be outlined as follows:

- A. Deuteronomy 19:1–21 – Positive steps to protect innocent life: human beings.
- B. Deuteronomy 20:1 – 21:9 – Four laws relating to the principles of warfare. Conclusion: a conditional law relating to the issue of a dead body left in a field.
- B<sup>1</sup>. Deuteronomy 21:10–23 – Four laws relating to life and death. Conclusion: a conditional law relating to the issue of a dead body left on a tree.
- A<sup>1</sup>. Deuteronomy 22:1–8 – Positive steps to protect innocent life: animals, birds and human beings.

### 19:1–21. Positive steps to protect innocent life: human beings.

Deuteronomy 19:1–21 falls into three parts: (1) a law on cities of refuge (vv. 1–13); (2) the law of the landmark (v. 14); and (3) the law concerning witnesses (vv. 15–21). The chapter deals not only with the issue of homicide, but also with the judicial processes involved in regulating it.

#### *Comment*

**1–3.** These verses signify a new beginning in the argument of Deuteronomy in which the Lord has *destroyed* (*kārat*, hiphil; cf. 12:29) the nations within the land, including the possession of the enemies' goods (cf. 6:10–11). Now as a first initiative, the time has come to set aside three cities of refuge *centrally located* (v. 2), within the land spoken of as divine gift and inheritance following 4:41–43 (cf. Exod. 21:12–14). This parallels the beginning of the previous section (16:18–20), with both relating back to 1:9–18.

**3.** This verse stands alone in specifying that distances should be worked out in the context of a tripartite division of the land (with

NRSV = 'calculate the distances'; preferable to NIV = *Build roads to them*). It represents the concern for proximity and accessibility in the case of the innocent manslayer (see 4:41-43; cf. Josh. 20:7-9).

4-7. These verses provide an example of a hypothetical accidental homicide. For more on the word *kill* (v. 4a), see commentary at 5:17. This case appears to apply where (1) the killing was a purely accidental event *without malice aforethought* (NIV; v. 4b; cf. the opposite at vv. 11-13); (2) the perpetrator and victim have not previously been at loggerheads, illustrated by the example given at verse 5 of a wood gatherer whose axe head flies off and kills a bystander. In this case, there is provision to flee to the nearest of these cities in order to save his life. Otherwise, the *avenger of blood* (*gō'ēl haddām*)<sup>60</sup> might pursue him in a rage of *hot anger*, and *overtake him if the distance is too great, and kill him*, even though the perpetrator did this *without malice aforethought* or without premeditated malice (v. 6b; cf. 2 Sam. 14:6-7, 11).

Finally, verse 7 re-emphasizes the point of verses 2 and 3 and the need to avoid excessive distance.

8-10. Three further cities (in addition to the six already appointed, three on the east, and three on the west of the Jordan) were to be set aside, obviously necessitated by the expansion of Israel's territory. However, these are not appointed in Joshua 20, or anywhere else in the Old Testament. This may be consistent with the implication that in much of the book of Joshua Israel never fully kept the conditions of the covenant and therefore never *fully possessed* the land (Josh. 13:1; 18:3; 20:1-9; 24:14-27). Deuteronomy 11:22-25 may hold the key to this interpretation. Finally, verse 10 provides the rationale for the added cities, that *innocent blood* may not be shed in the land of your inheritance, and so that you (collectively) may not be guilty of *bloodshed* (cf. v. 13; 21:8-9; cf. 2 Sam. 21:1-6). That is to say, the wrongful killing of a falsely accused person would be like the sin of murder, in that it would bring impurity and defilement on the land (cf. Num. 35:32-34).

11-13. These verses clearly teach that there was to be no abuse of this right of asylum. The person who commits premeditated

60. Most probably a close relative, who is authorized and obliged to perform this act of vindication (Num. 35:12, 19-21).

homicide might flee to one of these cities, but the elders of his own city (cf. 21:2–3) could extradite him and hand him over to the avenger of blood. However, before he could be convicted, at least two or three witnesses had to come forward (Num. 35:30; cf. vv. 15–21). If found guilty, such a person was to be shown *no pity* (7:16; 13:8; 19:21; cf. Num. 35:31), for the death of the murderer was regarded as a cleansing ritual for the land which had been defiled by the shedding of innocent blood (Num. 35:33; Gen. 4:8–12; 9:6; Deut. 19:21; cf. 1 Kgs 1:50–53 and 2:28–34, where the place of refuge is the altar and not a city of refuge).

14. This apodictic prohibition, *Do not move your neighbour's boundary stone*, concludes a main section within this discussion of the sixth commandment. In doing so, it performs a function similar to 14:21 (the goat boiled in its mother's milk) at the conclusion of the third commandment, and 25:4 (the muzzled ox treading out grain) at the conclusion of the ninth commandment. Thus a pattern is provided by a floating apodictic statement for commandments three (goat), six (neighbour's boundary stone) and nine (ox). Here, possession of a share in the inheritance of land was a means of economic survival, as well as tangible proof of membership in the covenant community. Therefore, any loss of land by stealth was tantamount to a severe reduction in one's ability to survive. Boundary violation was recognized as by far the most frequent cause of disputes, whether between individuals or between nations, and thus a major cause of war and murder. To respect this law may have been understood here as both a realistic and symbolic statement about the *reality* and *prevention* of homicide.<sup>61</sup> The clandestine removing of a neighbour's boundary stone could be viewed as the equivalent of *lying in wait for him*, and taking his livelihood and ability to survive, patterned by the situation in verses 11–13, as well as false accusation (vv. 15–21) as a means of eliminating someone. Both of these elements are present in the story of Ahab and Naboth at 1 Kings 21:1–26 involving Naboth's *inheritance* (cf. Prov. 23:10–11).

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61. Kaufman (1979: 137) suggests the following organization: (1) how to deal with homicide (vv. 1–13); (2) how to *prevent* homicide (v. 14); (3) how to deal with the accusation of homicide (vv. 15–21).

**15–21.** The law requiring more than one witness for an outright conviction (v. 15) also appears at Numbers 35:30 in close association with the law on cities of refuge as it does here (cf. 17:6 within the context of idolatry). This is followed by the case of the *malicious witness* (assumed to be a liar, and also implying that the law recognizes that cases based upon a single testimony are open to abuse, especially from a ‘violent’ and ‘false’ witness; McConville 2002: 313). Such a witness is then referred to the main sanctuary (vv. 16–21; cf. 17:2–7 followed by 17:8–13). In verse 17 the two men must stand *in the presence of the LORD* at the main sanctuary, before the priests and judges (cf. 17:9 where *the judge* is sing.). But here the judges alone (perhaps drawing upon local judges as well) are mentioned as carrying out a thorough investigation (v. 18a; cf. 17:8–13 = joint decision), which would appear to consist of further gathered testimonial evidence (v. 18b; cf. 13:12–15; esp. 17:2–7). If the witness has proved to be a liar and has given false testimony against his brother, then he must receive the same punishment intended for his brother (vv. 18–19). Only in this way could the evil (*rā’*) be purged (*bi ‘ar*) from the community (v. 19b; cf. 13:6; 17:7, 12; 19:13; 21:21; 22:21–22; 24:7). The end result is that the people will *bear* about this situation and be *afraid*, so that such an evil thing will not happen again (v. 20; cf. 17:12–13 concluding the section on the central court). The chapter ends with the *lex talionis* (v. 21), a measure-for-measure application of justice intended to limit the punishment to fit the crime (cf. Exod. 21:23–25; Lev. 24:17–22). However, no ransom could be given for murder (Num. 35:31). Life must be repaid in kind (Gen. 9:6), for humankind is made in the image of God. In this respect, Israel was to *show no pity* (cf. v. 13).

#### **20:1 – 21:9. Four laws relating to the principles of warfare.**

This section addresses the fundamental principles relating to warfare within the Promised Land (20:1–20; cf. 21:10–14; 23:9–14; 24:5). But it is not understood by Israel as a ‘manual’ for military operations as such. The section concludes with the case of an unsolved murder within the land (21:1–9). In this way, it parallels the following section (21:10–23) consisting of four laws, headed by *when you go to war against your enemies* (20:1; cf. 21:10), and concluding with a law about a dead body (21:1–9; cf. 21:22–23).

**1–4.** Verses 1–9 are framed by the topic of *fear* (vv. 1, 3, 8). The

section is also structured around three separate witnesses: first Moses (v. 1), then the priest (vv. 2–4), and finally the officers (vv. 5–9). Both Moses and the priest urge courage and faith when going to war. Moses recalls the exodus victory of Yahweh with reference to *horses and chariots and an army greater than yours* (7:17–18; cf. Exod. 15:1), and *the LORD your God, who brought you up* (*‘ālā* hiphil, rather than the normal *yāšā’* hiphil = ‘brought you out’) out of Egypt. This use of the verb may anticipate the various examples of those who should enjoy the possession of the *land* without penalty in verses 5–9. The role of the priest at the time of battle is significant (vv. 2–4). His set speech is an oracle which also takes the form of a didactic sermon encouraging the army (Heb. = ‘the people’) not to *fear* the enemy, and uses *four* different verbs (in jussive mood) in verse 3. The fact that Yahweh is *with you* (vv. 1, 4) makes courage and faith possible, whereas *panic* properly belongs to the enemy (cf. 7:23; NRSV). The priest himself was not to accompany them (*you* v. 3) into battle (cf. Josh. 6:1–7). However, he had an important role to play in calling Israel to obedience and faith in Yahweh, with the words: *Hear, O Israel* (6:4; cf. 4:1; 5:1).

5–7. Israel’s attitude towards war was governed by its enjoyment and claim to the *inheritance* of the land. This may be best understood in terms of the ‘futility curse’ found in ancient treaties and at 28:30–34. The rationale of these verses is that one has the right to enjoy the work of one’s hand. Not to do so is to come under the ‘futility curse’, whereby others enjoy what is rightfully yours (cf. Eccl. 2:17–26; Luke 12:13–21). Verses 5–7 in particular have a parallel at 28:30, but in the present passage the order has been reversed to the dedication of a *new house*, the planting of a *vineyard*, and a *pledge to a woman* to be married (24:5; cf. Luke 14:16–20). Such an idealistic view of life, in which the value of community and personal well-being take precedence over that of war (revealing a somewhat *subdued* and *ambivalent* stance on warfare), was also possible only because of the profound conviction that military strength and victory lay, in the last resort, not in the army, but in God (cf. Judg. 7:1–8) (Craigie 1976: 274).

8–9. The fourth and final provision for exemption differs from the other three in that the interest of the *army* and not the individual is in view. It was common knowledge that the psychological effect of *faint-heartedness* and *panic* could have a profound effect upon the

morale and success of an army (here one's *brothers*). This provision would appear to be rather surprising and unexpected, since it could conceivably reduce an army to only a token force, especially in light of other exemptions (see Judg. 7:2-3). Here, the issue is related to the psychological effect of *fear* on one's brothers (see the spies' report at 1:28; cf. Judg. 5:2, 17, 23; 21:5-10). Finally, after this process of elimination has taken place, the officers are then to *appoint* (with NIV; against NRSV = 'the commanders shall take charge') military commanders over the army (v. 9). This next procedure may have been viewed as a counterbalance to the *fear* of verses 8-9, with the psychological effect of helping to turn fear into *trust* (see 1:29-46).

**10-14.** The second half of chapter 20 moves from military personnel (vv. 1-9) to military strategies (vv. 10-20). Initially, when about to conduct an attack upon a non-Palestinian city, terms of *peace* (*šālóm*) (v. 10) were to be offered, probably referring to the making of a 'peace treaty' (Akkadian *salīmum*, Craigie 1976: 276n.; cf. Josh. 9:15; Judg. 4:17; 1 Sam. 7:14; 2 Sam. 10:19; 1 Kgs 5:12; 20:18; 2 Kgs 18:31-32; Isa. 27:5). A defeated city (v. 11) could either be placed under tribute or, as here, subjected to forced labour (*mas*) as with the Gibeonites (cf. Josh. 9:3-6, 15-27). The city that refuses to make peace (v. 12) is to be put to the sword by killing all the *men* in it, *after* the Lord gives it into their hands (v. 13; cf. 2:24; 3:2-3; 7:24). This is not the practice of being 'put under the ban' (*hērem*) that relates to the cities of the land itself, but rather an emasculation to ensure no further threat. However, the women (cf. 21:10-14), children and livestock were to be spared, and other goods taken as plunder from the city could be *used* (lit. to 'eat', implying enjoyment; cf. 6:10-11) by the Israelites (v. 14).

**15.** This verse acts both as a conclusion to verses 10-14 (cities at a distance) and as an introduction to verses 16-18 (cities within the Promised Land).

**16-18.** Unlike the previous cities outside the land (vv. 10-14), those within the land given to Israel as an *inheritance* were to be treated differently. There was a command not to leave *anything that breathes* (v. 16). Within the present context, this best refers to the human population only, with the nations standing in apposition to *them* (v. 17; cf. 2:34-35; 3:6-7; Josh. 8:2; 11:14). In this way, the six nations mentioned here (minus the Girgashites included at 7:1) are

placed under the ban or sacred dedication. The verb *completely destroy*, at the beginning of verse 17 for emphasis, is related to the noun ‘ban’ (*hērem*; cf. 7:1–6; Josh. 6:21). The reason for the destruction of the inhabitants of the land is expressed in the words of verse 18: *Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods* (cf. 12:31; 18:9–13). Such deviant instruction will not lead to life, but to sin and death.

**19–20.** These verses return to the theme of war beyond the limits of the land (vv. 10–14), with the idea of laying siege to a city (for a long period of time) linked to verse 12. The two kinds of trees in verses 19–20 *appear* to parallel the two kinds of nations in verses 10–18. Some nations are not to be destroyed, and fruit-bearing trees are not to be cut down. On the other hand, some nations are to be destroyed, and trees that do not bear fruit may be cut down in order to build siege works *until* the city at war with them falls (implying limitation even on the cutting down of these trees). But the case of the fruit-bearing trees may not only be linked to the desire to avoid ‘futility’ with the *fruit* in verse 6, but is also important for the ecology of every land. Furthermore, these trees are not sinful *people* that they should be besieged and killed (but *not* practised towards Moab at 2 Kgs 3:19, 25). In some ways, this is similar to the mother bird sitting on her nest. She too must not be taken and killed (22:6–7).

**21:1–9.** The case of the unsolved murder has points in common with the law on the cities of refuge in terms of *distance* (v. 2; cf. 19:1–3), the word *kill* (*nāḱā*; v. 1; cf. 19:4, 6, 11; cf. 27:24–25) and the shedding of *innocent blood* (vv. 8–9; cf. 19:6, 10). These connections might suggest that the law on the cities of refuge may have broken down from time to time in favour of some unknown *avenger of blood*, or because of other unknown circumstances. In any case, this situation would defile both the perpetrator of the killing as well as the land itself, which the Lord was giving Israel to *possess* as an *inheritance* (19:1 and 10; 21:1 and 23, all within contexts relating to death in some way *defiling* the land). In this passage, such a murder involved the whole community in bloodguilt, on the assumption that there is present guilt for the shedding of innocent blood, requiring some kind of ritual to satisfy the demands of justice.

**1–2.** *If* (*ki*) begins this verse as a conditional or casuistic law, in line with the other four laws in this chapter (vv. 11 and 14, 15, 18,

22). But following the outline above, it both provides a frame within this chapter for verses 22–23 (with the possession of the land), as well as parallels verses 22–23 as a conclusion with regard to dead bodies in public places (see outline at the introduction to 20:1 – 21:9).<sup>62</sup> This case concerns a reported dead body lying in an open field, and the slayer is unknown (possibly implying that enquiry has been made without discovering the perpetrator). Therefore, it is not clear whether this counts as a case of murder or manslaughter. It was the task of representatives of the central authority (*elders* and *judges*) to measure the distance to the nearest town, and the elders of that town would then accept responsibility for the purification ritual. Such a cleansing ritual was deemed necessary because of the sacredness of the land that the Lord was giving Israel to possess, which would have been defiled by the shedding of *innocent blood* (Num. 35:33–34). The role of the *judges* in this case may have been to supervise the measurement, and act as impartial arbiters to make sure that the right city was identified, thereby avoiding further dispute (cf. 16:18–20; 17:8–13).

**3–4.** Then the *elders* of the town nearest the body are to select a heifer that has never been worked and has never worn a yoke, and take her down to a valley that has not been ploughed or planted and where there is a flowing stream. This combination of requirements may speak of something set apart or *holy* (cf. Num. 19:1–10; Lev. 16:1–22). There in the valley, the *elders* (not the priests) are to break the neck (*‘arap*) of the heifer, making it plain that this was not an act of sacrifice (*zābah*). It has been suggested that this ritual re-enacts the murder that has taken place (rather than symbolizing the execution of the murderer) and, by killing the animal on uncultivated ground, removes the bloodguilt from the area of human concern. Then the drainage of the blood into the flowing stream has the effect of removing the pollution, carrying it even farther away (see esp. 9:21; also Lev. 14:1–7; 16:15–22; Num. 19:16–21).<sup>63</sup> It is also argued that this rite of elimination has a double aspect at verses

62. See Wenham and McConville (1980: 248–252).

63. McConville (2002: 329) argues that the ritual is best understood as a visual representation of the removal of sin and its effects from the land.

6–7. The elders, by washing their hands over the animal, transfer their responsibility (or supposed culpability) in the murder on to the animal (Wright 1987: 387–403).

5. The role of the priests in this ritual is more difficult to discern. Together with the judges (v. 2), their presence may have helped to bring closure to the case of an unsolved *bloodshed* (cf. 17:8–13), and symbolize the effectiveness of the ritual performed by the elders of the nearest city for all Israel (McConville 2002: 329).

6–9. The ritual finally concludes with a symbolic hand-washing over the heifer by the elders of the nearest city (v. 6; cf. Pss 26:6; 73:13; Matt. 27:24). This is followed by their declaration of innocence: *Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see* (v. 7), almost as if they were before a court of law (cf. 17:8–13). Finally, a prayer is made not only for themselves and the city, but for the whole nation of *Israel* (v. 8). At the heart of the prayer is the need for atonement (meaning to ‘remove’, ‘wipe clean’ or ‘cover over’ sin). The expression ‘atone’ or ‘make atonement’ (better than NIV = *Accept this atonement*; *kāpar*, piel imperative; cf. 32:43) is found at the beginning of verse 8, thus appealing to Yahweh’s sovereign grace and action to be demonstrated in this ritual. A different form of the verb is then used towards the end of the verse (v. 8b) (NIV). Within this frame of ‘atonement’, Israel herself is called a *redeemed* (*pādā*) people (‘out of the land of Egypt’ = LXX, in connection with a ransom price paid as a legal transaction by Yahweh; see commentary on 7:8). In this way, innocent bloodshed will be atoned for, and the guilt of shedding innocent blood will be *purged* from the people (v. 9; cf. 32:43).

**21:10–23. Four laws relating to life and death. 10–14.** The law of the female prisoner of war links back to 20:1 and 20:10–15, where women are listed among the items of booty taken in war. Four things were required of the woman: she must shave her head and cut her nails (v. 12), as well as put aside her foreign garments and engage in a month of mourning (v. 13). Most likely these represented a clean break with the past, as well as a sign of purification and transfer to a new life (Lev. 14:8; Num. 8:7; cf. 2 Sam. 19:4). However, the main concern of this law is that captive women should be treated with *dignity*, also at four different levels. (a) She is not to be raped or enslaved as a concubine, but is to receive full

status as a wife (vv. 11, 13). (b) She is to be given time to adjust to her new traumatic situation and ritually mourn for her parents (presumed dead) within the security of her new home (v. 13b). (c) A restriction is placed upon the soldier's 'bridegroom's rights' by postponing any sexual intercourse with the woman until this month of mourning and adjustment is over (v. 13b). (d) If the man finally decides not to take her as his wife, she is to leave as a 'free' woman (cf. 24:1-4), and is not to be sold or treated as a slave (v. 14). In this way, the 'unloved captive woman' forms an inner frame with the *unloved wife* in verses 15-17.

**15-17.** The loss of men through death in battle often resulted in polygamy, with resultant problems. Here, for the first time in the Bible, the principle is stated that a firstborn son had to be given double inheritance rights, even if this son belonged to the unfavoured wife (e.g. 2 Kgs 2:9; NRSV = a 'double share' of your spirit). But presumably if seven sons were involved, the estate would be divided into eight portions, with the firstborn son receiving two of them (i.e. twice as much as the share of any other son). Finally, the reason (v. 17) why the firstborn son belonging to the unloved wife was to be given the *double share* is that this son is the 'first issue' of his procreative power (i.e. a sign of the man's ability to produce children).

**18-21.** Whereas the previous law (vv. 15-17) protects a son from an unfair father, this law protects parents from an unruly son (vv. 18-21). Together they illustrate the balance of rights and responsibilities that exist in a family, and even more so in a wider society (Wright 1996: 235). Three main issues are involved here. (1) If this law balances the previous one, then it may envisage a firstborn son who is proving totally unworthy of his inheritance, disobeying both *father and mother*, and as a *profligate and a drunkard* (v. 20b; cf. Prov. 23:19-25) threatening the family's future economic viability and posterity. Further, rebelliousness of this kind might also lead to the worst kind of crimes (esp. Exod. 21:15, where 'strike' can mean 'kill'; also see Exod. 21:17). (2) The penalty for this law (*stoning to death*) places it on the same level as idolatry, sedition and bloodguilt (13:6-11; 17:5; esp. 17:8-13; 19:11-13, 16-21; 21:9; esp. 22:21, 24). At issue is a disrespect for both father and mother (also relating to the fifth commandment), who together are finally responsible (after repeated

disciplinary measures have failed) for bringing their *stubborn and rebellious* son before the *elders* at the gate of *his town* (v. 19; cf. 21:1–9; 27:16). Thus, this issue is resolved in the public arena before the elders, thereby also implying social ramifications for the wider covenant community. (3) Finally, if this law is linked in some way to those found at Exodus 21:15 and 21:17, then it could be argued that Deuteronomy has added its own legal innovation here in terms of verses 19–20 (= the son who refuses to cease his gluttony and drinking), thus significantly reducing the *scope* of any delinquent behaviour against parents punishable by death.<sup>64</sup> In fact, there is no evidence that such a measure was carried out in the Old Testament.

**22–23.** These verses conclude chapter 21, beginning with the words ‘*And if*’ (*wěkeš*; MT). In doing so, they provide a parallel to the opening *if* passage of 21:1–9 with regard to a dead body in a public and open space. But the difference here is that the corpse is of an executed criminal, rather than of a murder victim. Also, this case is not one of crucifixion, but impaling on a tree *after* execution has taken place (normally by stoning). This was common in a variety of forms in the Ancient Near East in biblical times (see Num. 25:4; Josh. 8:29; 10:26–27; 1 Sam. 31:8–13; 2 Sam. 4:12; 21:5–9; Lam. 5:12). It is important to note that the body was not ‘accursed of God’ because it was hanging on a tree; rather, it was hanging on a tree because it was accursed of God (v. 23; best understood as a subjective genitive = *God’s curse* with NIV and NRSV; Craigie 1976: 285). The point here is that the open display of the body is *limited* to one day, so that the presence of one so cursed might not *defile* the land (Matt. 27:57–61; cf. Acts 5:30; Gal. 3:13). This brings to full circle the opening image of the land defiled by the body of the murder victim (21:1–9).

**22:1–8. Positive steps to protect innocent life: animals, birds and human beings.** The following set of mixed laws can be seen as positive steps to protect innocent life, including that of animals and birds, and concluding with human life itself (22:8). In this way, it parallels and extends 19:1–21 by taking positive steps to protect

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64. See Fleishman (2003: 311–327). For another view see Hagedorn (2000: 101–121) who relates this to the fifth commandment and the guarding of the parents’ honour.

the innocent lives of human beings from *blood guilt*. Thus, this passage fittingly ends a long section related mainly to the sixth commandment: *You shall not commit murder*.

1-4. These warm-hearted laws spell out what it means to love one's neighbour as oneself in practical ways, and they build upon Exodus 23:4-5, except that the original judicial context of the court case with *your enemy's ox* and *someone who hates you* now changes to *your brother's ox or sheep* (v. 1), or his *donkey, cloak* or *anything he loses* (v. 3). The motivational element for keeping this law is the term *brother* (used six times in verses 1-4), and the description even extends to those who are non-local and personally unknown (v. 2). This may suggest that this law was difficult to enforce in practice. But in lifting the law from its original judicial context in Exodus, Deuteronomy now extends its application to all Israelites at any time, and appears to ignore any danger of the rescuer being accused of theft. One level of meaning is that animals should not have to suffer possible death because of human disputes and neglect. This is highlighted by the repetition of the phrase *do not ignore it* (vv. 1, 3, 4), especially when you *see* it (vv. 1, 4), which counteracts the human reaction to 'not get involved' (cf. Luke 10:30-35; Wright 1996: 240). Another level of meaning is that lost property of any sort must be restored if the owner is known (v. 1). This especially relates to the loss of valuable resources which would bring hardship and suffering (a kind of 'death') to the person who had lost them. This point is reinforced by the procedure and personal expense involved in verse 2, which applied to anything lost or found (v. 3). Finally, the case of verse 4 focuses not only on love for one's neighbour, but also on the well-being of the animal which has *fallen* or 'collapsed' (*nāpal*; cf. Exod. 23:5), possibly under the weight of his load (cf. Num. 22:21-33).

5. This law reflects the blurring of mixtures at Leviticus 19:19, but here its direct target is the wearing of any item (not limited to clothing) belonging to the opposite sex. This may have sought to discourage homosexuality, or to prevent transvestite practices found in Canaanite and Mesopotamian worship, as suggested by the word *detestable* (*tô'ēbâ*; cf. 12:31; 18:12; 23:17-18).<sup>65</sup> It is argued that this

65. See Vedeler (2008: 459-476).

verse also serves as a *transition* to the sin of improper mixtures in the laws of sexual purity in 22:9 – 23:18. In the meantime, it links verses 5–8 with verses 9–12 in the form of a chiasm: dress (v. 5), animals (vv. 6–7), house (v. 8), field (v. 9), animals (v. 10) and dress (vv. 11–12). This has the effect of linking *death* (sixth commandment) with *mixtures* (seventh commandment) (so Kaufman 1978–9: 136 and Merrill 1994: 298).

6–7. The principle of saving the mother bird is best linked to the preservation of life (sixth commandment), as well as to the ensuring of a food chain within the land. In this way, it has links with both the fruit-bearing trees spared in siege warfare (20:19–20), as well as with the law forbidding the boiling of a kid in its mother's milk (14:21). Here *long life* is linked with the fifth commandment (5:16) and, by logical extension, with the sixth commandment (cf. 21:18–21).

8. The section 22:1–8 now concludes with the instruction to homebuilders to build a parapet around the roof of a new house, in order to prevent the accidental death of anyone using the roof for relaxation or other reasons, as this would bring bloodguilt upon the household (cf. the *cities of refuge* at 19:10).<sup>66</sup> This is to be done at one's own cost and to prevent anyone from *falling* (cf. the brother's *fallen* donkey or ox at v. 4, and the *fallen* bird's nest at vv. 6–7) from the roof to their death (cf. 21:1, 9).

### *Meaning*

The section 19:1 – 22:8 is concerned with the sixth commandment (5:17) and covers premeditated murder and manslaughter, cities of refuge, rules for warfare, as well as death within the land in a more general sense, even down to the mother bird upon her nest (22:6–7). More verses (seventy-two) are devoted to this section than to any other, highlighting the importance of the issues of life and death within the land (cf. 30:15). These laws value the dignity and worth of life across a broad spectrum. Furthermore, the section as a whole is ordered according to the priority system of socio-economic worth of institutions (19:1 – 21:9), free citizens (21:10–21), criminals

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66. See Code of Hammurabi (para 229–233; *ANET*, p. 176).

(21:22–23), animals, birds and human beings (22:1–8; Kaufman 1979: 135). It is especially emphasized that *innocent blood* not be shed within the land, thereby bringing *blood-guilt* upon the people, and *desecration* upon the land. This theme is found in the outer frames of the section at 19:10 and 22:8, as well as within the conclusions to the two inner frames at 21:9 and 21:22–23.

*vi. Unholy mixtures and adultery (22:9 – 23:18, with 23:15–16 transitional; cf. 5:18)*

*Context*

Though adultery is clearly alluded to only once in this section on purity (22:22), there can be no doubt that the focus is on expounding the seventh commandment: *You shall not commit adultery*. This sin was known as the ‘Great Sin’ in the Ancient Near East (see comment on 5:18, pp. 127–128). In the Old Testament, the covenant relationship between God and his people is often portrayed in terms of a marriage (e.g. Hosea), and to prove unfaithful to that bond was a form of spiritual adultery. Hence the following laws address improper ‘mixtures’, which begin to point in the direction of crossing boundaries and a lack of purity in sexuality.

9–11. These three brief laws about not mixing (two kinds of seeds, the ox and the ass, wool and linen) may be understood as referring to unnatural combinations that violate the purity of the species (Thompson 1974: 235). As such, they may be seen within this context as serving as a prelude to the following laws on chastity, which deal with unlawful mixing at the sexual level.

Deuteronomy *limits* sowing two kinds of seed (grapevine and one other) within the vineyard (v. 9a; cf. Lev. 19:19 = *field*), which would produce a situation of mixing or boundary violation.<sup>67</sup> As such, not only would the extra crop become defiled (*holy/set apart* or ‘forfeit to the sanctuary’), but also the fruit of the vineyard could no longer be used (v. 9b; 20:6; cf. Lev. 19:23–25).

The ox and the donkey (v. 10) were probably to be set apart on

67. Houtman (1984: 226–228). Prohibited also in Hittite laws with the penalty of death, probably on the basis of religious or cultural taboos.

the basis of the clean/unclean distinction reflected earlier at 14:3–8 (Lev. 11:1–47; cf. 1 Cor. 6:14–18). At Leviticus 19:19 the prohibition is against *mating* two kinds of animals.

Verse 11 has a connection with verse 5 on the basis of *wearing* certain kinds of *clothing* inappropriate (or mixed) for both sexes, but here the prohibition is against the *wearing* of *mixed fabric* (wool and linen) woven together (see Exod. 26:1; 28:4–6; 39:29; and 4QMMT: 75–85 where these mixtures are reserved for sacred use).

**12.** The version of this law in Numbers (15:37–41) states that the purpose of the tassels on the garments is to remind Israel to obey all God's commands so that they will not *prostitute* themselves by pursuing the *lusts* of their own hearts and eyes (Num. 15:39). This verse therefore provides a link with verse 11 (on the basis of clothing) and a fitting frame for 22:30 [ET] with the words *corner* (v. 12) and *bed* (v. 30; *kānāp*), in order to produce a bracket for the six intervening laws about sexual offences. The first three of these (vv. 13–19; 20–21; 22) have *married women* as their focus, whereas the last three (vv. 23–24; 25–27; 28–29) are concerned with *unmarried women*.

**13–19.** In this first case, a charge of infidelity is brought by the husband against a wife whom he has just married. It is difficult to know what motives may have been behind such a charge. Here the man *hates* his wife, because he does not find her to be a virgin (v. 14). This could mean either that his new wife was not a virgin when he married her, or that she had been pregnant before the marriage and has concealed this. In any case, the parents produce the evidence required to establish the integrity of the woman's virginity and of her household, which was necessary because of the *slander* brought against her character as a virgin (v. 17). As a result, the man is possibly beaten and fined one hundred shekels, which is double the amount of the scenario mentioned at verses 28–29. This may signal that the possibility of a divorce in this case has been made doubly difficult. The amount was paid to the woman's father, possibly to restore any damaged honour to the parents (vv. 16–17, 19). Finally, verse 19 shifts the focus of the law away from the rights of the husband and father to the *reputation* of the woman as an Israelite virgin. The man must not divorce her as long as she lives. This law appeared to provide a strong deterrent against the possibility of a false and malicious charge motivated by greed and self-

ishness (e.g. to reclaim the bridal gift paid to the father). At the same time, it would provide security to the woman given in marriage, as the husband's case would be very difficult to sustain on the basis of the parents' protected evidence.

**20–21.** This law may be regarded as a counter-case to the previous one, which parallels a similar double law in the Code of Hammurabi (para 142–143; *ANET*, p. 172). If the man's accusations prove to be true mainly on the basis of lack of proof relating to the girl's virginity (in which case the parents would not be able to approach the elders at the gate in a judicial context), she is to be brought to the door of her father's house and there the men of her town are to stone her to death (v. 21a). The reason given is that she has done a *disgraceful thing in Israel* (Heb. *nēbālā*; linked to sexually immoral acts at Gen. 34:7; Judg. 19:23–24; 2 Sam. 13:12–13; and adultery at Jer. 29:23), by being promiscuous while still in her father's house (v. 21b). This law was probably given to ensure the virginity of brides (including the woman's need for proof), and also to halt the threat of laxity seen as a dangerous trend (cf. 21:18–21 where this point is present; Nelson 2002: 271).

**22.** The case of adultery directly links with the seventh commandment (5:18; see commentary, pp. 127–128), and with the previous law as a *disgraceful thing* (cf. Jeremiah 29:23). Furthermore, it relates to the laws either side of it, with the expression *you must purge the evil from Israel* (v. 22) as a chiasmic centre for *among you* (vv. 21b and 24b). The requirement that both parties be caught in the act (*found sleeping*) is a protection against unfounded accusations, in light of the severity of the death sentence. The status of the man is not identified (whether married or unmarried), but the woman is described as *another man's wife*, which makes it clear that the offence relates to the violation of the husband's rights to procreate, endangering the orderly transmission of his estate to his heirs (Walton and Matthews 1997: 252).

**23–27.** As with the law of the virgin (vv. 13–19) and its counter-case (vv. 20–21), this section on the other side of the pivotal verse 22 poses a similar scenario. Here we have the case of a virgin in a town who is pledged to be married (vv. 23–24), and its counter-case of a virgin in the countryside who is also pledged to be married (vv. 25–27).

**23–24.** In the first example, the central issue is the woman's *consent* to the act which was assumed, since she might have called out for help. In this case both parties were to be stoned at the gate of that town. The reason given is that the girl could have expected to receive help from the people within the town, but did not do so. On the other hand, the man violated a betrothed girl within that town, which was tantamount to committing adultery with a married woman, the *wife* of one of his fellow Israelites.

**25–27.** The counter-case is introduced by *But if* (Heb. *wě-'im*) as at verse 20. But here the setting is open country, and *force* is also involved. The Hebrew text says, 'if he seizes her and lies with her', which the NIV rightly translates as *rapes her* (v. 25). The parallel with *murder* (v. 26) suggests a degree of force has taken place. Therefore, it was presumed that the betrothed girl called out and there was nobody to hear or rescue her. In this case, only the man was to die, because the girl had committed no offence, and was a passive victim throughout the ordeal.

**28–29.** This law reflects that found at Exodus 22:16–17 [ET]. But here the situation involves the complementary case of the seduction of an unbetrothed virgin. Therefore, there is no question of capital offence because no marriage or betrothal has apparently been compromised. While the NIV and many other versions treat this as a case of *rape* too, the terminology here is different, which points rather to a case of *seduction* with the expression *and they are discovered* (v. 28b). If they are discovered, then the man is obliged to marry the girl, and is prevented from ever divorcing her (v. 29b). As part of this arrangement, he has to pay the sum of fifty shekels of silver to the girl's father, which may have represented the equivalent of a bride price.

**30.** This verse provides a frame with verse 12 (see commentary there) for the six laws in between, with the noun *kānāp* (*corner/skirt*) in the context of covering (22:12) and uncovering (22:30 [ET]). This law forbids a man to *marry* his stepmother or his father's wife, probably assuming that the father has died in the meantime (cf. Lev. 18:8; 20:11; Deut. 27:20). In Hebrew, the expression *to dishonour his father's bed* is literally 'to uncover his father's skirt'. In either case, the purpose of the law protects the integrity of the extended family in a polygamous context by blocking a son's inheritance of his father's

wives (21:15-17; cf. Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4; 2 Sam. 16:22; 1 Kgs 2:22-25).<sup>68</sup>

**23:1-8.** The next four apodictic (absolute) laws have in common the refrain *enter*, with the first three negative in form, *may not enter* (*lō' yābō'*) (23:1, 2, 3 [ET]), and the fourth positive, *may enter* (23:8). Each also involves the *the assembly (qāhāl) of the LORD* as the covenant community of God. This particular phrase is found only here in the present chapter (vv. 1-8), with its other usage relating to the *day of the assembly*, when the whole people of Israel gathered at Horeb to receive the Ten Commandments (4:10; 5:22; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16; cf. 31:30). Thus, here the worshipping community is defined in a more limited fashion with the exclusion of the following three groups of people.

**1.** Men who had mutilated their reproductive organs, either by accident (*crushing*) or deliberately (*cutting*; e.g. eunuchs), were excluded from the assembly, possibly on religious grounds (14:1-2; cf. Lev. 21:5-8, esp. 17-20; 22:24). Also, this particular exclusion may have been related to the covenant identification of circumcision for males (Gen. 17:9-14), which would thus be circumvented by this situation (cf. 10:16; 30:6), including the Abrahamic promise of progeny (11:10-11; 10:22; 28:62).<sup>69</sup> Later this situation would change (cf. Isa. 56:3-5; Acts 8:26-40).

**2.** The second prohibition refers to those from a *forbidden marriage (mamzēr)* (cf. Zech. 9:6). The context might suggest either incestuous marriages (22:30; 23:3-6; cf. Lev. 18:6-20; 20:10-21) or cult prostitutes (23:17-18). However, Zechariah 9:6 may provide an important clue, as it refers to the mixed population of Ashdod, indicating mixed parentage (cf. vv. 3-6; 7:1-3). That is, any child born of a Hebrew-pagan marriage would be excluded to the tenth generation, which probably means *for ever*, as the number ten was a symbol of completeness (Harman 1996: 211).

**3-6.** *No Ammonite or Moabite* (both tribes of incestuous unions; Gen. 19:30-38) *or any of his descendants* down to the tenth generation

68. Wright (1996: 245) takes this to mean while the father is still alive.

69. Friedman (2001: 635) takes this to mean that they may not marry an Israelite woman.

was to appear before the Lord in solemn assembly. This was because the Ammonites did not provide bread and water to the Israelites after they came out of Egypt (Deut. 2:26–30), and the Moabites hired Balaam (note the *Babylonian* connections of v. 4b) to pronounce curses on them (Num. 22–24; cf. Gen. 12:3). But the Lord reversed these curses into blessings, because the Lord *loves you* (cf. 7:7, 12–16). With such people (v. 6; cf. 7:1–3) Israel was never to seek a *covenant of peace* (Num. 25:12; Isa. 54:10; Ezek. 37:26) or good will (1 Sam. 25:30; 2 Sam. 2:6; 7:28).

7–8. As distinct from the first three groups, the claims of kinship (Edomites; cf. Amos 1:11–12; Obad. 10 from eighth–seventh centuries BC) and hospitality (Egyptians) allowed the grandchildren of resident aliens from these nationalities to be included in the covenant community. The Israelites' attitude to the Egyptians (v. 7) was governed by the fact that they themselves had lived as *aliens* in Egypt, recalling especially the earlier period of their settlement there when they had been shown generous hospitality by the Egyptians. After three generations (v. 8), those within these groups who believed and were committed to the covenant could enter the assembly of the Lord (cf. Isa. 56:1–8).

9–14. The opening words *When you go out/are encamped ...* (v. 9) link this passage with the basic rules for warfare in 20:1–20. Here the concern is not just of a physical nature, but involves issues of ritual purity, with the words *keep away from everything impure* (lit. 'evil', Heb. *rā'*, v. 9; cf. Num. 5:1–4).

10–11. The first example probably refers to any kind of nocturnal emission, whether urine or semen (cf. Lev. 15:16–18; 22:4; 1 Sam. 21:1–6). In this case, the man is to go outside the camp and stay there until evening approaches, when, after ritual washing, he may return.

12–14. The next example has to do with a different form of emission, namely defecation. The Hebrew word for *place* is simply 'hand' (*yād*) (which might indicate a 'place' or 'pointer' such as we use today). The word *outside* the camp is mentioned three times in verses 12–13 [ET] for emphasis. In this case, a hole has to be dug in order for the excrement to be buried, implying a degree of holiness even in the camp's vicinity. The rationale for this practice is that *the LORD your God moves about (mithallēk) in your camp* (cf. Eden at Gen. 3:8) to

protect you and to deliver your enemies to you (Lev. 26:12–13; cf. Num. 10:35). But even more important, the camp must be holy, because the Lord himself is *holy* (7:6; cf. Lev. 19:1–2; Josh. 24:19). An *indecent* thing (*‘erwat dābār*; v. 14b; literally ‘nakedness of a thing’) refers broadly to a matter of shameful behaviour (see Gen. 9:22–23; cf. Exod. 20:26). At stake here is any act of ‘indecentcy’ that might be practised by God’s covenant people within his holy presence. This can only offend the Lord and cause him to turn away from them.

**15–16.** On first impressions, this law appears to have little or nothing to do with the overall theme of 22:9 – 23:18 on laws of sexuality and purity. But connections of a literary kind can be made with verses 13–14 (e.g. *sit outside / sit in your midst, deliver / take refuge, and among you*). Further, this law may be regarded as a trailer, as found in other oriental collections, such as the laws of Hammurabi, anticipating the property laws in 23:19 – 24:7 (esp. 24:7).<sup>70</sup> Following the topic of military campaigns (vv. 9–14), the plight of foreign slaves may have arisen in the light of this context more than at any other period. But whatever the particular situation, three things are specified about them. First, while international treaties often required the return of fugitive slaves,<sup>71</sup> Israel was not to follow this practice. To do so would imply that she was in a covenant relationship with foreign nations (cf. 7:2b; 23:6). Secondly, the foreign slave is permitted to imitate Yahweh in the free choice of a *place* (as in the law of centralization), and should live fully integrated in Israel’s midst (*among you*) just as Yahweh does (cf. 6:15; 7:21; Hamilton 1992: 117–121). Thirdly, such a slave was not to be *oppressed* (*yānā*) in any way. This may be deliberately recalling Israel’s treatment of the alien (Exod. 22:21 [ET]), and also her own former status as aliens and *oppressed slaves* in Egypt.<sup>72</sup>

70. Although Merrill (1994: 312) regards vv. 15–16 as well as vv. 17–18 as a combined transition to 23:19 – 24:7 on the theme of ‘stealing’.

71. See the Code of Hammurabi (laws 15–20) *ANET*, pp 166–167. Also see *ANET*, pp. 200–204.

72. Merrill (1994: 312) observes that just as Israel was never to be returned to her Egyptian overlord, so the verb *oppress* (*yānā*) may here suggest returning an escapee to his master and therefore to a former state of bondage.

17–18. Israel's law against prostitution (Lev. 19:29) now prohibits this practice within the context of worship, as well as linking sexuality with deity. The words used in verse 17 for *temple prostitute* (NIV) are both related to the word *holy* (for female and male respectively; cf. 22:5). It is generally thought that these people were involved in some form of fertility ritual, designed to secure plenty in the sphere of family, herds and flocks. A better case can be made here for the presence of *sacred* prostitution both in Israel and in the Ancient Near East, in which prostitutes may be employed by the shrine or temple as a means of raising funds (Walton and Matthews 1997: 255). Here, the motivation for such activity (v. 18) appears to have been the fulfilment of a vow, possibly as a form of popular religion (Prov. 7:10–20; cf. 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:46 [ET]; 2 Kgs 23:7). The Hebrew word for *male prostitute* (NIV) in verse 18 is the derogatory expression for 'dog' (*keleb*). This could refer either to a 'devoted follower' in the service of a pagan god (cf. *ANET*, p. 322), or to the price in exchange for a vow promising a dog to the temple, since a canine could not be sacrificed. Finally, the point of the text is that *both* male and female prostitutes and the offerings made from their earnings are *detestable* (*tô'ebâ*) to the Lord (v. 18).<sup>73</sup> The different terms used are possibly playing on the distinction between two levels of gendered sacred prostitutes (cf. Gen. 38:1–21), in line with a similar twofold gendered format link to 22:5 (cross-boundary dressing).

### Meaning

The misuse of sex in 22:9–23:18 is seen as highly polluting, and its prohibition may be viewed as an extension of the seventh commandment (5:18). The section opens with laws about unholy mixtures (22:9–12), which thereby fittingly introduce unholy mixtures of a sexual kind (22:13–30). The severity of penalties (death by stoning) for sexual sins underlines the great importance placed upon the sacredness of marriage within Israel, as this relates to kinship, progeny and inheritance, as well as Israel's standing

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73. Friedman (2001: 638) takes v. 19 to mean vowing an amount to the temple that is known to be the going rate for a prostitute. But it is better to see v. 19 as the *earnings* of both male and female prostitutes.

before Yahweh as a holy people. Surprisingly, those who may or may not enter the assembly of the Lord are not restricted to Israel (23:3–8), and Israelites can be excluded on the basis of certain ritual (sexual) impurities (23:1–2; cf. 14:1–2). The assembly of the covenant people is ultimately a spiritual community, determined by conditions which largely prevailed during the exodus and wilderness periods. It also takes into account the promise to Abraham: *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse* (Gen. 12:3). Finally, ritual purity of a sexual kind should even govern warfare, because the Lord moves about in the camp (23:9–14), and should also direct how Israel are to worship him, because the Lord is present in his sanctuary (23:17–18).

***vii. No stealing or exploitation at any level (23:19 – 24:7; cf. 5:19)***

*Context*

These laws apply the eighth commandment, *You shall not steal* (5:19), to a range of ancient problems. The theft of property is implied by lending at interest (23:19–20), failing to honour vows (23:21–23), and abuse of generosity (23:24–25). Then the theft of ‘life’ is suggested by the law on divorce and remarriage (24:1–4), and the prohibition of sending a recently married man to war (24:5), connected metaphorically to the pair of millstones which were not to be taken as security for a debt (24:6). Finally, there is the theft of physical life in terms of kidnapping a brother Israelite (24:7; Kaufman 1979: 140).

*Comment*

**19–20.** The Old Testament laws relating to interest taking (lit. ‘biting’; cf. ‘dog’ at v. 18) are unique in the Ancient Near Eastern world. Furthermore, Deuteronomy’s law supersedes even that of earlier Pentateuchal laws (cf. Exod. 22:25–27; Lev. 25:36–37) by relating this to *money or food or anything else*. In other nations, interest might be levied on money and goods at rates of between 20% and 50%. Here, it is not the poor who are specifically targeted, but the *brother* Israelite in general. However, the foreigner whose interests would be mainly commercial may be charged interest. This law appears to pick up the intent and spirit of 15:1–11 at two levels.

(1) As far as the material necessities of life are concerned, people should live with the interests of others in mind, even at personal cost (cf. Phil. 2:4, 19–30; Rom. 13:8–10). (2) The ban on *interest* taking (seven times in vv. 19–20) corresponds to the appeal not to withhold a loan from the needy, even when it is unlikely that the capital will be recovered (15:9). Finally, the attendant blessing (23:20b) is virtually the same as at 15:10. The Lord will continue to bless and provide for those who have learned to share the abundance of the land with their *brothers*, so that none suffer deprivation.

**21–23.** The vow (*nēder*; cf. v. 18) was linked to other forms of offerings made to the Lord (Lev. 7:16–17; 22:17–33). Deuteronomy carries forward this concept as it relates to worship at the central sanctuary (Deut. 12:6, 11, 17, 26; cf. Pss 50:14; 66:13–15; 116:16–19). The term is first recorded with reference to Jacob at Bethel (Gen. 28:20–21; cf. Deut. 26:1–15). Vows, by virtue of their voluntary nature, did not have to be made, and people who did not make them were not considered guilty (v. 22). But the framing verses (vv. 21 and 23) point out that once vows had been made, they were binding. Further, they must surely be carried out without unnecessary delay, because such a vow was made to *the LORD your God* (cf. Num. 30:2–17 for some of the practicalities involved; also see Eccl. 5:4–7). It was considered a *sin* not to carry out a vow (v. 21b), and the Lord would certainly demand it of his people (cf. Judg. 11:30–40).

**24–25.** Just as the *brother Israelite* was not to be exploited at verses 19–20, so the tables are now turned here in favour of landowners who were to be protected from unfair exploitation by the community (*you* sing.). However, while property rights were to be respected, a traveller in genuine need was permitted to gather food from the vineyard or field (cf. 24:19–22). But a *limitation* is here placed upon this activity, in that nothing could be taken away in a basket, or reaped with a sickle. This would constitute an abuse of privilege and an act of theft (cf. Matt. 12:1–8).

**24:1–4.** This is not a general law permitting divorce or setting forth grounds for it, but simply takes the practice of divorce for granted (cf. 22:19, 29). The case is therefore a special one, framed in a casuistic fashion (as an ‘if’ or hypothetical situation). The first three verses are the protasis (‘if’ section), describing a situation of

successive marriages that have terminated. Then verse 4 contains the apodosis ('then' section) which supplies the consequence to verses 1-3, and brings the law to a conclusion.<sup>74</sup>

1. Within the first marriage, the ground given for divorce is *something indecent* ('*erwat dābār*; see commentary on 23:14b; cf. 25:11-13) the man finds about his wife. This does not apply to adultery, which was punished by death (22:22). Since this law is mainly concerned with what happens *after* a divorce, it does not specify the actual details of the grounds for divorce. The written certificate of divorce (*sēper kērītūt*) was a wise provision to safeguard the woman's rights (lit. to be given 'into her hand'), thereby giving her legal protection and security to marry again. But the man's action may have also exempted him from any requirement to restore money received from her family at the time of marriage.<sup>75</sup> Or the issue may have involved a case of *false accusation*, whereby the husband acquires his wife's forfeited bride-price and the bride-price she would bring from her second marriage (Westbrook 1986: 387-405). Understood in this way, the verse also acts as a trailer for the section on false witness that begins in 24:8.

2-3. The second divorce is passed over quickly, although the word *dislike/hates* (*šānē*) is the same verb used of the man who makes an unjustified accusation against his wife at 22:13 and 16 (see previous comments). But the scenario of the second husband also possibly 'dying' would leave the woman as a widow (v. 3b). In either case, she would be free to remarry without committing adultery. Thus, the legal position of the woman is established as a prelude to the final decision to be made in verse 4.

4. The final judgment made here places a *limitation* on the first husband, who may not remarry the woman. She is now clearly out of bounds to the first husband (cf. Jer. 3:1-5), and the reason given here is that she has been declared *defiled* (McConville 2002: 359). For

74. See Warren (1998: 39-56) for a different construction of the protasis/apodosis in this section.

75. See Code of Hammurabi (law 142) *ANET*, p. 172, which speaks of the woman taking the initiative in leaving her husband without cause, and also taking her dowry with her back to her father's house.

the man to take this woman back as his wife, after declaring her *defiled* and forcing her into the second marriage, would be *detestable* (*tô'ēbā'*; cf. 23:18) before the Lord, and would also defile the land given to Israel as an inheritance (Matt. 5:31–32; 19:1–12; cf. Matt. 1:18–25).

5. This law should belong with the exemptions from military service at 20:5–8, but its presence here is clearly supported by the previous law. Now follows a law on the *maintenance* of marriage as the mainstay of Israelite society. Earlier, exemption from army service was granted for a betrothed man (20:7), and this law is intended to guard a newly married couple for one year against the premature death of the husband, and to bring *happiness* to the wife he has married (cf. Prov. 5:18). Economic tensions could also arise on the death of a young man who was childless (cf. 25:5–10). The one-year period would help to ensure the happiness and security of the wife, as well as to facilitate starting a family.

6. It was common practice to take 'pledges' as securities on loans, both in Israel and in the Ancient Near Eastern world (cf. 15:1–3). This apodictic-style law was designed to protect the poor man from surrendering his family's livelihood and *life* itself (lit. 'that would be taking a life in pledge'). The ancient mill consisted of two stones used for making daily bread. A lower channelled stone remained stationary, while the upper millstone (*rekeb*; lit. 'rider') moved over the top of it.<sup>76</sup> This law ties in with verses 10–13 and verse 17, and has a thematic link with the law prohibiting interest-taking (23:19–20; cf. Exod. 22:25–27). Here human survival takes precedence over a creditor's rights.

7. This law appropriately concludes the eighth commandment on stealing. The word used for *kidnapping* is literally *steal*, found elsewhere only at 5:19. Of all forms of theft, the stealing of a brother Israelite for purposes of slavery or selling was the most oppressive and degrading (cf. 7:6–8), and all the more so if this involved enslavement to a foreign land, depriving the victim of the benefits of belonging to the covenant community (cf. 21:14; also see the

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76. It is also interesting to note that the sexual imagery of the two preceding laws lingers here. See Kaufman (1978/9: 140).

reverse at 23:15). This most serious form of stealing a *life* (*nepes̄*; providing a catchword with v. 6) from his brothers required the death penalty (Exod. 21:16). In this manner, such evil was to be purged from Israel (cf. 22:21, 22, 24).

### *Meaning*

The exposition of the eighth commandment against ‘stealing’ is applied in 23:19 – 24:7 to a range of ancient problems (also see commentary on 5:19). These laws draw attention to the value and dignity placed upon human *life* in terms of the family and the individual, as the covenant people of Yahweh living as *brother Israelites* within the land of their inheritance (24:4). At the centre of these laws is the focus on marriage, the core value of Israelite society. There is need for protection in divorce proceedings for women who could be robbed of security (24:1–4), as well as protection for a newly married couple who could be deprived of family and security because of war (24:5). These laws cover different classes of people and situations within the covenant community, and they were anchored in the holy character and promises of God in terms of worship (23:21–23), and with regard to the gift and blessings of the *land* they were about to inherit (23:19–20; 24:4, 7). Finally, they were designed to resist and defy the notion of *slavery* within the land (McConville 2002: 364). Israel must always remember that they were rescued from Egypt, *the land of slavery*, and therefore to inflict any of these forms of theft on one another within the Promised Land was tantamount to returning to the land of slavery and death (cf. 7:6–8).

### *viii. Ten laws relating to false witness (24:8 – 25:4; cf. 5:20)*

#### *Context*

According to Kaufman (1978: 141), this section corresponds to the ninth commandment, prohibiting false witness (5:20), which is interpreted as thinking and acting *fairly* towards the possessions and dignity of others, including the convicted criminal (25:1–3) and domestic animals (25:4). Therefore, attention is drawn to matters of justice, impartiality and false witness. The following series of ten laws follows a traditionally defined gradation of levels of society. These include: the priestly Levites (24: 8–9), any debtor (vv. 10–11),

a poor debtor (vv. 12–13), poor labourers (vv. 14–15), children and parents (vv. 16), the resident alien, orphan and widow (vv. 17–22), criminals (25:1–3), and even an ox (25:4).

### Comment

**8–9.** These verses form a concentric bracket with verse 18 (*command ... to do / remember / remember / command ... to do*) surrounding verses 10–17 as a topical unit (cf. Ezek. 18:5–20). The first law in the series (24:8) seems out of place with its reference to *leprosy* (or some kind of skin disease; cf. Lev 13–14). What does this have to do with false witness? The answer becomes clearer in verse 9 with the reference to Miriam (cf. Num. 12:10–15), who spoke unjustifiably against Moses *because of his Cushite wife* (Num. 12:1), even though he was the legitimate leader of God's people. It becomes apparent that their real complaint was that they did not share the unique role of leadership that God had given to Moses (Num. 12:1–2, 5–8). Thus, Miriam suffered the skin disease of leprosy as punishment for bearing false witness against Moses (Kaufman 1978: 141–142). Further, the Israelites must obey all that the priestly Levites, as the true successors of Moses, *teach* them (cf. 17:9–11; 27:9–26; 31:9–13; 33:10). This is what ultimately excludes, and not the skin disease itself (McConville 2002: 361).<sup>77</sup>

**10–13.** Picking up on the previous commandment about what may or may not be regarded as security on a pledge (24:6), this law reflects further on items taken as security on loans (Exod. 22:26–27). Here it is assumed that pledges given by the poor are in order, but with the important provision that the dignity, privacy and worth of the debtor are respected by not going into his house to get what he is offering as a pledge. His home is a sacred space, a boundary that is not to be transgressed (cf. 22:21). This might suggest that some creditors used oppression and force in settling loans. However, the man himself had to select the item he would give as a pledge and bring it out to the creditor (vv. 10–11). But in the sub-case which

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77. Olson (1994: 109) adds: 'Disobedience of the *torah* taught by the Levites will be counted as "bearing false witness", and the resulting punishment of disease and exile will be Israel's fate.'

follows (vv. 12–13), the issue moves away from the neighbour's house, to the poor man's cloak. As a pledge, the cloak was to be handed over to the creditor (contrast vv. 6 and 17), with the proviso that it was not to be kept overnight, but was to be returned at sunset (cf. 21:23), so that he may sleep in it (cf. Amos 2:8; Job 22:6). This would have the powerful effect of reminding the poor man of his debt, but observing this provision would also bring thanks from the debtor (no doubt a strong motivation to repay the loan). Furthermore, it would be regarded as a *righteous act* (*šēdāqâ*, NIV; better than NRSV's 'to your credit') before the Lord (6:25; 9:4–6).

**14–15.** These verses are related to the previous law in terms of the sun going down and the appeal of the oppressed to Yahweh. The hired worker (*šākīr*) was especially vulnerable, because he was landless and only temporarily employed. Such a man, whether a fellow Israelite *brother* (*'āḥ*) or a resident *alien* (*gēr*), was not to be oppressed through robbery or fraud (*'āšaq*; cf. Lev. 19:13), and his wages must be paid promptly before sunset because he is poor and his life depends upon it (lit. 'he lifts up his soul on it'; cf. v. 6). There is a double motivation here in terms of human compassion, and the reverse of verse 13 in terms of lament and appeal to God, thereby making the landlord guilty of *sin* (cf. Exod. 22:27b [ET]; Jas 5:4).

**16.** The placement of this verse here is intriguing. It is linked to the previous law by the word *sin*, but in this context *sin* is probably associated with legal offences or crimes. This is supported by the threefold passive formula (*be put to death*), indicating authorized, formal execution. As such, it serves as a fundamental statement about the legal accountability of the individual in human courts (17:8–11; 19:15; 25:1–3; cf. 13:1–18; also Jer. 31:29–30; Ezek. 18:1–4, 19–20).

**17–22.** There is a good case for proposing that these laws should be taken together, even though they are divided in NIV. This may be seen on the basis of the phrase *the alien, the fatherless and the widow* (vv. 17 and 19), and the motivation for such behaviour: *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt* (vv. 18 and 22).

**17–18.** This law is expressed in simple apodictic (absolute) form and reflects the concern of Exodus 22:21–22 [ET]. The phrase, *Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice*, extends to the entire section (vv. 17–22). The issue of *justice* (*mišpāt*) in verse 17 applies to legal

justice and relates to the cause or rights of these marginal people being disregarded or judged unfairly (16:19; cf. Job 29:12–17). Providing justice for this triad of the alien, fatherless and widow was recognized as a duty not only for kings (Ps. 72:1–4, 12–14), but for the whole of society (Deut. 10:18–19; esp. 27:19; Exod. 22:22; 23:6–9; Lev. 19:33; Prov. 22:22). In verse 17b, the topic of debt collateral continues from verses 6, 10–13, but here it is specifically applied to the widow. Compared with the poor man of verses 12–13, whose cloak may be temporarily impounded but returned by sunset, the extreme nature of the widow's plight is one of total exemption. Verse 18 may be seen as the *motivation* for the entire section from verses 8–9. It is based upon Israel's own experience of slavery within Egypt, which must be now expressed in empathy for struggling and marginal groups within their midst (cf. v. 22). The particular emphasis upon the Lord *redeeming (pādā) you* ('purchased you free') is itself a powerful theological statement with significant social justice implications (cf. 7:8; 9:26; 13:5 [ET]; 15:15; 21:8; 24:18).

**19–22.** These laws are directly related to verses 17–18 by the re-appearance of *the alien, the fatherless and the widow*, mentioned three times in this section (vv. 19, 20, 21), and conclude with the reminder of Israel's slave status in Egypt (v. 22). A threefold command gives them a stake in the three typical crops of the land: *the grain, the oil and the wine* (cf. 7:13). Similar laws are found elsewhere (Exod. 23:10–11; Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22). Further, the three laws in verses 19–22 are held together by a common structure: 'When you ... do not ... it shall be for ...' (suggesting ownership). Therefore, the underlying idea of this law follows that of 23:24–25 [ET]. All members of the covenant community have rights to share in the blessings of the land, which is ultimately Yahweh's gift to the people as a whole. This suggests that *justice (mišpāt)* at verse 17 is broader than courtroom justice and includes a person's rights in general. Finally, the promise of blessing in return for respect for this principle recalls 15:10 and 16:15, and obedience is motivated by the memory of slavery in Egypt.

**25:1–3.** This case involving a private *dispute (rīb)* between parties finally becomes a legal procedure like that of 19:15–21, thus implying a case involving true and false witness. As such, it establishes a proper and equitable process for corporal punishment, as well as protection from possible excesses involving the court of

*justice* (*mišpāt*; cf. 24:17). Even criminals had rights that had to be protected. If, after the due legal processes, it was found that the guilty man deserved to be beaten, the judge had to be present when the punishment was carried out. This was to ensure that the due penalty was implemented without excess, in order that the dignity of the man might be preserved. Excessive beating would mean that the *brother* Israelite was being *degraded* (Heb. *qālā*; lit. 'make light of'; cf. 27:16 with *dishonouring* of parents) or treated like an animal. The number forty is not intended as a fixed form for all sentences, but rather the absolute maximum (i.e. up to forty). Later in Jewish practice this was restricted to thirty-nine to make sure the limit was not accidentally breached (cf. Paul's five occasions at 2 Cor. 11:24).

4. The ox is not to be muzzled, so that it can eat of the corn while it is threshing it (in separating the grain from the husk; cf. 24:20; 25:1-3, 5-10). This reflects the rights of the poor and marginalized to consume what they need of another's crops (24:19-22). Thus the wholeness of the covenant society includes both people and animals (5:14; 22:1-4, 6-7; cf. Prov. 12:10; Jon. 4:11; 1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18).

### Meaning

The section 24:8 - 25:4 has been loosely connected with the ninth commandment, which prohibits false witness within Israel (5:20). This point is established at the beginning of the section with the reference to Miriam (24:9), who was afflicted with leprosy because of her false witness against Moses' authority and leadership. Other laws that follow address the *rights* of different groups of people within Israel which, if not honoured, amounts to disobeying the Torah or false witness against it. To honour these laws is to live *righteous* lives before Yahweh (v. 13b; cf. 6:25), and underlying these laws is the assumption that the land belongs to every member of the covenant community, and therefore each person has a right to its bounty and blessing.

A chief motivation for practising *justice* towards the alien, fatherless and widow is the remembrance that Israel were once *slaves* in Egypt, and the Lord *redeemed* (or purchased) them from there (v. 18; cf. 5:15; 15:15). Finally, the guilty party at 25:1-3 was no doubt involved in false witness, but even the rights of the accused had to

be preserved. This is followed by the ox (25:4), which must not be abused or exploited by denying it a right to the bounty and blessings of the land (cf. 5:14; 25:5–10).

### *ix. Coveting and its antidote (25:5 – 26:15; cf. 5:21)*

#### *Context*

This section expounds the tenth commandment, which begins *You shall not covet your neighbour's wife ...* (5:21). The last commandment is the broadest in both intent and application (Harman 2001: 221). While the opening law of levirate marriage (25:5–10) appears to suggest that there is an institution through which a man may rightfully claim the wife of his brother (reflecting the tenth commandment in reverse), the option of not taking on the role of the *levir* could well have been driven by economic rationalism and the protection (or *coveting*) of one's own property. Further, the prohibition on coveting wives may lie behind the rules on levirate marriage and brawls (25:5–12). The concluding law of the two sets of weights and measures (vv. 13–16) relates to coveting, and fittingly brings these laws to an end. Finally, one of the best antidotes to coveting is giving. Thus, the exposition of the laws concludes with a reminder to the Israelites to give to God and to the poor (26:1–15).

#### *a. Miscellaneous laws (25:5–16)*

#### *Comment*

5–10. The law of the levirate marriage does not appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, and it does not create a new institution, but codifies an old one (Driver 1996: 281). An early example comes from Genesis 38:1–11, in which the *levir* will receive only public shame (and not death) if he decides not to marry his dead brother's wife. However, in Ruth (4:1–12) the closest relative may choose to marry the dead man's wife, but when he decides not to marry her, there is no shame or penalty of death. It appears then that the law in Deuteronomy and the concept of the *levir* (Latin for 'brother-in-law') allowed some flexibility according to family situation and local clan law.

The practice of levirate marriage was also known in the Ancient

Near East, though Hittite law 193 (*ANET*, p. 196) and Middle Assyrian law 33 (*ANET*, p. 182) do not offer an explanation in terms of providing a family heir, nor do they address the issue of passing on property in an orderly fashion. Both matters are referred to in Deuteronomy. The main idea behind the practice is that, if a man died without a male heir, it was the duty of his brother to marry his widow and produce a son, who would then inherit the deceased brother's name and property. The practice ensured that property would remain *within the family*, and that the dead brother's *name* would be carried forward for posterity.

5–6. The situation here refers to *brothers living together* as joint tenants of a yet undivided property. In the case of one of them dying without a son, the widow of the deceased brother is left in a particularly vulnerable position, without any absolute right of inheritance to the property. However, although this law is also designed to provide the widow with security in terms of marriage and having a son, it is primarily focused on the rights of the deceased husband. The *name* of the deceased husband is mentioned three times in verses 6–7, and the phrase *carry on the name* (v. 6) is literally 'stand upon the name'. Even though the undercurrents of the cult of the dead were obviously strong in Israel (cf. 14:1–2; 26:14), this expression best relates to the idea of establishing the name through legal status and procedure with regard to *inheritance* (Gen. 48:6; Ruth 4:5, 10). On the other hand, loss of inheritance means loss of the *name* (Num. 27:4) (Nelson 2002: 298).

7–10. However, in the section that follows, the surviving brother had the option of not taking on the duty of the *levir*, which was no doubt driven by economic rationalism. If he had a son by her, and if that son was his only surviving heir, then all his years of effort on the property would eventually pass on to the son of his deceased brother (cf. Ruth 4:5–6). Later, Boaz would be a hard act to follow! His kindness and generosity in this matter would leave behind a legacy and blessing for Israel that he would never have anticipated in his wildest dreams (Ruth 4:13–22).

Within the passage, two courses of action were open to the spurned widow. First, she may appeal publicly to the elders at the town gate with the words: *My husband's brother [yābām] ... will not fulfil the duty [yābām] of a brother-in-law to me.* Clearly this refers to sexual

intercourse and marriage at verse 5. Upon hearing this, the elders will then summon him (19:12; 21:18–21; 22:15–18) in order to persuade him to think differently through the application of this law. If he persists in his refusal to marry her, his brother's widow is to *go up* (*nāgās*; cf. 20:2; 21:5; 25:1) to him in the presence of the elders. Then she is to take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, *This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's* [lit. 'house'] *family line*. (cf. Gen. 16:2; 30:3; Ruth 4:11). Finally, with a play on the word 'house', the brother's line will be known as the 'House of the Unsandalled' (v. 10). NRSV picks up on this wordplay, but it is missing in NIV. The removal of the sandal is open to several interpretations, depending on context. In the book of Ruth it symbolized the public renunciation and legal transfer of property rights to another, when one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other (Ruth 4:7; cf. Amos 2:6; 8:6; *a pair of sandals*). But here in Deuteronomy the context also suggests some form of public humiliation and stigmatization involving honour and shame.

Finally, how is this law linked to the tenth commandment? Many scholars see the levirate marriage as an *exception* to the prohibition in the tenth commandment, whereby the *levir* should now *desire* his dead brother's wife. If the original intent of 5:21a *includes* the dowry of a neighbour's wife, then by *not* marrying the brother's widow, the *levir* is in effect desiring the wealth of a widowed woman which she would pass on to a future generation through her dead husband. But by marrying her, the *levir* is found to be *obeying* the intent of the tenth commandment (Matlock 2007: 295–310).

**11–12.** This law shares with the previous law the action of a *wife* who defends the interests of her deceased husband before a brother (vv. 7–10), and now defends the life of her living husband before a brother (lit. 'a man and his brother') involved in a fight (cf. Exod. 21:18–19, 22–25). In seeking to rescue her husband from the *hand* (*yad*) of his brother, she puts forth her *hand* (*yad*) and seizes his private parts. As a consequence, her *hand* (*kap*) is cut off.<sup>78</sup> By describing his genitals as 'his instruments of shame' (v.

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78. See Code of Hammurabi (law 195) *ANET*, p. 175 and MAL (law 8) *ANET*, p. 181 for similar situations.

11b; see Eslinger 1981: 269–281), the Masoretic tradition interprets her offence as ‘shaming’ the brother, as with the previous law on the use of the sandal, which may have carried a similar sexual meaning. But clearly, something more than ‘shame’ must have been at stake here. The severity of the penalty (prescribed only here in the Old Testament) would suggest that the man might be injured to the point that he could no longer bear children as part of God’s covenant people. This adds a further connection with the previous law, which dealt in another way with the lack of children. Moreover, the penalty might be linked with the fact that the male organ of reproduction carried the covenant sign of circumcision (see commentary on 23:1). The woman’s action completely disregards this fact, so that her eventual punishment (*cutting off the hand*) is in line with the threat of the *cutting off from Israel* of disloyal covenant servants (Gen. 17:14; cf. Mark 9:43–48; Harman 2001: 223).<sup>79</sup>

**13–16.** The two differing sets of weights (lit. ‘stones’; possibly connected to testicles in the previous law) reflect the dishonest purpose of obtaining (or coveting) more than standard measure when purchasing (using heavy weight), and giving less when selling (using light weight) (cf. Lev. 19:35–36). Likewise, Israel was not to have two sets of measures for dry and liquid products in order to cheat those with whom they traded (vv. 13–14). It is somewhat fitting that the specific laws of chapters 12 – 25 should finish on this note. Honesty in trade would bring the blessing of long life in the land (v. 15), whereas dishonesty stands under the covenant curse as something *detestable* (*tô’ēbâ*) to the Lord (emphatic position in v.16; cf. Prov. 11:1; 16:11; 20:10, 23). Deuteronomy uses this same expression to describe idolatry, sexual perversions and Canaanite pagan cults, and signals the fact that dishonesty in trade (involving the sin

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79. See Walsh (2004: 47–58) for the translation of Deut. 25:12a as: ‘You shall shave [the hair of] her groin’, seeking to resolve the anomaly of the one and only law in the entire Israelite corpus that imposes physical mutilation as a punishment. But the following words, ‘Show no pity’, relate only to severe forms of punishment in the rest of Deuteronomy (see fn. 44, p. 196).

of covetousness) and practice lies behind so much of the exploitation and poverty of those whom Deuteronomy cares so much about in the rest of the book (cf. 1 Kgs 21:1–29; Amos 8:4–6).

*b. Unfinished business with the Amalekites (25:17–19)*

**17–19.** Initially, the account about Amalek appears to be an unconnected topic. The law commands Israel to remember what Amalek did to Israel in the wilderness on their way out of Egypt. The older account in Exodus 17:8–16 relates how Amalek attacked Israel, and was defeated by Joshua as Moses held up the staff of God in his hands. From a structural point of view, this passage may be seen as a frame to 12:9–10 in terms of what Israel must do when it experiences *rest from all the enemies around you*, thus forming a frame around the entire body of cultic and social laws in chapters 12–25. The frame to the present passage of *remember* (v. 17a) and *do not forget* (v. 19b) calls Israel to a matter of unfinished business with Amalek, her archetypal enemy (cf. 1 Sam. 15:1–3; 30:1–31). Israel is to *blot out the memory* of Amalek from under heaven (cf. 12:3; *wipe out their names*). But verse 18 adds important details to the original account, and brings it under the theme of the tenth commandment and the prohibition of desiring what belongs to the poor and powerless. Amalek's crime was in desiring and taking advantage of a people when they were weak, powerless and unable to defend themselves (Olson 1994: 114). Furthermore, Amalek took advantage of a weakened Israel because 'he did not fear God' (NRSV; v. 18; cf. Exod. 17:16 = 'because a hand was against the throne of God?'). This may mean that the Amalekites failed to reverence (or *fear*) the Lord; similarly Pharaoh and Sihon and Og openly and defiantly opposed the Lord's people and took up arms against them (cf. Josh. 2:8–13).

*c. First declaration: Israel's presentation of firstfruits and confession of what Yahweh has done for her (26:1–11)*

*Context*

The last specific law ended at 25:16 (true and false weights). Then 25:19 links up with 26:1 in this section in terms of land *inheritance*. The link between the land *given* by Yahweh and the *place* (*māqôm*) to which Israel *come* (*bō'*) in worship first appears at 12:5–6, and

reappears in this section at 26:1–10. Thus, 26:1–15 not only supplies the best antidote to coveting in terms of worship and giving, but also provides a fitting bracket and conclusion to the worship of Yahweh in chapter 12. This section also contains a series of *declarations* (vv. 3, 5, 13, 17, 18) made in three stages (vv. 1–11, 12–15, 16–19; McConville 2002: 377). Thus the chapter virtually condenses the message of the entire book of Deuteronomy into a threefold covenant of *grace* (vv. 1–11), covenant *obedience* (vv. 12–15) and covenant *blessing* (vv. 16–19) (Wright 1996: 270).

### Comment

**1–4.** Central to this passage is the offering of *firstfruits* as a fitting conclusion to the tenth commandment (the best antidote to coveting is giving), as well as to the entire law section from chapter 12 onwards. In fact, the offering of *firstfruits* is an indicator of the abundance and blessing of the land of *inheritance* that the Lord has *given* (*nātan*; vv. 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15) to Israel. This should make covetousness at all levels redundant. The passage addresses the time when Israel has already settled in the land (v. 1; cf. 17:14). In this context the Israelite is called on to make two liturgical declarations. The first is preceded by the Lord's command to take a token offering of some of the firstfruits in a basket and then go to Yahweh's choice of central sanctuary (v. 2; cf. 12:5–7; Exod. 23:19a). This appears to apply not only to the first occasion, but to successive ones as well. The first liturgical response is made to the priest presiding at the time (v. 3; cf. 17:9; 19:17). It is a grateful acknowledgment of the *sworn* (*šāba'*) promise to the forefathers and the gift of the land entirely from Yahweh's hand, which is so important throughout Deuteronomy, and also frames this section (v. 15).

**5.** After the basket has been placed before the altar of the Lord by the priest (v. 4), a second liturgical response follows in the form of a confessional short credo (vv. 5–10; cf. Num. 20:15–16). It begins: *My father was a wandering Aramean*. The *father* is clearly Jacob, as the rest of the verse indicates. The description of *Aramean* is strange, although here it is probably linked to Jacob's ancestors (Gen. 25:20; 28:5, 7; 31:20, 24), as well as to his long stay in Paddan-Aram and his marriage to his Aramean wives (Leah and Rachel). The word *wandering* may also mean 'perishing' (i.e. dying). Both

meanings ultimately suit Jacob's constant wanderings as well as oppression and mistreatment in Egypt. On arriving in Egypt, Jacob's family were few in number (seventy persons; Gen. 46:27; Exod. 1:5), and the people lived there as *aliens* (*gēr*, 10:19; 23:7 [ET]) and became a *great nation, powerful and numerous* (v. 5b).<sup>80</sup>

6–7. The second aspect of the confession is followed in verse 6 by a threefold verbal description of Israel's mistreatment at the hands of the Egyptians, amounting to injustice, oppression and slavery (lit. 'placed upon us hard labour'). *Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers* (v. 7). Throughout this credo, the present generation (*we/us*) are fully identified with the exodus group, and also with the generation gathered at Sinai/Horeb (5:3). The expression *the LORD, the God of your/our fathers* frames the law section (12:1; 26:7; cf. 1:11, 21; 4:1; 6:3; 27:3; 29:25 [ET]), and is also present at the burning bush episode (Exod. 3:6, 13–16). It is at this point that the Lord *bears* the people's cry and *sees* their misery, as part of Moses' call for deliverance for the Lord's people (Exod. 3:7; cf. Num. 20:16). But in Deuteronomy the Lord also *sees* the threefold *misery, toil and oppression*, reinforcing the *hard labour* and slavery of verse 6.

8–10. The third and final aspect of the confession relates to the Lord's redemptive power involving his judgment upon Egypt with a *mighty hand and an outstretched arm* (only in Deuteronomy as a pair at 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:26–29; 11:2; 26:8). This is followed by the threefold *with great terror* (4:34; 11:25; 26:8; 34:12), and with *signs and wonders* (only in Deuteronomy as a pair at 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 13:1–2; 26:8; 28:46; 29:3; 34:11). All of these terms are found at 4:34, only in reverse order. But by concluding verse 8 with *signs and wonders*, the credo may also be anticipating the second recognition of these verses with the blessing and provision of the land itself (the probable meaning of *this place*) in verse 9 (cf. 28:46 used with the reverse sense of *curses*). Verse 9 concludes with the land flowing with the twofold *milk and honey*, providing a balance for *signs and wonders* at the end of verse 8. In verse 10 we have the words, *And now I bring* (*bō'*; cf. 12:5–6) *the firstfruits of the soil, O LORD, that you have given me*, a final recognition

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80. These three adjectives together qualifying *nation* are unique in the Old Testament.

that it is the Lord, and no other fertility god (including Baal) of Canaan, who is the true provider.

**11.** This verse performs a function similar to that of 12:12, except that ‘you’ here is singular, implying the covenant people as a whole. Throughout this whole section there is a movement between ‘we/us/me’, and now comes a concluding threefold blessing and rejoicing shared between *you* (sing.) and the Levites and aliens. Both the vertical (*the LORD your God has given you*) and horizontal implications of this covenant blessing extend into the next section.

*d. Second declaration: Israel's obedience to the third-year tithe (26:12-15)*

**12.** The second ceremony would come in the third year of occupation, and it recalls the third-year tithe of 14:28-29. But now this section adds to the Levites and aliens of verse 11 the full complement of the fatherless and widows as well. Also, the sharing of these tithes would not take place at the central sanctuary, as with the previous offering of firstfruits to the Lord (v. 2; cf. 12:6, 11; 14:22-27), but would be shared in the towns (lit. ‘in your gates’). By setting this provision here alongside the offering of firstfruits within the context of worship, Deuteronomy emphasizes the tithe’s importance on behalf of the needy (Wright 1996: 271).

**13.** As with the ceremony of firstfruits, a liturgical declaration also follows here, which was to be made *to* (‘before’) *the LORD your God* (v. 13a), most probably at the central sanctuary. Within this declaration, the Israelite claims to have fully obeyed the law, which is expressed both negatively (v. 13b) and positively (v. 14b). The main statement comes in verse 13: *I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow.* The *sacred portion* (*qōdeš*; cf. 12:26 of general offerings, and 26:15 of sanctuary) refers to special offerings that belonged to God. In this case, the third-year tithe had to be *removed* from the man’s house. The verb ‘remove’ (*bā’ar* = piel; also v. 14) is used elsewhere in Deuteronomy in the piel form for *purging* different forms of evil from Israel (13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:13, 19; 21:9, 21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7). These verbal associations may relate to the following scenario. If the third-year tithe were to remain in the man’s house, this would repeat a situation like that of 22:20-21, needing to be *purged* of evil. In this case, the man who keeps the third-year tithe within his house proves unfaithful to the lawful

recipients, who have no allotment or inheritance of their own (14:28–29). To obey the law fully in this matter is effectively to *remove* or *purge* one's house of any potential evil (cf. 22:9; 27:19).<sup>81</sup>

**14.** There follows a threefold negative confession relating to ritual behaviour. The first refers to not *eating* the sacred portion while *mourning* (Deut. 14:1–2; cf. Hos. 9:4; Ezek. 8:14); the second relates to not *removing* any of it while *unclean*. This may be best interpreted in the light of the first disclaimer, suggesting that contact with a corpse would make someone ritually unclean (cf. Lev. 22:4–8). The third relates to not *offering* any of the sacred portion to the *dead* (Deut. 14:1–2; cf. 12:30–31; 18:10–11; Jer. 16:5–9). It is possible that each of these areas is linked to the cult of the dead, which frames the passage. In this regard, one may also note the close structural proximity of 14:1–2 (cult of the dead) and 14:3–21 (clean/unclean foods), followed by the law of the tithes (14:22–29).

**15.** Verse 15 concludes the declaration with an appeal for God to bless both people and land (possibly with rain; cf. 11:11–15; 28:12) from his heavenly habitation, also recalling the promises given on oath to the forefathers (4:36–39; cf. 1 Kgs 8:27–30). And so the worshipper claims the full blessing of God's oath and promises in order to experience the land flowing with milk and honey, especially in the light of verse 13 (support of the living) and verse 14 (avoidance of the dead) (Blenkinsopp 1995: 11).

*e. Third declaration: Yahweh and Israel as willing partners of the covenant (26:16–19)*

**16–19.** This passage resembles the pledge made at the conclusion of the reading of the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 24:7). The people are now brought back from the anticipated future of the land to the plains of Moab and the Mosaic present, with the challenge *this day* to observe carefully the *decrees and laws*, which frame major sections of the book (4:1; 5:1; 11:32; 12:1). This section is also distinguished by a double pledge and ratification, first by the people (v. 17), and then by Yahweh (vv. 18–19), recalling 5:27–33. The

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81. See 4:11 (*bā'ar*) *blazed* with fire, here linked to *removing* evil or *purging* Israel's house of evil.

people's response (v. 17) consists of a main statement, *the LORD is your God*, followed by three further obligations: to *walk in his ways*, to *keep his decrees, commands and laws* (a threefold law centrepiece; cf. 5:31; 6:1; 7:11; 8:11; 11:1) and to *obey* his voice. They are to do this with *all your heart and with all your soul* (v. 16b; recalling 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13). The Lord's response in verses 18–19 also begins with a main statement declaring ownership of his people: *You are his people, his treasured possession* (*sĕgullā*), and *holy* (*qādōś*) to the Lord (Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21).<sup>82</sup> Finally, verse 19 notes the high responsibility given to Israel, who were greatly exalted above every other nation. The same threefold expression (*praise, fame and honour*) is found in Jeremiah 13:11 and 33:9 (cf. Zeph. 3:19–20) as a standardized formula for highest renown (cf. 4:6–8). This will be taken up again at 28:1, 9. Moreover, the mutual aspect of this entire arrangement is finally set forth in 29:1, 12–15 [ET] in the explicit terms of *covenant renewal*.

### Meaning

The key to understanding chapter 26 is its position in Deuteronomy (McConville 2002: 384). Within the structure of the book, with its resemblance to both treaty and law code, it rounds off the long section of laws. But in a treaty-like manner, and also in a pattern similar to that of the *Book of the Covenant* (Exod. 20:22 – 23:19; cf. 24:7), the section from chapter 12 to 26 begins with worship, and ends with worship at the chosen place with the bringing of first-fruits, thus fulfilling the command in 12:5–7, 11–13. But only here in Deuteronomy do we hear the voice of the loyal worshipper in terms of a liturgical-style credo *before Yahweh* at the sanctuary. This credo rehearses Israel's pain, oppression, homelessness and slave status in Egypt, resulting in Yahweh hearing their cry and finally bringing them into a *place* where they may live safely and securely (v. 9). However, this brings with it the responsibility of drawing the homeless within their midst into a place of celebration and belonging (v. 11), which is also related to the third-year tithe (v. 12). This tithe (called the *sacred portion*) must not be absorbed into the

82. The use of these terms at 14:2, 21, and now here, further supports the situation described at vv. 14–15 above.

ever-present cult of the dead (v. 14), but must be faithfully dispensed to the 'living' and marginalized of Israel (v. 13). The passage concludes with a command to carefully keep the *decrees and laws* (v. 16), forming a bracket with 11:32 – 12:1, followed by words of covenant ratification (vv. 17–19) in which Yahweh exists as 'God for Israel', and Israel exists as 'people for him'.

## D. Covenant renewal in the Promised Land (27:1–26)

### *Context*

It is widely accepted that this chapter intrudes between chapters 26 and 28. However, there are solid reasons, both literary and theological, to believe that it serves an important function in the overall purpose and meaning of the book. From a literary perspective, chapter 27 provides a frame to 11:26–32 in terms of Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, the blessings and curses, and associated covenant commitment. Sandra Richter (2007: 342–366) plausibly links these passages on the basis of Yahweh's inscribed monument on Ebal (11:29–32; 12:1–5; 27:1–8), providing a frame for the laws of chapters 12–26. Nelson (2002: 316) also brackets 11:29–30 with 27:1–8, 11–13 and 14–26, with each serving three different 'scripts'. Verses 1–8 focus on inscribing the law, verses 11–13 address the instituting of the blessing and curses, and verses 14–26 relate to Moses' instructions on the content of the curses. Also, a twofold witness is established with the elders (27:1) and priests (27:9), signifying Israel's formal acceptance of the terms of the covenant (27:9–10; cf. 26:16–19). This leads into the announcement of blessing and cursing (vv. 12–13), of which *only* curses are recorded (vv. 15–26), implicitly acknowledging that Israel's future will move towards disobedience and curse rather than blessing, although optimism also pervades the chapter (Barker 1998: 277–303).

### *Comment*

#### *i. The inscription of the law and witness of the elders (27:1–8)*

1. In the light of his impending death, Moses involves the *elders* in the procedures mentioned in verses 1–8 (29:10 [ET]; 31:9, 28; cf. 5:23). First of all, the people are instructed afresh to keep watch

over (lit.) ‘all the commandment’ (*mišwā*) (cf. 5:31; 6:1; 17:20; 30:11) that Moses is giving *today* (v. 1). This would cover not only the whole body of laws in chapters 12 – 26 (McConville 2002: 388), but may also include all that Moses was about to say, especially with regard to the further details on the blessings and curses (27:14–26; 28:1–68; cf. 29:1; esp. Josh. 8:34–35).

2–4. *When you have crossed the Jordan* is mentioned three times in verses 2–4, in order to emphasize the urgency and importance, as well as the time and place, of the setting up of the large stones and altar on Mount Ebal. The words (lit. ‘on the day’; v. 2) need not be taken to mean within a strict twenty-four hour period (Barker 1998: 298). In the light of Moses’ imminent death, the beginning of verse 3 now emphasizes the *writing* of Moses’ words on large stones coated with plaster (vv. 2b, 4), serving as a memorial of Yahweh’s gift of the land. Initially the law may have been read directly from the stones, or from the Book of the Law, by Joshua (cf. Josh. 8:30–35). But thereafter, it appears that the stones may have stood as a silent witness against sinful Israel, and at the same time sought to bind Israel to her covenant obligations (31:24–29; cf. Josh. 24:25–27). Further, Moses records all the words of the law in a book which is to be preserved alongside the ark of the covenant (31:24–26), and read every seven years to the people (31:9–13). It is therefore likely that Mount Ebal serves a more *symbolic* function in Deuteronomy, rather than as the main contender for the chosen *place* where Yahweh chooses to *place his name* with the monument inscriptions as well as altar building.<sup>83</sup> The altar and stone tablets at Mount Ebal are more likely to have been a kind of memorial shrine, strategically located in the centre of the land at Shechem, especially in view of its covenant associations with Abraham (Gen. 12:6–8; cf. Josh. 24:25–26), Jacob (Gen. 33:18–20; cf. 35:1–4), and the burial of Joseph (Josh. 24:2). As such, it would have initially served as the centre for *covenant renewal* illustrated by Joshua 8:30–35; 24:1–27, but it appears that Shiloh continued to be the main sanctuary throughout this period (Josh. 18:1; cf. 1 Sam. 4:3).

83. Contrast Richter (2007: 342–366) who argues for this connection with Mount Ebal.

*And coat them with plaster* (vv. 2b and 4b): This provision may have facilitated quick and easy readability for all the laws, as distinct from being cut into stone (see v. 8 below).

5–7. In addition to Deuteronomy's prior emphasis on the stones (cf. Josh. 8:30–35), an altar was to be erected on Mount Ebal and sacrifices made with *burnt offerings* (vertical as given to God) and *fellowship* (or peace) *offerings* (horizontal as shared among the worshippers). Thus, love for God and neighbour permeate the worship that celebrates the renewal of the covenant in the land. The instructions to build an altar closely follow the earlier altar law of Exodus 20:24–25, and are therefore not a late addition to the text (as adopted by Mayes 1979: 340). Rather, as on Mount Sinai, the renewal of the covenant was to be marked by this ceremonial feast, which was a recognized way in which the *ratification* of the covenant took place (Exod. 24:3–8). It was common in the Ancient Near East for important agreements to be recorded on stones or stelae, especially in the ratification of treaties (e.g. some Hittite treaties; VTE; Sefire). Added to this evidence is the record that in Exodus 24:3–8 twelve pillars were set up corresponding to the twelve tribes, perhaps reflected here by the presence of the twelve tribes in the presence of the Lord (vv. 12–13).

8. Finally, what began as the *clear exposition* of the law in oral form (1:5) is to be completed by the *clear* (*ba'ēr*) and accurate *inscription* of the same law, now in written form (cf. 5:22; 9:10). This was later copied on to the stones by Joshua from the Book of the Law, and then publicly read before all the people (Josh. 8:32–35). In order to read *every word*, this process may well have been facilitated by the plaster coating on the stones and the use of black or red ink, and such an inscription may have stood as a silent witness against sinful Israel (Barker 1998: 287; also see commentary on 1:5).

## *ii. The ratification of the covenant and witness of the Levitical priests (27:9–13)*

9–10. The second group to witness the ratification of the covenant are the Levitical priests, who will recite the curses in verses 14–26. Together with Moses (thus providing continuity for the future), they command Israel to be *silent* (*sākat* only here). *You have now become the people of the LORD your God* (v. 9) emphasizes the

*continual* nature of covenant renewal (cf. 4:20; 9:26; 26:16–19). Israel must always reflect on who she really is, as defined by obedience to the covenant laws (v. 10). These verses form a rhetorical bridge between 26:16–19 and 28:1, with 27:9–10 repeating the language of 26:16–19, and 27:10 reflecting the language of 28:1. This may suggest that the call to ‘silence’ stands as a liturgical introduction to the announcement of the blessings and curses to follow in 28:1–68 (cf. Zeph. 1:7; Hab. 2:20). In the meantime, this may also include the Levites’ pronouncement of the twelve curses in verses 14–26 that relate to *secret* sinning (*sēter*).

**11–13.** Moses now speaks alone, assigning the tribes (including Levi) to the two mountains for the formal declaration of the blessing (Gerizim) and curse (Ebal). It is not clear whether each tribe faced the mountains, or faced the ark of the covenant with their backs to the mountains (cf. Josh. 8:33). Those who were to stand on Mount Gerizim were all descendants of Leah (four) and Rachel (two), with Joseph representing Ephraim and Manasseh, and Levi included as well in the blessing tribes. Those who were to stand on Mount Ebal were descendants of Leah (two), and the remaining four were Jacob’s descendants by the maidservants Zilpah and Bilhah.

### *iii. The divine sanctions as a response to oath taking (27:14–26)*

**14–26.** Quite surprisingly, even though both blessings and curses are expected, only curses are recited by the Levitical priests (v. 9; cf. 31:9–13), because the tribe of Levi has already been included in the blessing group on Mount Gerizim. Why then should only curses follow, and why locate the altar on Mount Ebal, the place of curse? It would have made better sense to sacrifice and rejoice before the Lord on the Mount that speaks of blessing. The clue to this situation may be twofold. (1) First, as a conclusion to the laws of chapters 12–26, the procedure of *oath taking* requires divine sanction (curse), which takes the form of apodictic prohibitions (sealed as self-curses with the *amens*) that are therefore not likely to come into open court for trial and judgment. The reason is that the prohibited deeds listed (twelve in order to align with Exod. 24:3–8 and the twelve tribes gathered here) are explicitly *secret* (vv. 15, 24), or the sort of behaviour carried out in private and therefore hard to discover (e.g. v. 18), and known to Yahweh. These curses reinforce

the point that Yahweh sees and knows what happens in secret, and consequently Israel cannot pay mere lip service to these laws, or secretly devise ways of getting around them.<sup>84</sup> (2) Why place the altar and curse on Ebal? The short answer may be that the symbolism of the location (in physical terms as well) may have the effect of emphasizing that the covenant continually stands under the curse for failure to keep it. Therefore Israel agrees to accept the curse for failure to keep the covenant (McConville 2002: 389). This is consistent with the idea of the law as a witness against Israel, suggesting that it will fail to keep the law (cf. 31:16–17, 26–27; Barker 1998: 286–289).<sup>85</sup>

**15.** The first curse is the longest, and deals with the making of carved images or cast idols, the chief symbol of turning away from Yahweh (4:16, 23, 25). Idolatry is the most offensive sin in Deuteronomy, and here it stands alone in this list as being called *detestable to the LORD*. Thus, all that follows hangs upon the first two commandments (cf. 5:7–10) and Israel's ability to fear, love and serve the Lord only. Here there is also a touch of sarcasm and irony in relating the idol to the work of the craftsman's hands (cf. Isa. 44:9–20). The secrecy clause aims to prevent the covert cult of small idols in the home, which may be reflected at 7:25–26 (cf. Josh. 24:14–15, 23; 1 Sam. 7:3–4).

**16.** Next to the vertical worship of God, the honour of father and mother on the horizontal level (the fifth commandment and turning point of the Decalogue) is the cornerstone of Israelite law and society (see commentary on 5:16). Here the curse is directed to those who *dishonour* (*qālā*) their parents. The expression is also used at 25:3, where it carries the idea of being humiliated, degraded or belittled in terms of the criminal who is flogged. To *curse* parents was a capital offence (Exod. 21:17; Lev. 20:9), undermining the importance of the family in Israelite society (cf. 21:18–21). This would have been tempting to do in secret.

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84. Tigay (1996: 254) suggests that these twelve curses form a parallel with 29:17–28, where Moses warns Israel that secret sins will be detected by Yahweh and punished (esp. v. 19).

85. Israel's future failure is also witnessed by the Song of Moses at 32:1–47.

**17–19.** The next three curses have to do with care and respect for other people. Heading the list (v. 17) is the important issue of the landmark or boundary stone which may have been surreptitiously removed (see commentary on 19:14). This illustrates the central importance of the individual's right to have his share of the inheritance of the land protected, as a matter of life and death (cf. 1 Kgs 21:1–26). The case of the blind man (v. 18; cf. Lev. 19:14) has not been addressed previously in Deuteronomy, but the curses (vv. 17 and 19) framing verse 18 illustrate the vulnerability of the blind, and so seek to give much-needed protection regarding deceitful dealing and the impossibility of identifying the offender. Finally, verse 19 upholds the basic requirement of justice for the alien, fatherless and widow, who had no legal defence and no way of redressing an offence in law. These concerns lie at the heart of Deuteronomy's ethics (cf. 16:18–20; 24:17–18).

**20–23.** The following four curses all relate to sexual offences. These are framed with the man who sleeps with his stepmother (v. 20; cf. 22:30; Lev. 18:8; 20:11), and the man who sleeps with his mother-in-law, mentioned here for the first time (v. 23; cf. Lev. 18:17; 20:14). Between these curses is the inclusion of 'all' (or *any*) forms of bestiality (v. 21) which is the only sexual offence in the Covenant Code (Exod. 22:19 [ET]; cf. Lev. 18:23; 20:15–16). Not only was this sin a serious aberration of God's purpose for creation (Gen. 1:26–28), but its link with the worship of pagan gods at Exodus 22:19–20 [ET] may also be associated with the animal gods of Egypt. This provides a further link with the adjoining curse at verse 22, concerning intercourse with a step-sister or half-sister (cf. Lev. 18:9, 11 [ET]; 20:17 [ET]).

**24–25.** The specific laws in this section conclude with two cases that relate to murder (5:17). This is appropriate, for Deuteronomy is all about *life and death* within the land (30:15–20). Moreover, the sixth commandment on *murder* (19:1 – 22:8) receives the longest exposition within the law section (chs. 12 – 26). In verses 24–25 the Hebrew word is 'smite' (*nākâ*; cf. *rāṣah*, *murder* at 5:17), but it is correctly translated as *kills* in the NIV, and this is supported by other uses of the word in Deuteronomy where death is implied (e.g. 2:33; 3:3). Furthermore, the use of *nākâ* may originally have been suggested by its use at Exodus 2:12, where killing a person *secretly*

(v. 24) may reflect the situation at 21:1–9. In such a case the reciting of the curse would provide extra cover for the innocent, and condemn the guilty party. The same would apply to someone who accepts a *bribe* (v. 25) in order to kill an innocent person. Presumably, a man would not accept a bribe unless he thought his action would remain unknown, thereby enabling him to profit from it.

26. Finally, verse 26 forms an *inclusio* with verse 3, with *the words of this law*. This probably refers to the keeping of the entire law of Deuteronomy, including the Song of Moses (32:44–47), which performs a similar function to 27:14–26.

### *Meaning*

Chapter 27 makes an important literary and theological connection with 11:26–32 in terms of Mounts Gerizim and Ebal and the associated blessings and curses, as well as commitment to the covenant laws. As such, these passages provide a frame for the laws in chapters 12–26, establishing a final link between Horeb, Moab and Shechem on the basis of *today* (27:1, 10–11; cf. 5:1). However, chapter 27 locates the altar and the inscription of the laws upon the mountain of curse, Mount Ebal, which must be replicated when Israel crosses the Jordan (27:1–8; cf. Josh. 8:30–35). Both the elders (27:1) and the Levitical priests (27:9) witness this event, and will ensure the future of the law. Even though Moses announces both blessings and curses (27:11–13), only twelve curses are recited by the priestly Levites (27:14–26; cf. 29:17–28). This appears to be a deliberate literary and theological ploy, providing a fitting conclusion to the laws already given, and focusing especially on *secret* aspects of breaking the law. Furthermore, these laws remind Israel (symbolized by the *twelve* curses) that they stand under the curse as far as covenant and law are concerned.

## **E. Declaration of the covenant sanctions: blessings and curses (28:1–68)**

### *Context*

Ancient treaties and law codes usually ended with a section on blessings and curses. The appearance of this feature here is an indication that Deuteronomy is not just a series of long sermons, but was used

in covenant renewal ceremonies, as with Mount Ebal in the previous chapter. However, in the context of Moses' second and longest sermon (4:44 – 28:68), these blessings and curses constitute his final appeal to the nation to keep the law. In doing so, 28:1 also links to 26:16–19, providing a transition between the specific covenant stipulations of 12:1 – 26:15 and 27:1 – 28:68. Chapter 28 begins with the blessings (vv. 1–14). These really sum up the Lord's full covenant of love and grace towards Israel in terms of the promise of the land, and are therefore not *deserved* blessings (cf. 7:12–16). They will come to pass if Israel does not depart from the Lord by following other gods (v. 14). But the curses that follow the blessings are *four* times more numerous (vv. 15–68; cf. Lev. 26:14–46, *three* times more numerous). This is in accordance with the practice of ancient treaties. However, the order of blessings followed by curses resembles ancient law codes.<sup>86</sup> But here, these parallels may be more than simply following Ancient Near Eastern treaties. The length of the curses may evoke some pessimism about Israel's ability to keep the law (as well as possible motivation to keep it), suggesting that Israel's future lies under *curse* and not blessing (Barker 1998: 284; cf. 31:24–29; 32:1–43). The chapter may be divided into the following four sections: (1) verses 1–14; (2) verses 15–44; (3) verses 45–57; (4) verses 58–68.

### *Comment*

#### ***i. The blessings (28:1–14)***

**1–2.** Verse 1 opens with the conditional: 'If you fully obey the *voice* of the LORD your God' (framing vv. 1–2). It takes the reader back to Moab at 26:16–19, especially linking 28:1b with 26:19a (with Israel being set *high above the nations*), obedience to the Lord's 'voice' (28:1–2; cf. 26:17), and the threefold *today* or *this day* (28:1, 13, 14) with the threefold *today* of 26:16–18. Enjoyment of the covenant blessings would not be based on merit, but on Israel's obedience to all the Lord's commands included in the section (vv. 1–2, 9, 13–14).

**3–6.** This passage contains six successive phrases in the Hebrew, beginning with 'blessed are you' (all in the sing.). These sound like

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86. Blessings and curses provide a canonical frame to the Pentateuch.

liturgical priestly blessings, focusing on agriculture and fertility. They correspond to the curses of verses 16–19, which may have been modelled on the blessings of verses 3–6, although the third and fourth blessings are reversed, and *the young of your livestock* (v. 4) is omitted in verse 18 (also by LXX). Verses 3 and 6 correspond to each other as polar opposites. The expression *come in ... go out* (v. 6) indicates the ability to come and go in all the affairs of life (31:2; Josh. 14:11; 1 Kgs 3:7; Ps. 121:7–8; Isa. 37:28). The intervening blessings relating to fruitfulness of people, ground and animals (vv. 4–5)<sup>87</sup> are anchored in God's covenant promise of love sworn to the Patriarchs (cf. 7:12–13; Gen. 12:1–3).

**7–14.** The six blessings in verses 3–6 are reflected by the *promises* in verses 7–13, arranged in a roughly concentric structure as follows:

- A Foreign relations (v. 7)
- B Domestic affairs (v. 8)
- C Israel's covenant Lord and standing (v. 9)
- C<sup>1</sup> Israel's covenant Lord and standing (v. 10)
- B<sup>1</sup> Domestic affairs (vv. 11–12a)
- A<sup>1</sup> Foreign relations (vv. 12b–13)

**7, 12b, 13.** Verse 7 interprets verse 6 in military terms through the ideology of the Divine Warrior (see 31:2, 3–6; cf. Josh. 14:11; Ps. 121:7–8) (Nelson 2002: 330). Ordered attacks against Israel ('one way') will result in a state of panic and dispersion ('seven ways') for the enemy. Verse 12b refers to individual Israelites lending to individual non-Israelites (cf. 23:20 [ET]). However, the use of the singular ('you') in both 'lending' texts may refer to the covenant nation under the blessing of God (also supported by NIV; *lending to many nations*). Israel will assume the leadership (*head*), and will not become subservient or indebted (*tail*) to others (v. 13a; cf. vv. 43–44 addressed to the individual Israelite in relation to the resident alien). In the clause *If you pay attention to the commands* (v. 13b), the Hebrew *ki* (*if*; also at v. 9) can be translated 'as long as' or 'because', in order

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87. For the 'offspring (*šeger*) of your cattle and the fertility (*'asîrâ*) of your flock' (vv. 4, 18, 51) see commentary on 7:13.

to establish a correlation between blessing and covenant faithfulness (cf. 28:1) (McConville 2002: 404). Finally, the promise of verses 12b–13 also appears in 15:6.

**8, 11, 12a.** Verse 7 is closely followed by Yahweh's gift of peace and blessing in their own land (v. 8), in which Yahweh orders *blessing* as though it were a personified underling (Nelson 2002: 330). This will result in the overflow of the *barns* (v. 8; cf. Prov. 3:10), as well as abundant prosperity in the fruit of the womb, animals and crops in the land sworn on oath to the forefathers (v. 11). Finally, as a frame to *barns* and work of their *hand* in verse 8, verse 12a states that the Lord will open the heavens, the *storehouse of his bounty* (cf. Ps. 104:3, 13; Job 38:22), to send rain on the land in season (cf. 11:13–18), and bless all the work of their *hands* (cf. 15:10; 23:20 [ET]).

**9, 10.** The central piece in this literary structure is a reiteration of the Lord's divine promise to establish Israel according to his oath, as a holy people, obedient to him. For Yahweh to *swear* about something (v. 9) without reference to the ancestors is unique in Deuteronomy (Nelson 2002: 330). At the core of this section (v. 9b) are the words: *if* (Heb. *keî*) *you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways* (cf. v. 13b). In that happy relationship, all the peoples of the earth will see that Israel is called (or known) by the *name* of the Lord (v. 10), expressing ownership and belonging, and found only here in Deuteronomy (cf. Isa. 4:1; Amos 9:12). As a result, the nations will stand in awe at the Lord's favour towards Israel and they will *fear* them (cf. 4:5–8; 26:19).

**14.** The blessings conclude with a negative command, *Do not turn aside [sûr] from any of the commands [mišwôt] ... following other gods and serving them*, providing a frame for the first two commandments (5:7–10). Such a path would destroy the basis of blessing, fellowship and loyalty.

## ii. The curses (28:15–68)

**15–19.** Verse 15 begins this section with a negative counterpart to verses 1–2. It also adds the word *decrees* (*ḥuqqâ*) to *commands*. This is followed by the first block of curses (vv. 16–19), which precisely reverses the blessings of verses 3–6. There does not appear to be any distinction between the different words for 'curse' used in verse 15 (*qēlalôt*) and in verses 16–19 (*'ārûr*; possibly related to an Akkadian root meaning 'bind' [by magical means] or 'exorcise'; but see Gen.

12:3; Thompson 1974: 272). The framing formula, *you will be cursed* (sing.) (vv. 16 and 19), and *cursed* (vv. 17 and 18), matches the six instances of *blessed* in verses 3–6. The reversal of the order of verses 4–5 in verses 17–18 may be a rhetorical ploy to intensify a movement from material things to living creatures (Nelson 2002: 330).

**20–44.** It is possible to divide this section into two main cycles, each beginning with disease, and concluding with Israel as a thing of horror before the nations (vv. 21–26; 27–37). At the same time, one may discern a concentric shape in verses 23–42:

a. Verses 23–24	Agricultural disaster
b. Verses 25–26	Israel as a horror to others
c. Verse 27	Incurable boils
d. Verses 28–29a	Madness/blindness/what is seen
e. Verse 29b	Exploitation of Israel
f. Verses 30–33a	Futility threats
e'. Verse 33b	Exploitation of Israel
d'. Verse 34	Madness/blindness/what is seen
c'. Verse 35	Incurable boils
b'. Verses 36–37	Israel as a horror to others
a'. Verses 38–42	Agricultural disaster

At the centre of this structure is the oppression of Israel and the futility threats which rhetorically speak of Israel's final state of helplessness, hopelessness and disaster. Finally, verses 43–44 reverse the promises of verses 12b–13a (Nelson 2002: 330).

Verses 20–44 contain a group of curses illustrating the kind of calamity that might come upon the covenant breaker. Steymans (1995b: 118–141) argues that this section is parallel to VTE 472–493 (= section 56). But even within this passage, the differences between the texts far outweigh any convincing parallels (e.g. Deut. 28 speaks of deportation which is of no concern to VTE). The main concern of VTE is that the crown prince designate Ashurbanipal be accorded the same loyalty as that given to his father Esarhaddon. Also, Deuteronomy 28 may mix items from different parts of VTE, making it more likely that both stood in a common

tradition, rather than one being dependent upon the other (McConville 2002: 402–403).

**20.** This section begins with three adversities sent by the Lord in the form of *curses*, *confusion* (cf. 7:23) and *rebuke* (*miġ'eret*; only here), reversing the blessing language of verse 8, and including *everything you put your hand to*. The first-person speech of Yahweh 'forsaking me' (v. 20b; LXX and NIV 'him') intrudes unexpectedly, but emphasizes that he is the real speaker (cf. 28:68).

**21–26.** This opening unit takes us from the threat of diseases (vv. 21–22) to the possibility of Israel's demise before the nations as a *thing of horror* (vv. 25–26).

**21–22.** The two passages (vv. 21–22, 27–28) introduce *diseases* (pl.) into the larger section of verses 15–44. The seven diseases of verse 22 are held together by the general notion of *heat*, but this raises some lexical issues. The first three are diseases, but items four and five could be construed as symptoms of disease ('fever' and 'dehydration'), and the last pair as the 'fiery heat' of fever, and 'yellowness' of jaundice (Nelson 2002: 331). Alternatively, the middle pair can read as *scorching heat* and *drought* (reading *hōreb* = drought, rather than MT *herēb* = sword), with this pair of weather conditions resulting in diseased crops, indicated by the final lexical pair (*blight*, the effect of the hot sirocco winds, and *mildew* or yellowness).<sup>88</sup>

**23–24.** The description of the seriousness of the drought leads to hyperbole. Thus the sky would become bronze, and the earth iron (cf. Lev. 26:19 where these are reversed; VTE 63–64 *ANET*, p. 539 follows Leviticus with the order of iron earth and bronze sky, but also has 'may it rain burning coals instead of dew on your land'). Verse 24 speaks of the rain turning to *dust and powder*, which may be a consequence of the severe drought in which fierce dust storms replace the rain, reversing verse 12a.

**25–26.** The scene changes from the disasters of the domestic sphere to defeat at the hands of enemies. Verse 25 reverses verse 7 (cf. Lev. 26:17). Instead of being an object of worldwide *fear* (v. 10), Israel will become an object of *horror* (*zā'āwā*; cf. Jer. 24:9–10; Ezek.

88. See Amos 4:9–10 and Deut. 28:25–27 (also 32:22–25 is framed by *fire* and *sword*).

23:46–47) and international revulsion. In verse 26 Israel will be denied the dignity of burial (21:22–23; cf. 1 Sam. 31:8–13; 2 Sam. 21:10–14; the curse of Ninurta, VTE 41 *ANET*, p. 538). Rather than feeding off the land (vv. 4–5, 8, 11), Israel will be a banquet for carnivorous birds and animals.

**27–37.** As with verses 21–26, this section opens a second cycle of threats, beginning with various diseases (vv. 27–28), and concluding with defeat and exile and Israel as a thing of *horror* before the nations (vv. 36–37).

**27–28.** The sequence of skin diseases and blindness (vv. 27–28) is matched in VTE 39–40 (*ANET*, p. 538) as part of a common stock of curse formulas in the second and first millennium BC. Further, the seven diseases of verses 27–28 (the first four dermatological, and the last three psychological) match the seven disasters of verse 22. But here disease is primarily linked to Egypt and the memory of Israel's enslaved past with *boils*. The term 'boil' (*šēhān*) derives from a root which in cognate languages means 'be hot or inflamed' (see comment on v. 22 above) and has been variously identified with smallpox, elephantiasis and bubonic plague (cf. v. 35; Exod. 9:8–12; Lev. 13:18–20, 23; Job 2:7). Together with *tumours* (probably not haemorrhoids; see Firth 2009: 92, 96; cf. 1 Sam. 5:6, 9, 12), *festering sores* or 'swellings' (cf. Lev. 21:20; 22:22) and the *itch* (*heres*; only here), all are pronounced incurable.

**28.** Three diseases of the mind are now given in the order of *madness* (*šiggā'ôn*; cf. 2 Kgs 9:20; Zech. 12:4), *blindness* and *confusion* (lit. 'terror or dismay of heart'). The same three words occur in Zechariah 12:4 referring to the *panic* that seizes horses and horsemen in battle and makes them powerless. Here all three terms refer to the heart or mind (Thompson 1974: 274). The middle term *blindness* (*'inwārôn*; cf. Zech. 12:4) is used in the same way as of the blind person at 27:18 (see commentary on 27:17–19). But here the notion of blindness (probably metaphorical; cf. v. 29 *like a blind man in the dark*) is understood differently, as deliberate affliction producing helplessness and exposure to exploitation, the reverse of 27:18.

**29.** Israel will be reduced to a condition of blindness at midday, when they should be able to see clearly. This verse also reflects the plagues of Egypt with the words *grope* (Heb. *māšā'*; Exod. 10:21) and *darkness* (Heb. *'āpēlā'*; Exod. 10:22). Israel (sing.) will become

unsuccessful in everything they do (lit. 'paths'), and each day they will be *oppressed* ('*āsūq*; cf. Lev. 6:4 linked to extortion) and *robbed*, with no-one to help.

**30–33a.** These are known as the *futility* curses (reversing and frustrating the enjoyment of the blessings). Structurally, they form the centre of verses 23–42, but they also add a greater rhetorical intensity to verses 27–37. Verse 30 echoes the holy war context of 20:5–7, but here the wife who is *ravished* (*šāgal*) by the enemy is mentioned first, followed by the inability to enjoy *house* and *vineyard*. Next comes the *slaughtering* (*tābah*) of the *ox* (main means of livelihood) which will not be eaten (by you), followed by the forcible taking of your *donkey* and *sheep*, and *no-one will rescue them* (v. 31; cf. vv. 29c and 22:27c). The imagery of verses 30–31 is replayed in verses 32–33a: *your sons and daughters* would be given to another nation, and Israel would be powerless to do anything (v. 32). Furthermore, a nation that Israel did not know would *eat* all they had produced.

**33b–37.** The curses mentioned in verses 27–29b are now mentioned in reverse order (exploitation of Israel, v. 33b; madness, blindness, what is seen, v. 34, here related to the terrible trauma and personal loss of war; and incurable boils, v. 35). Finally, Israel as a *horror* (*šammā*) to others (vv. 36–37) parallels the conclusion at verses 25–26, which anticipates the oppression of Israel at the hands of a foreign enemy.

**36–37.** The theme of oppression by foreigners now extends to captivity in a foreign land (v. 36), including the king at 17:14–20. Israel will worship other gods of wood and stone, who cannot hear them when they call (cf. 4:25–31; 29:16–18 [ET]). As a result, Israel (v. 37) will become a horror (*šammā*; cf. v. 25), a proverb (*māšāl*) and an object of ridicule (*šēnūnā*) in all the nations where they are sent (cf. 1 Kgs 9:7; esp. Jer. 24:9; 25:15–18).

**38–44.** A further set of futility curses follow, taking us back into the domestic setting (vv. 38–42). But here *locusts* will devour Israel's crops (v. 38), *worms* will eat her grapes (v. 39), and the olive trees will drop their fruit (v. 40). Sons and daughters who work on the farms will be taken into captivity (v. 41; cf. v. 32). Locusts will destroy all the trees and crops (v. 42). Finally, the resident alien (possibly including Canaanites) will prosper and become the creditor, thus enjoying the benefits of the land once again, while Israel becomes the borrower

(vv. 43–44), thereby reversing the promises of verses 12b–13a.

**45–57.** Structurally, the link between verse 45 and verse 15 may serve a dual purpose. First, it may form a frame with verse 15 by concluding verses 15–44. Secondly, like verse 15, it may introduce a new section with altered perspectives (Nelson 2002: 332).

**45–46.** Here, the curses will not only *come upon* Israel, and *overtake* them (v. 15), but they will *pursue* them (*rādap*; cf. 30:7) like an enemy in warfare until they are destroyed (*šāmad*). Disobedience to the *voice* of Yahweh (cf. 4:12–14; 5:23–27) will bring judgment. The use of the conjunction in verse 46 (‘and’ they will be) ironically links the curses with a *sign* (*’ôt*) and a *wonder* (*môpēt*) expressed elsewhere in connection with the salvation of Israel (4:34; 7:19; 26:8).

**47–48.** Verse 47 begins: *Because you did not serve*, and might simultaneously point forwards to explain what is threatened in verse 48, as well as point backward as the reason for verse 46 (Nelson 2002: 332). These verses present neat contrasts in terms of Yahweh’s sovereign and benevolent rule over Israel: first, in terms of *abundant prosperity*, requiring Israel’s *joyful* and *glad* service (v. 47; cf. 8:10–20; 11:13–17), and secondly, suffering complete deprivation and slavery, serving the *enemies* the Lord sends against them (v. 48; cf. vv. 25, 32, 33, 36, 49–57, 68). The *iron yoke* on the neck symbolizes subjugation by Babylon in Jeremiah 28:14 (also see comment on 28:37). The iron cannot be broken in a symbolic repudiation of the sign. Further, a reverse exodus is now being played out (cf. Lev. 26:13). Finally, the words *until he has destroyed you* (v. 48b) may provide a frame for verse 45a within the context of warfare language.

**49–57.** In spite of the apparent closure of verses 45–48, there is now a resumption, or a sequence that is well known in the treaty curses, that focuses on the ravages of the enemy, including siege warfare, resulting in exile (McConville 2002: 407).

**49–52.** The all-devouring alien nation recalls verses 32–33, and the language here is used by Jeremiah 5:15–17, again pointing to the Babylonians (Jer. 48:40; 49:22; Hab. 1:8; cf. Hos. 8:1 referring to the Assyrians). The comprehensive catalogue of verse 51 reverses and cancels out the list that appears at verses 4 and 11, except for the *fruit of the womb*, which is picked up at verse 53 and applied negatively to Israel in order to convey the horrors of siege warfare (Nelson 2002: 332). They are a fierce people of unknown language (itself a fore-

boding image), whose siege tactics do not find the security of high-walled cities a problem (v. 52; cf. 1:28).

**53–57.** This section draws attention to human atrocities committed under siege warfare, which are commonly found in treaty curses (esp. VTE 47, 69–72, 75; *ANET*, 538–540). The passage contrasts the natural appetites of the barbarian (v. 51) with the unnatural lust of the Israelites (Kline 1963: 128).

**58–68.** The conditional nature of verse 58 (*if you do not carefully follow*) begins the last section with words similar to those of verse 15. However, the movement between these verses is from oral exposition to a written book (vv. 58, 61; 29:19–20, 27; 30:10–11; 31:9, 24–26). We have already observed the same movement signalled from 1:5 to 27:8 relating to Mount Ebal. The twofold reference to *this law* (Torah) and *this book* is coupled with a reference to fear the twofold *glorious and awesome name* of the Lord your God (v. 58), which looks like a kind of signature (McConville 2002: 408; cf. Ps. 99:3–4 linked to the Lord’s love of justice). *Lingering illnesses* (v. 59) will follow, including the dreaded diseases of Egypt (v. 60; cf. v. 27), some not even recorded in the Book of the Law (v. 61).

**62–63.** Here the second-person plural is used in order to provide a transition between verses 58–61 and the dispersion referred to in verses 63b–68. The threat of obliteration is now modified to that of greatly reduced numbers, as an inversion of the promise of great numbers at 1:10–11; 10:22; 26:5 (cf. Gen. 15:5, 18). Verse 63 also provides a rhetorical twist and reversal. The Lord’s joy in blessing Israel will turn into joy in bringing dislocation and destruction.

**64–68.** This final section is a picture of exile (v. 64), and reflects language used at 4:27–28. The *rest* from enemies at 12:9–10 now becomes restlessness and anxiety in a foreign place (v. 65), which is centred on the *heart* and *eyes* (vv. 65–67; cf. vv. 32–35). Formerly, the nations would experience *terror* at Israel’s hands (2:25; 11:25), but now terror will come upon Israel (v. 67). Finally, the very last of the curses (v. 68) threatens a return to Egypt (cf. 2 Kgs 25:26; Jer. 43:4–7) in boats,<sup>89</sup> and the enslavement from which they have just come.

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89. One possibility is that the ships may have been Phoenician, engaged in slave traffic (Ezek. 27:13; Joel 3:6; Amos 1:9).

But even as slaves, they will not be sought after, suggesting either that they are now worth nothing, or that their fate has made them an object of revulsion to potential purchasers (cf. v. 25b).

**69 [MT] 29:1 [ET].** The placing of verse 69 [29:1 ET] has been much discussed in recent scholarship, but it is best to understand its original intention as providing a subscript or summary to chapters 5 – 28 in terms of ‘words of the covenant’ (cf. 5:2–3; esp. see Lev. 26:46).<sup>90</sup> However, in the final form of Deuteronomy this verse may have also served the dual purpose of looking *forward* in terms of covenant oath and recapitulation (cf. 29:1 [ET] with 29:9 [ET]) found in chapters 29 – 30 (also cf. 29:1–2 [ET] with 4:45 – 5:1). Finally, the words *in addition* not only separate Moab from Horeb in terms of time and space, but express the idea of a new embodiment or renewal of the Horeb covenant, rather than its complete replacement.

### *Meaning*

The blessings (vv. 1–14) and curses (vv. 15–68) of chapter 28 follow the pattern of Ancient Near Eastern treaties in seeking to motivate loyalty and obedience in the subjects of the conquering king. But within the Pentateuch, the unity and *concept* of blessing and curse drives the narrative from Genesis (the fivefold blessing given to Abraham at 12:1–3, reversing the fivefold curse of Gen. 3 – 11); the blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:1–33); Leviticus 26:1–13 (blessings); Leviticus 26:14–46 (curses); and Deuteronomy 27 – 28, 32 – 33.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, the assumption behind the blessings and curses within the Pentateuch is the sovereignty of Yahweh (monotheism) in all the affairs of life. This especially relates to the Lord’s covenant with Abraham and his progeny to give them a land (Gen. 12:1–3). But in order to possess this promise in all its fullness, Israel must replicate Abraham’s obedience to all of the Lord’s commands (cf. Gen. 26:5;

90. On this understanding, Van Rooy (1988: 215–222) also sees it as a ‘covenant’ inclusio with 1:1–5.

91. Evans (1994: 77–89) sees the curses of chs. 27 – 28 as a collective whole without individual application, directed to those who stand outside of the covenant with Yahweh (cf. 2 Kgs 2:23–25).

Deut. 28:1, 15, 58). The main sin that will undo this blessing and incur Yahweh's curses will be Israel's proclivity to go after other gods and serve them (28:14). Within chapter 28, the curses are four times longer than the blessings (cf. Lev. 26:14–46; three times longer than the blessings), which initially may have served the purpose of motivating obedience to the laws of chapters 5 – 28 (cf. 29:19–21). But it may also suggest that Israel will fail in its attempt to keep the demands of the covenant (cf. 31:14–29). Even though the curses will inevitably follow the blessings (30:1), God's grace will also prevail in the possibility of Israel's return to the Lord (30:1–10), suggesting that the curses were not *always* logical or irreversible in their desired and rhetorical effects. Finally, *the terms of the covenant* (28:69 [MT]; 29:1 [ET]) from chapters 5 – 28 were to be understood as a new embodiment or renewal of the Horeb covenant, and not its replacement.

### 3. THIRD ADDRESS OF MOSES: RECAPITULATION OF THE COVENANT DEMAND AND THE CALL TO CHOOSE GOD AND OBEY (29:1 – 30:20)

#### *Context*

From a literary point of view, it is generally agreed that chapters 29 – 30 do not strictly concur with covenant documents as they were ordinarily crafted in the ancient world, which concluded with curses and blessings. While acknowledging a basic treaty structure for Deuteronomy, McCarthy (1981: 204) sees the kernel in chapters 5 – 28. This is framed by two independent speeches (Mayes 1979: 148–149, 358–359) in covenant form, linking Horeb (ch. 4) with Moab (chs. 29 – 30), looking at past, present and future, and ending on a positive note, thus providing a framework of hope to counter the curses of chapter 28. Finally, we may broadly agree with McConville (2002: 413) in seeing chapters 29 – 30 as exploring further the implications of Israel's acceptance of the terms of the covenant, especially those of the curse (29:19–21; 30:1, 15–20 [ET]) in chapter 28.

## A. Israel exhorted to accept the covenant (29:1-15)

### Comment

**2-3 [ET].** The section (v. 2a [ET]) begins with Moses' *summons* (lit. 'call') to *all* Israel last encountered at 5:1 with reference to the covenant at Horeb made with the present generation. Now *all* Israel is summoned to respond in obedience to the terms of the renewed covenant made at Moab (v. 9 [ET]). This section opens with an historical review similar to the prologue section in treaties. It is typically based upon Yahweh's prior action of deliverance from Egypt. The words *your own eyes have seen* (vv. 2b-3a [ET]) recall 11:1-7 (cf. Exod. 19:4), and the triad of *great trials*, *miraculous signs* and *great wonders* is found only here and at 4:34 (cf. 6:22; 7:19; 26:8), referring primarily to the plagues of Egypt (cf. Exod. 7:3-5).

**4-6 [ET].** *But to this day the LORD has not given you* (second-person pl.) *a mind* (or 'heart') *that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear* (v. 4 [ET]). The phrase *to this day* occurs six times in Deuteronomy (2:22; 3:14; 10:8; 11:4; 29:3; 34:6), with the sense that nothing has really changed, or is likely to do so. Like the exodus, the wilderness has failed to bring Israel to a right knowledge, recognition and acknowledgment of Yahweh. The same issue is found at 9:4-7 and 10:16, and further anticipated at 30:6, which may be seen as the narrative solution to 29:4 [ET] 3 [MT] (cf. 31:27-29). The new note sounded here is that Yahweh should *give* the people minds (or hearts) to know (cf. 8:2-5), in order to produce right action. In this sense, the Lord will have to *give* the people knowledge, sight and obedience (cf. Jer. 24:6-7; 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:26-28).

**7-8 [ET].** The reference to the conquests in Transjordan not only continues the idea of a test of Israel's obedience, but now places Yahweh's great defeat of these kings (cf. 2:24 - 3:11) as the most recent and notable victories of Israel that are related to Moab (v. 7a [ET]). This includes the preliminary fulfilment of the promise of land made to Abraham that takes in the land (*inheritance*) already given to the two and a half tribes east of the Jordan (v. 8 [ET]; cf. 3:12-20).

**9 [ET].** These more recent events provide Israel with a strong motivation to obey the covenant made at Moab, as an appropriate response and consequence of Yahweh's covenant faithfulness and acts of salvation. But here *understanding* is contingent upon and

framed by *doing* (*šākal*; cf. Gen. 3:6; Deut. 32:29) the words of the covenant (cf. v. 9b [ET] framed by v. 2b [ET]).<sup>1</sup>

**10–15 [ET].** This passage provides the background for 26:17–19 and 27:9. Now Moses gathers up the past of patriarchal promise and Horeb assembly into a new act of covenant making and ratification for both the present (vv. 10–13 [ET]) and future (vv. 14–15 [ET]) generations. The message of this passage is presented in a chiasmic form:

- a. standing (*nāšab*) today in the presence of the Lord (v. 10 [ET])
- b. making covenant and oath/curse (*'ālā*; v. 12 [ET])
- c. his people/your God – patriarchal promise (v. 13 [ET])
- b<sup>1</sup>. making covenant and oath/curse (*'ālā*; v. 14 [ET])
- a<sup>1</sup>. standing (*'āmad*) today in the presence of the Lord (v. 15 [ET])

**10–11 [ET].** The opening phrase, *standing* (v. 10 [ET]; *nāšab*) before the Lord, indicates the liturgical formality and purpose of the gathering. This is followed by something new in terms of the careful and accurate enumeration of the covenant members of Israel, ordered from the greatest to the least. This inclusive list of leaders (cf. Josh. 23:2; 24:1 = *elders, leaders, judges and officials*), men, wives, children and resident aliens who chop wood and carry water (cf. Josh. 9:21, 23, 27) all find themselves standing before the Lord. Each person is equally important and responsible as a member under the terms and sanctions of the covenant.

**12 [ET].** Israel *enters* ('passes through' or 'over into it'; *'ābar*) this covenant which is sealed with an *oath/curse* (*'ālā*). This unique use of the word *enter* is mainly used in Deuteronomy for 'going over' into the land. Its usage here may have been suggested by its associations at 29:16–18 [ET] with idolatry. Or it may relate to the covenant ceremony of 'passing through' the parts of slaughtered animals (Gen. 15:17–18), anticipating the empty oath/curse of 29:19–21 [ET] (cf. Jer. 34:18).

**13 [ET].** This particular expression of the covenant relationship forms the rhetorical centre of the section. It recalls 26:17–18 and

1. Contrast Nelson (2002: 340).

here refers to the *fulfilment* of the oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 30:20). Its function is to reassert the fundamental basis on which the covenant is established (and maintained) precisely at Israel's most solemn point of covenant commitment (McConville 2002: 416).

**14–15 [ET].** Future generations are included in and bound by this covenant (cf. 29:11 [ET]; 30:2, 6, 19; cf. 5:2–3), as was sometimes the case with both Hittite (*ANET*, pp. 203–205) and Assyrian (*ANET*, pp. 534, 537–539) ancient political treaties.

## B. Punishment for disobedience (29:16–28)

### *Comment*

**16–21 [ET].** This section traces a temporal sequence from past experience (vv. 16–17 [ET]) through perilous present (vv. 18–19 [ET]) to grim future (vv. 20–21 [ET]). The covenant placed Israel under the inescapable curse that upholds obedience (Nelson 2002: 341).

**16–17.** The route from Egypt to Moab exposed Israel to *detestable* (*šiqqûšîm*) things (cf. 1 Kgs 11:5, 7; 2 Kgs 23:13) and *idols* (*gillîlîm*; cf. Lev. 26:30)<sup>2</sup> of wood and stone, silver and gold (vv. 16–17 [ET]; cf. *wood and stone* at 4:28; 28:64). Egypt would have inspired the incident of the golden calf (9:7–21; cf. Exod. 32:1–14), and the episode of Baal of Peor frames Israel's idolatry at Moab (cf. Num. 25:1–5).

**18–21.** These verses, which embody the heart of the argument of the chapter, are concerned with the liability and responsibility of *each individual* (man or woman), as well as each clan or tribal unit within Israel, with regard to the sin of idolatry. Whereas in chapter 13 the people are the agents of punishment because the person there sins publicly, here the person's thoughts (whether individual or group) are kept private. Therefore, Yahweh himself executes punishment (cf. 27:15–26).

**18.** Idolatry begins when the *heart* deliberately forsakes the Lord and *turns away* (*pānā*) to worship other gods, after tasting his covenant goodness (cf. 30:17; 31:18, 20). Such a practice is described as a *root* that produces bitter poison (cf. 32:32–33; Jer. 9:13–15). This

2. Both terms are found together in 2 Kings 23:24 and Ezek. 20:30–31.

may be illustrated by the golden calf incident, inspired by the *root* of Egyptian idolatry, which the people carried with them out of Egypt, coupled with a spirit of continuous *rebellion* (9:7–24; cf. 31:27–29).

**19.** The root that bears such evil fruit is now described as a person who hears the covenant sanctions (lit. ‘words of this curse’), but considers himself immune by invoking a *blessing on himself* (lit. ‘in his heart’), and thinking, *I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way* (lit. ‘in the stubbornness of my heart’; cf. Jer. 7:4–8). The result of such rebellion would be the utter ruin of *the watered land as well as the dry* (i.e. as a raging bushfire destroys both dry and fresh trees alike; cf. 1 Kgs 18:38; Luke 23:31). Thus, if idolatry were to take root in Israel, the result would be the utter ruin of the nation (cf. 2 Kgs 17:7–23) (Thompson 1974: 282).

**20–21.** Outward conformity to covenant requirements (including circumcision) would not save such persons. Those who walk in the stubbornness of their own hearts (presumably deliberate sin) would not be offered any *forgiveness* (*sālah*); only here in Deuteronomy; cf. Num. 14:19–20; esp. 15:25–26; 1 Kgs 8:30–50; 2 Kgs 24:4; Jer. 31:34). Further, the Lord’s *anger* and *jealousy* would *smoulder* (*‘āšan*; cf. Exod. 19:18; Pss 74:1; 80:4) against that person (cf. 4:24; 6:15; 7:4), and every curse (*‘ālā*)<sup>3</sup> written in this book would fall (lit. ‘crouch’; 30:1 = *come upon*; cf. 28:45; Gen. 4:7) upon them. Yahweh would blot out their name from under heaven (cf. 7:24; esp. 9:14; 25:6, 19), and such a person would be *singled out from all the tribes of Israel for disaster*. Moreover, all the curses he had taken lightly would fall heavily upon him (cf. Josh. 7:14–26; Acts 5:1–11).

**22–28.** Some see these verses as a later insertion into the text, because the transition to the future appears to be abrupt and unexpected (Nelson 2002: 342). But one can argue that this passage follows the logic and argument of 4:25–28. Both sections share the fulfilment of the curses in history, including the reversal of the speech of the nations made at 4:5–8, now framed at 29:24–28 [ET]. The section thus anticipates a time when both the children of the present generation and foreigners will look back and see the horror of the plagues and diseases inflicted upon the land because of

3. Translated *oath* at 29:12, 14, 19 and *curses* at 29:20, 21; 30:7.

Israel's *forsaking* ('*āzab*; cf. 28:20; 31:16–17) the covenant (v. 25 [ET]; cf. 5:2–3), expressed in the form of apostasy and idolatry ('serving' and 'worshipping' other gods; v. 26 [ET]).

The argument of this section is presented in the catechetical style of question and answer (cf. 6:20–25). This is framed by the word 'say' ('*āmar*) at the beginning of verse 22 [ET] ('a future generation will say' – both your children and foreigners), followed by verse 24 [ET] ('and all the nations will ask'), concluding with verse 25 ('and they will say'). This last reference might refer to the deductions of the nations themselves or to others, including Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 9:8–9; Jer. 22:8–9).

A further concentric pattern is present, which highlights Yahweh's wrath (here in its most concentrated form in the book) in the following way: 'wrath', 'hot anger', and 'great fury' (vv. 23, 28 [ET]) surround 'burning anger' (vv. 24, 27 [ET]). The first of the references to Yahweh's wrath and hot anger at verse 23 [ET] likens the land to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, with its soil a *burning waste*, ruined by salt and sulphur, thereby preventing any form of growth and vegetation (cf. Gen. 19:24–25). Then, as a result of this ruin in the frame at verse 28 [ET], the Lord, in his threefold wrath, hot anger and great fury, *uprooted* (emphatic position) Israel from their land (cf. Ps. 80:8–9) and *thrust* them into another land, *as it is now*. These words are best understood as a response that will be used in the future to the question at verse 25 [ET].

Finally, Israel's abandonment of the Horeb and Abrahamic covenants (vv. 25–26) is framed by the curses of Yahweh's *burning anger* (vv. 24, 27). This covenant was abandoned for *other gods ... they did not know, gods he had not given them* (v. 26 [ET]; cf. 4:19; see commentary on 4:17–19).

### C. Secret and revealed things (29:29)

#### *Comment*

**29 [ET].** The secret things (*nistārôt*), including the unfathomable wisdom of God's creation, plan, election and grace, as this relates to Israel's *future* in particular (30:1–10; esp. 30:6), are God's concern. But the things that are *revealed*, such as God's law and his will expressed through it (30:11–14), belong *to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law* (cf. 5:3; 6:20–25).

### Meaning

Chapter 29 draws attention to the terms and implications of Israel's *entering* into the covenant that is sealed with a 'curse' (v. 12 [ET]), involving both present and future generations (vv. 11–15). The new element here is that all members of the community, from the leaders to menial servants, stand as *individuals* before the Lord (vv. 9–15), and are thus under the curse and wrath of God if the covenant is broken. The chapter especially recalls the standpoint of chapter 13 on apostasy and idolatry (v. 18 [ET]). This is then developed in terms of the person who might hear the words of the curse, and then invoke a blessing upon himself, thinking that he is safe from the curse, while continuing in his own stubborn and rebellious ways (cf. 27:15–26). Such a person is a *root*, whose bitter poison can bring ruin to the entire nation (v. 19 [ET]). Earlier, this is attributed to the absence of 'a heart to know, eyes to see and ears to hear' to 'this day' (v. 4 [ET]). Such sin will never be forgiven within Israel. The wrath of the Lord (vv. 20–28 [ET]) will 'burn' against such a person, and 'single' him out for the full quota of curses contained in chapters 27–28 (v. 21 [ET]). In time this will lead to the land itself becoming an unproductive *burning waste* like Sodom and Gomorrah, prompting the nations to ask why this should be so. The answer will be that Israel *abandoned* the covenant of the Lord by worshipping other gods they did not know, gods he had not given them (vv. 22–28; cf. 4:19; 28:64). As a result, the Lord's anger will *burn* against the land, uprooting Israel and thrusting them into another land, *as it is now*. Finally, verse 29 [ET] flows into the following chapter, where the resolution to this failure is described (see commentary above).

## D. Repentance and restoration (30:1–20)

### Context

Beyond the curse of exile, this chapter expounds the possibility of a new beginning. If Israel lacked a 'heart to know' (29:4 [ET]), leading to her exile, this will be remedied by Yahweh himself, who will provide a 'heart to know' by circumcising Israel's heart (30:6) (Barker 2004: 141). The main theological issue in this chapter can be broadly summarized with three modern approaches. (1) One approach sees *Yahweh's circumcision* (v. 6) as a pre-condition for Israel's response to

the Lord in all three sections (vv. 1–10, 11–14, 15–20) of the chapter (Barker 2004: 217–221). (2) A second approach regards *Israel's repentance and obedience* as a pre-condition for Yahweh's new acts of grace and salvation throughout the chapter (Craigie 1976: 363–364). (3) A third approach takes a more mediating course and sees a *balance* between *Israel's repentance and Yahweh's grace* that cannot be reduced in any polarized way (McConville 2002: 424).<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the chapter divides clearly into three sections (vv. 1–10, 11–14 and 15–20). Also, 30:1–10 closely resembles 4:29–31 in future outlook and audience, but goes a step further in speaking about a return from exile. In chapter 30 there is a shift from the second-person plural of chapter 29 to the second-person singular form of address. The final section on choosing life (30:19–20) reflects 4:1, as well as echoing the choice between the two trees back in Eden (Gen. 3:1–24).

### *Comment*

#### ***i. Future blessing as a spur to present obedience (30:1–10)***

1–2. These verses form one long sentence, with verses 1–2 as protasis (*when*) and verse 3 as apodosis or result (*then*). The expression *When all these blessings and curses ... come upon you* (v. 1) assumes that Israel will move from experiencing a time of blessing within the Promised Land to one of curse, in that order. This can only happen because of covenant violation, resulting in dispersion among the nations (cf. 4:27; 28:64–68). The verb *disperse* (*nādal*; lit. 'driven one' = sing.; also v. 4) refers to persons who would drive the Israelites away from their God (back at 13:6, 11, 14). That role is now reversed by the Lord himself, who 'drives' Israel away to foreign lands because of her apostasy (cf. v. 17: *drawn away* after other gods). However, the prospect of a *return* to the Lord your God (*šûb*; v. 2; found seven times in vv. 1–10) defines the direction of

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4. The chapter contains a sevenfold reference to *today* (vv. 2, 8, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19), thus enhancing its rhetorical intensity in all three sections. This may intend to hold in tension *future ideal* (v. 6) with *present reality* or *possibility* (vv. 11–14; cf. 15:4–5, 11).

Israel's covenant obedience. This is a departure from the curses of the normal treaty pattern (whether Hittite or Assyrian), indicating that the experience of the curses need not spell the absolute end (McConville 2002: 425). This will come about as a result of Israel's reflection upon the blessings and curses (supported by v. 1b; *and* = NIV or 'if' = NRSV; *you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations*), recalling the great lesson and distress of the curses and exile,<sup>5</sup> and the Lord's command to seek him there with *all your heart and with all your soul* (4:29; cf. Jer. 29:10–14). These themes frame verses 1–10 as follows:

- A. Protasis (vv. 1–2) – when ... 'and/if' you take (*return*) them (blessings and curses) to heart (v. 1)  
 – and (*return*) to the Lord with *all your heart and with all your soul*  
 – according to *everything I command* you today (v. 2)
- B. Apodosis (vv. 3–5) – The Lord will restore (*return*) your captivity (v. 3a)  
 – and gather (*return*) you again from the nations (v. 3b)  
 – He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers
- C. Centre (vv. 6–8) – The Lord will circumcise your hearts so that you may love the Lord with *all your heart and with all your soul* (v. 6)  
 – All these curses will be placed upon your enemies who hate you (v. 7)  
 – You (emphatic) will (*turn*) and *obey* the Lord and follow *all his commands* I am giving you today (v. 8)

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5. Supported by Lev. 26:40–45 and Craigie (1976: 361), who translates Deut. 30:1 = (after the blessings and curses have come upon you) 'then you shall return to your senses among all the nations to which the Lord your God banished you'.

- B. Apodosis (v. 9) – The Lord will (*return*) to *delight* in you and prosper you just like the fathers (v. 9)
- A. Protasis (v. 10) – ‘when/if’ you *obey* the Lord and keep his *commands and decrees* and (*turn*) to the Lord your God with *all your heart and with all your soul* (v. 10)

3–5. Such seeking of the Lord (v. 3) will result in a display of his compassion (4:31) and the *restoring of fortunes* (cf. Job 42:10; lit. ‘turning thy turning’), which can also be translated ‘produce a coming back’ or ‘bring back a captivity’ (cf. Jer. 30:16–23). Yahweh will gather his banished (lit. ‘driven one’, sing.; see v. 1 above) from the extremities of all the nations to which he has scattered them in accordance with his plan (v. 4; cf. Jer. 25:8–14). In the address to a future generation in verse 5, the *fathers* probably refer to the present Moab generation. The promise that Yahweh *will make* them (i.e. the future generation) *more prosperous and numerous than your fathers* (following 28:3–6) need not be taken as a rejection of the present generation. Rather, it has the rhetorical effect of assuring them of Yahweh’s ongoing commitment to *this Book of the Law* (Deuteronomy) at verse 10, as well as to the Abrahamic covenant, thus providing further motivation for the present Moab generation to keep the law as well (cf. 2 Kgs 22:11–20).

6–8. For the first time in Deuteronomy, the Lord himself will carry out the inward renewal of Israel (*circumcise your hearts*) that will make love of God and obedience to his commandments possible (6:5–6), as well as fulfil the demand made at 10:16 (cf. Jer. 4:4).<sup>6</sup> The end result will be *life* itself (lit. ‘for thy life’s sake’; anticipating vv. 15–20, esp. vv. 19–20: *For the LORD is your life*). At the centre of this section (v. 7) is the reversal of Israel’s fortunes (cf. v. 3), where the covenant curses (*’alā*; cf. 28:15; 29:21 [ET]) are now directed towards the enemies of Israel where they belong (7:15; cf. Isa. 10:5–23; Jer. 25:11–14). Verse 8 may then be seen as a *consequence* of verse 6: ‘But

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6. Williamson (2003: 153) speaks here of a reaffirmation of obligations laid out in the covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17; cf. Deut. 30:6–10) for all future generations (Deut. 29:14–15; cf. Jer. 4:4; 31:31–34).

as for you' (emphatic), *you will again obey the LORD and follow all his commands I am giving you today* (cf. Jer. 24:6–7). Though referring to certain obedience in a future time, the rhetorical effect of *today* can hardly be missed by the people at Moab (McConville 2002: 428).

9–10. The covenant blessings will follow obedience, reflecting the threefold order of fruit of the womb, beast and ground (28:11). Accompanying this will be Yahweh's renewed *delight* in his people, causing them to prosper rather than to perish, and reversing the curse of 28:63 (cf. Jer. 24:6–7; 32:41). The expression *just as he delighted in your fathers* (v. 9b) parallels verse 5, but here it is more directly positive, as well as encouraging, to the present generation at Moab. But verse 10 (as summary) also serves as a final warning to both periods that divine grace always works in conjunction with human responsibility: 'when/if' (*keif*; temporal and conditional) you obey the *voice* of the Lord your God and *keep his commands and decrees* (a combination last expressed at 28:15 and 45 with regard to the blessings and curses) that are written in *this Book of the Law*, and *turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul* (cf. 2 Kgs 22:11–20). This passage is well summed up by Nelson (2002: 349) as follows: 'All of this will occur if Israel obeys and wholeheartedly returns. The essential first step in this movement must be taken by Israel, but only Yahweh's willingness to have compassion (v. 3) can lead to restoration, and only what Yahweh promises to do in verse 6 can make Israel's love and obedience enduringly possible.'

## ii. God's covenant accessible to all (30:11–14)

11–14. It is best to see this section as a continuation and development of the second half of 29:29 [ET]: 'but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we might follow ("do") all the words of this law' (cf. v. 14). Thus, these verses can be seen as providing a frame to 29:29 [ET]. Also, they take us abruptly from the future, portrayed in verses 1–10, and return us to the present 'Moab moment' and the renewal of the covenant outlined in 29:1–28 [ET] (Nelson 2002: 349).<sup>7</sup>

11–13. The section begins with the 'nearness' (cf. 4:7–8) of the

7. For Barker (2004: 182–198) the present tense of vv. 11–14 is not in contrast to vv. 1–10, but rather highlights rhetorically the certainty of

law (lit. ‘this commandment’), which embraces the entire revelation of Deuteronomy (6:1, 25; also see commentary on 27:1). It is neither too *difficult* (or ‘wonderful’) to understand (cf. 17:8; Ps. 131:1; Prov. 30:18), anticipating the vertical distance of the heavenly realm (v. 12), nor *beyond your reach* in terms of being unattainable or inaccessible (cf. 4:7–8; Job. 36:3), anticipating the horizontal realm (v. 13).<sup>8</sup> These images are clarified by 29:29 [ET]: ‘But the things revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may follow (“do”) all the words of this law.’

14. The conclusion to this section reads literally: ‘But near to you is the word, exceedingly, in your mouth and in your heart to do it.’ Barker (2002: 198) interprets these words as a statement of the effect of the *future* circumcision of the heart at 30:6, and because of present human effort (also see fn. 3, p. 288). The argument is made that, whereas at 6:6 (and 11:18) Israel is instructed to place the commands *upon* the heart, here at 30:14 Yahweh does this for them by putting the commands *in* their heart for the first time in Deuteronomy. The same change is intended from 10:16 (where Israel are commanded to *circumcise* the heart) to 30:6 (where Yahweh will circumcise the heart). Further, the argument relating to 30:14 assumes that God is the subject of this verse, which conceivably may be so if it is directly governed by 30:6. However, the movement to the present tense in verse 11 is compelling, including the rhetorical use of *today* in verses 11–19. Also, the internalization of the law was important in the Old Testament, especially for a righteous remnant (Pss 1; 19; 119; esp. 119:11). In addition, there is a strong catechetical emphasis in Deuteronomy, involving the mouth and heart, beginning with the Shema at 6:4–9, followed by 6:20–25; 11:18–19 (cf. 31:9–13; 32:1–47). On this basis, it was expected that the law could be *in* the mouth of every man as he repeated it, thus allowing it to enter *into* his heart and flow out into his life. This did

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this *future* event and its effects for obedience. But see commentary on v. 14 where Israel’s *present* obedience and response are preferred.

8. The expression ‘go up to heaven’ (cf. Prov. 30:4) occurs in the Amarna letters (EA 264: 14–19), in the Babylonian *Dialogue of Master and Servant* XI, 85 *ANET*, p. 438, and also in Psalm 139:8.

not require the deep searchings of philosophy and the mysteries of the universe, for it was as near as hearing and seeing (cf. 4:1–8, 32–40), and had been plainly revealed to Israel (29:29 [ET]). Therefore, it was something that potentially could be acted upon: *so that you may obey (do) it* (cf. Rom. 10:5–10) (Thompson 1974: 286).

### *iii. Choose life so that you may live (30:15–20)*

This section is the rhetorical climax of Deuteronomy, ending as it does the third speech of Moses. It brings to a conclusion, in hortatory style, all the covenant themes of the book, including the commandments, blessings and curses, and witnesses, and closes with an appeal for obedience, so that the ancient promises to the Patriarchs might be fulfilled. It also provides a frame to 1:8 and 11:26–28 (*see*) and 4:1, 40 (*life*), as well as a canonical frame to the two trees in Genesis 2–3, echoing the choice between life and death.

**15.** The words of verse 15, *See, I set before you (sing.) today life and prosperity (tôb; lit. 'good'), death and destruction (ra'; 'misfortune'; cf. v. 19), echo the opening words of 1:8 (also 1:39) as Israel stands on the boundary of the land, and also the blessings and curses at 11:26–28. However, the expression set before you calls Israel to choose (cf. v. 6). The dominant theme of life (recalling 4:1, 40) in verses 15–20 reflects its presence at 30:6.*

**16–18.** The alternatives of *life* and *death* are now explained. In the typical style of Deuteronomy, the positive alternative is given first, with an expansive use of triplets. On the one hand (v. 16), if Israel obeys (present tense) the threefold command to *love* God, *walk* in his ways, and *keep* his commands, decrees and laws (cf. 10:12–13, 14–22; 11:1, 22, following the golden calf episode), then (future tense) they will *live, increase* and be *blessed* by Yahweh within the land (cf. 4:1; 7:13; 8:1; esp. 32:46–47). On the other hand (vv. 17–18), if anyone's heart *turns away* (cf. 29:18 [ET]) and does not obey (lit. 'listen'), but is drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, then that person will certainly perish, and will be denied long life within the land (cf. 4:26, 40).

**19.** Sometimes in secular treaties, both early Hittite (*ANET*, p. 206) and later Assyrian (*ANET*, p. 539), the gods of heaven and earth are invoked as witnesses. But here such an appeal to the gods is rejected in favour of Yahweh's own creation (cf. 4:26; 31:28). The

twofold *heaven* and *earth* will serve as silent and lawful *witnesses* (emphatic; cf. 17:6; 19:15) against Israel, in terms of the choice of *life* and *death* now set before them. Finally, the grand finale of the book is reached at verse 19b: *Now choose life, so that you* (sing.) *and your children* (“seed”) *may live*. Life in all its abundance and fullness is Israel’s prospect and goal and, as such, echoes the choice between the two trees in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9b, 16–17; 3:3, 22; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14; cf. John 10:9–10; 14:6). The final decision was Israel’s to make in each successive generation (5:2–3; cf. Josh. 24:15; 1 Sam. 12:14–15, 24–25). The call to *choose* may be taken as a command to Israel in the present, which is preferred here (see vv. 15–16a), but at the same time it might also subtly signal a future application, with the translation: ‘And you shall choose life, in order that you and your offspring may live’,<sup>9</sup> echoing the logic of verses 6–8 (see commentary above).

20. The final verse continues verse 19b, with the implications of *life* in terms of a threefold response to Yahweh: to *love* him, *listen* to his voice, and *hold fast* (or ‘cleave’ to him; cf. 10:20; 11:22, illustrating trust in Yahweh’s promises). The outer case terms of *love* and *hold fast* reflect the language of personal affection and loyalty typical of ancient treaties. The middle term, *listen* to his voice, continues the pattern in Deuteronomy of the central importance of keeping the commandments, as Horeb confronts each generation (30:10; cf. 4:10–14, 32–40; 5:2–3, 22–29). The following expression, *For the LORD is your life* (NIV), can also be translated: ‘For that means life to you’ (NRSV), namely the threefold response just given. While the latter suggestion is theologically correct, and indeed gives important meaning to *life*, both here and throughout Deuteronomy (v. 16; cf. 32:46–47), the first suggestion (NIV) is preferable, on the basis of the statement immediately preceding it, which reads *hold fast to him*, for *he* (the LORD) is your life. This reinforces the use of *life* at verse 6 (see commentary above), as well as the testimony at 8:3 and 32:39. Also, verses 17–18 make the equation that to choose other gods is to choose death, but to choose Yahweh is to choose life.

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9. So Craigie (1976: 366) and Friedman (2001: 660), who also translate the verbs as a future statement of command.

This reading flows naturally into the last part of verse 20. Finally, the blessing of many days within the land also links to Yahweh's *sworn* fulfilment of his ancient promises *given* to the Patriarchs as a frame to 1:8.

### Meaning

Theologically, chapter 30 addresses the future anticipated at 4:25–31, and so provides further commentary on that statement. The future orientation of verses 1–10 points to a certain exile and dispersion of the Lord's people, *when all these blessings and curses ... come upon you* (in that order), after living in the Promised Land for some time. Therefore, the chapter addresses the issue of whether the covenant can continue, and on what basis. At the same time, it assumes that Israel will fail (28:1–29:28[ET]; cf. 31:24–29), but after exile and judgment, God's mercy and covenant faithfulness will again prevail in restoring faithless Israel. If this happens, they should not lose hope (Jer. 24:1–10), for if they take the blessings and curses to heart (v. 1), and return to the Lord with all their heart and soul (vv. 2, 10), then the Lord will bring them back from captivity and restore their fortunes (vv. 3–5, 9). But in order to make this return to the Lord both possible and permanent in terms of obedience to all his commands (v. 8), the Lord himself will *circumcise* their hearts, as well as the hearts of their children, so that they might love him with all their heart and soul, and *live* (v. 6; anticipating Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–32). Then returning to the present Moab generation in verses 11–14, the future ideal of verses 6 and 8 is now put in more realistic terms relating to the accessibility of the law and the *present* possibility of obeying it. These verses constitute the rhetorical heart of the chapter, leading to the matter of an appropriate choice by Israel in verses 15–20: *See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction* (v. 15), concluding at verse 19: *Now choose life ... For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*. The final choice is between love of Yahweh and obedience to his promise and laws, leading to life (cf. 32:46–47), or following the gods of Canaan, leading to death (vv. 16–18; cf. Josh. 24:14–15). Ultimately for Deuteronomy, the present and future shape and viability of the covenant are a matter of the *heart* and obedience to all that Yahweh has commanded.

#### 4. THE TRANSITION FROM MOSES TO JOSHUA (31:1 – 34:12)

Scholars have often referred to these concluding chapters as ‘appendices’ which have no real connection to all that has gone before. But it is far better to see this section as providing an ‘outer frame’ with chapters 1 – 3. Both parts of the frame may be read together as a single document, and are the only sections in which Joshua appears as Moses’ successor, framing both sections (1:37–38; 3:26–28; 31:7–8, 14, 23; 34:9). But whereas the primary focus of chapters 1 – 3 is on the past, chapters 31 – 34 look to the distant future through the song (32:1–43) and blessing (33:1–29) of Moses. The book concludes with a moving account of the death of Moses (34:1–12).

##### **A. The threefold witness of law, song, and heaven and earth (31:1 – 32:47)**

###### *Context*

In spite of the complexity of chapter 31, its final form reveals a concentric pattern centred on verses 14–23, featuring a theophany

of Yahweh and witness of the Song of Moses, framed by Yahweh's commission of Joshua (vv. 14, 23). Thus we may follow the concentric outline proposed by McConville (2002: 437):

- A Moses to the people, on Joshua's succession (vv. 1–8)
- B Moses to the Levites, on the *reading* of the Book of the Law (vv. 9–13)
- C Yahweh to Moses and Joshua, on the succession and song (vv. 14–23)
- B' Moses to the Levites, on the *deposit* of the Book of the Law (vv. 24–29)
- A' Moses to the people, about the song (v. 30)

Hence chapter 31 has close ties with chapter 32, and therefore must be read in the light of it. But it also links up with chapters 1–3, recalling the very beginning at 1:1 (cf. 31:1), and especially 3:28 as this relates to Moses' charge to commission Joshua, which appropriately occurs at the beginning of chapter 31 (vv. 7–8), after recounting the Sihon and Og battles (v. 4; cf. 3:21–22). The opening at 31:1, 'and he went' (MT), sufficiently distances the following narrative from the covenant preaching and conclusions of chapters 29–30. However, these final chapters (31–34) are never theologically distant from all that precedes them, exhibiting traces of the treaty pattern, which belongs to the general make-up and genre of the book (Thompson 1974: 289).

### *Comment*

#### ***i. Moses to the people, on Joshua's succession (31:1–8)***

1–2. *Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel* (v. 1) recalls 1:1: *These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel*. The reading 'went' (MT) can be retained, even though LXX and Qumran texts have 'And Moses finished speaking all these things', which links what follows to chapters 29–30. But here the narrative connection is made more directly with chapters 1–3. Moses' age is given as 120 years (34:7; cf. Gen. 6:3). In Egypt the ideal lifespan was 110 years (as with Joseph; Gen. 50:26; also Joshua; Josh. 24:29); in a wisdom text from Emar in Syria it was 120 (Walton and

Matthews 1997: 265). At a narrative level, Moses' life is portrayed in terms of three lots of forty years (perhaps representing three generations), concluding with forty years of wilderness wandering from the time of the burning bush (Acts 7:30). At such an advanced age, Moses confessed that he was no longer active (lit. 'able to go out and come in'; cf. 28:6; Josh. 14:11). This might be linked more to Yahweh's refusal to allow Moses to go in, rather than to his physical ability to lead (34:7; cf. 1:37; 3:23–29; 4:21–22; 32:48–52; Num. 20:2–13).

**3–6.** These verses are framed by Yahweh's leadership in going before Israel into the Promised Land (vv. 3a and 6b). Yahweh will do to these nations what he had done to Sihon and Og (vv. 3b, 4; cf. 2:24 – 3:11), in terms of the motif of Yahweh War. In practice, Joshua will be Yahweh's deputy (v. 3b), recalling the same context at 3:21–22 and 3:28. Verse 5 not only re-emphasizes Yahweh's leading role in *delivering* the nations to Israel (cf. 7:2, 23–24), but is also a call to Israel (pl.) to perform the acts of destruction commanded in 7:1–5; 12:2–3; 20:16–17. Finally, verse 6 addresses Israel for the first time with the opening (pl.) imperatives: *Be strong and courageous*, an appropriate rallying cry for impending battle, directed also to Joshua in the singular at verses 7 and 23 (cf. Josh. 1:6–9, 18; 10:25). The following commands not to *be afraid* or *terrified* are repeated from the previous lessons of the spies' account at 1:21, 29 (cf. 7:21; 20:3), which led to the earlier generation's failure and death.

**7–8.** These verses take up the theme of encouraging Joshua from 3:21–22 (within the context of Sihon and Og), repeated at verse 4 above. This is what Moses was commissioned to do at 1:38 and 3:28, and is now repeated here in terms of Joshua 'going over' (to conquer), and causing Israel to *inherit* the land (allot it). This is later confirmed by Yahweh at verse 23. But here (vv. 7–8) this encouragement is given by Moses to Joshua in the presence of *all Israel*, confirming the integrity of Joshua's succession and stature in the people's eyes as Moses' legitimate successor.

## ***ii. Moses to the Levites, on the 'reading' of the Book of the Law (31:9–13)***

The focus of this section is upon Moses writing *this law* (*tôrâ*) for the

first time (cf. v. 24), although this is assumed elsewhere in Deuteronomy (cf. 17:18, 19; 27:3, 8, 26; 28:58, 61; 29:21; 30:10). The written law will stand alongside the Song of Moses and *heaven and earth* as a threefold *witness* against Israel that they stand under the covenant sanctions or curses (vv. 24–29). Within this section, the written Book of the Law also speaks of Moses' impending death, and the need to pass on his last will and testament as the permanent and binding will of God for all Israel. Thus, its purpose here seeks to institutionalize the Book of the Law in Israel's worship (McConville 2002: 439).<sup>1</sup>

9. The Horeb experience is re-enacted by Moses by first writing the Book of the Law, just as Yahweh had written the Ten Commandments there on tablets (4:13; 5:22; 9:10; 10:2, 4). This is extended in reverse to Yahweh's original command at Horeb to *assemble* the people so that they can *listen* and *learn to fear the LORD your God*, and carefully follow all the words of *this law* at verse 12 (cf. 4:10). The written law was then committed to the care of the Levitical priests who carried *the ark of the covenant of the LORD* (i.e. as the receptacle for the covenant tablets of the law), as well as to all the elders of Israel. The former probably represent the divine side of the covenant relationship (27:9, 14), whereas the latter were responsible for securing leadership in the implementation of the law (v. 28; cf. 5:23; 21:2; 27:1).

10–13. Though Moses would no longer be present, the public reading of the law (cf. 2 Kgs 23:1–3) would occur at the end of *every seven years*, coinciding with the year for *cancelling debts* (cf. 15:1–18), which lies at the heart of Deuteronomy's vision for social justice. This would also take place during the Feast of Tabernacles (16:13–17), a concluding festival of joy, signalling the end of Israel's agricultural and religious year. At this time, *all* Israel would *appear* (*rā'ā*; v. 11; cf. 16:16; 31:15) before the Lord, at the place he will *choose* (12:5–7; 16:15–16). The verb *assemble* was last used at 4:10 with regard to *the day of*

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1. It was normal practice at the conclusion of a secular treaty for the suzerain to hand a copy of the treaty to the vassal, to be lodged in the sanctuary of the vassal under the care of the priests and under the eyes of the gods (Thompson 1974: 291).

*assembly* at Horeb, when Yahweh spoke to Israel out of the fire (cf. 5:22; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16). This becomes the prototype for both assemblies at verses 12 and 28 (Tigay 1996: 298). Its place here is to build the law into the worshipping life of Israel for perpetuity, with the added benefit that those who have not previously *known* the law (v. 13) may not fail to do so (McConville 2002: 439). Finally, verses 12–13 outline an educational objective, resulting in different behavioural patterns. The adult group in verse 12, including *the aliens* (lit. ‘your alien’), are to *listen* (‘hear’) in order to *learn*, *fear* and finally *follow* (‘do’) all the words of *this law*. But in verse 13 their children, who do not know (*this law*), are only required to *bear* (it), and *learn* to *fear* the Lord, perhaps because they are less accountable at this stage (cf. 6:20–25; 11:2–7).

### iii. *Yahweh to Moses and Joshua, on the succession and song* (31:14–23)

**14–23.** This section is the centrepiece of the chapter, and is framed by Moses’ imminent death and the call of Joshua to the Tent of Meeting (v. 14), leading to the final commissioning of Joshua by Yahweh alone (v. 23).

**15–18.** The reference to Yahweh’s *appearance* at the Tent of Meeting in a pillar of cloud (v. 15) occurs here for the first time in Deuteronomy, and is a high point in this section in terms of the theme of God’s presence. As such, it recalls Exodus 33:7–11, and especially Numbers 14:10, where the glory of the Lord *appeared* at the Tent of Meeting, in the context of Israel’s rebellion and lack of trust. Within this section (v. 16), the context is no different, although Israel will soon forsake the Lord by *breaking the covenant* (v. 20; cf. Gen. 17:14 = the covenant of circumcision; Lev. 26:15, 44), and they will *prostitute* (*zānā*) themselves by going after foreign gods (only here in Deuteronomy; cf. Exod. 34:15–16; Lev. 20:5; Num. 15:39; Judg. 2:17; 8:27, 33). This would repeat the rapid movement towards idolatry, as with the golden calf incident (9:12; cf. Judg. 8:33), supported by the distancing of Yahweh from Israel with a contemptuous reference to *this people* (cf. 9:13, 27). In the meantime, Moses will find *rest* with his fathers (v. 16a), but the covenant breakers will experience the opposite, in terms of many disasters and difficulties that will come upon them (v. 17b; cf. 29:25–28 [ET]). In fact, their own question on that day relating to

God's absence<sup>2</sup> from them (v. 17b; negating 12:7, etc.) is framed by the Lord's burning *anger* and *forsaking* them, leading to the expression: *I will hide my face from them/I will certainly hide my face from them* (vv. 17a, 18; only here and at 32:20).

Idolatry is the greatest act of *wickedness* (*rā'ā*) in Israel (v. 18), and is not only linked to the *disasters* (same word) that will come upon them (29:21 [ET]; 31:17, 21, 29; 32:23), but causes the Lord, in a wordplay, to hide his *face* (*pānay*) from them, because of their wickedness in *turning* (*pānā*) to other gods.

19–23. *And now* (v. 19a) attention turns to *this song*, which follows later in chapter 32 and thus divides the chapter with special rhetorical effect as a permanent *witness* against Israel, as well as an additional witness to the words of *this law* (*tôrā*).

19. The imperative *write* for yourselves is plural in form, implying that both Moses and Joshua will write the song (perhaps Joshua acted as a scribe for Moses within this joint process), but it is followed by singular verbs ('teach it ... put it'), suggesting that Moses himself would teach it (cf. 31:30; 32:44 which use the sing. verb for Moses, even though Joshua is present). The purpose of the law is to act as a *witness* (*for me* = Yahweh) against Israel. Finally, verse 19 is framed at verse 22 with the words: *So Moses wrote down this song that day and taught it to the Israelites*.

20–21. The introduction to the song in this section draws attention to Israel's future apostasy and consequent punishment (vv. 20–21), recalling the language of verses 16–17. When disasters come upon them, the purpose of the song will be to act as a *witness* (*for me* = Yahweh) against Israel (v. 19b), since it is Yahweh's covenant and promises that have been broken (v. 20). Further, it will *not be forgotten* by their descendants, as it will be in their mouths as a song (vv. 19, 21; cf. the law at 30:14), recalling Israel's warning (at 6:10–12; 8:10–20) not to *forget* the Lord and his blessings. This might also suggest the original logic of the song's placement here, as distinct from the silent and passive witness of the Book of the Law (v. 26), beside the ark of

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2. Stated ironically and emphatically in the singular (lit. 'because *my* God is not in the midst of *me* and all these evils have come upon *me*'; v. 17b), thus drawing attention to the people's plight.

the covenant, which at least by Josiah's time had become separated and lost (2 Kgs 22:8–13). Also, within the previous section (vv. 9–13), the law is read in the *bearing* of the people only every seven years, and therefore could easily be forgotten quickly.<sup>3</sup> On this basis the medium of song would provide the best teaching method for maximum long-term memory and effect (cf. Exod. 15:1–21; Ps. 89).

The inevitability of Israel's failure (v. 21) is signalled by the word *inclination* (*yēser*, cf. Gen. 6:5; 8:21), used only here in Deuteronomy. It can be translated 'tendency', 'impulse' or 'disposition', and is reminiscent of the later Jewish concept of the 'evil impulse' (*yēser ra*). But it may echo 29:18 [ET], which speaks of a *root* within Israel that produces the bitter poison of idolatry, and this suits the present context (vv. 20–21). Within verses 20–21, such a disposition even flies in the face of Yahweh's sworn oath (promise) to bring them into the land.

**22.** In keeping with Ancient Near Eastern practice, what was considered important was immediately (*that day*) committed to writing, also corresponding here to the immediacy of Israel's sinful inclinations *today* (cf. Exod. 17:14; 24:4–7; 34:27–28; Num 33:1–2). Moreover, this verse anticipates the song's recital at 31:30.

**23.** As a frame to verse 14, Yahweh alone now commands Joshua to be strong and courageous, a command first given to the people (v. 6). Joshua will fulfil the promise given on oath to the Patriarchs with regard to the possession of the land (cf. vv. 7–8). Finally, the promise of the presence, *I myself* (emphatic) *will be with you*, echoes the commission to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:12), again illustrating the importance of this event for Deuteronomy.

#### *iv. Moses to the Levites, on the 'deposit' of the Book of the Law (31:24–29)*

**24–29.** Within the concentric structure of the chapter, these

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3. It can be assumed that this law was carried out during the days of Joshua and his elders (cf. Josh. 8:30–35; 24:31), but beyond this, there is no hard evidence that this happened. According to Holladay (1985: 326–328), the book of Jeremiah provides evidence that the law was recited every seven years during the period of the late monarchy.

verses align with verses 9–13, where Moses wrote down *this law* and gave it to the Levitical priests and to all the elders of Israel for public reading every seven years before an *assembly* of the men, women, children and aliens.

**24–26.** Now, at the beginning of verse 24, the completion of the writing begun at verse 9 is recorded. Distinct from verses 9–13, the Levites are now commanded (v. 25) to place *this Book of the Law* beside the ark of the covenant as a *witness* (*'ēd*) against *you* (v. 26; sing., referring to corporate and individual Israel). As such, the song and the Book of the Law would constitute the required legal twofold witness against Israel (cf. 17:6; 19:15). A third 'witness', fulfilling the legal requirement, would be *heaven and earth* at verse 28, attesting to the fact that Israel had been warned (Tigay 1996: 298).

**27–29.** These three verses form a small concentric arrangement of their own as part of verses 24–29. Verse 27 begins, *For I* (emphatic) *know*, and concludes with verse 29, *For I know*, with both verses addressing the consequences of Moses' death. The absence of Moses will only exacerbate the inclination towards *rebellion* (v. 27) and *corruption* (v. 29). The expressions *rebellious* and *stiff-necked* (v. 27) recall the golden calf episode (cf. 9:7, 23, 24 and 9:6, 13 respectively), as does the language of verse 29, with *become corrupt, turn from the way I have commanded you, do evil in the sight of the LORD and provoke him to anger* (cf. 9:12, 16, 18). It is on the basis of this incident that Moses knows (vv. 27, 29) what Yahweh knows (v. 21). This also suggests Israel's future undoing by repeating the golden calf episode with regard to *what your hands have made* (v. 29; cf. 9:21), referring to idols (Nelson 2002: 362). Verse 29 concludes with a wordplay: *In days to come, disaster (rā'ā) will fall upon you (pl.) because you will do evil (ra') in the sight of the LORD and provoke him to anger by what your hands have made* (cf. vv. 15–18 above, also concluding with a wordplay in the context of idolatry).<sup>4</sup>

**28.** This leaves the difficult verse 28 at the centre of verses 27–29. The problem with these verses relates to the apparent fluctua-

4. The phrase *in days to come* fits several periods in Israel's later history, starting with the period of the 'Judges' following the death of Joshua (Tigay 1996: 298). See commentary on 31:16.

tion of addressees, as well as to *these words* in verse 28. One approach would be to follow the structure of the chapter and see the gathering of *the elders of your tribes and all your officials* in assembly (vv. 24–29) as a counterpart to the gathering of the people in assembly (vv. 9–13) in order to hear *the words of this law (tôrâ)*, with Horeb as the prototype (cf. 4:10; see commentary on v. 12 above). This would be most appropriate in verse 28, as the leadership would finally be the ones to take responsibility for Israel's covenant future (see commentary on v. 9), especially framed by the inevitability of apostasy and failure (vv. 27, 29). To that assembly *heaven and earth* are called as third *witnesses* (cf. 4:26; 30:19; 32:1). But whereas *heaven and earth* are witnesses to potential disobedience and failure at 4:26 and 30:19, here they testify to the inevitable fact of apostasy (Nelson 2002: 362). A second approach would be to take *these words* either as referring to the words just spoken to the Levites in verses 26–27 and verse 29, which would also make good sense (cf. 30:15–20), or, with other commentators, as pertaining to the Levites assembling the elders and officials for the recitation of the song, leading to verse 30 (Tigay 1996: 298; McConville 2002: 441; Nelson 2002: 361).<sup>5</sup>

### **v. Moses to the people, about the song (31:30)**

30. Finally, Moses recites the words of *this song from beginning to end* (cf. 31:24) in the hearing of *the whole assembly* of Israel (31:12, 24; cf. 4:10). Like the Book of the Law (31:26), the song will *testify* against Israel (31:21), as a warning and witness to their covenant unfaithfulness.

### *Meaning*

The structure of chapter 31 provides important insight into its meaning. Within Deuteronomy's larger structure, it begins the final section (chs. 31 – 34) as a frame to chapters 1 – 3. In this respect, it importantly reminds *all Israel* at the outset of the Lord's intent to *go ahead* of his people and destroy the nations which they will

5. However, von Rad (1966: 190) interestingly points out that to *write, teach*, and 'put in their mouths' the song at 31:19 is vocabulary applicable to the writing down of the law.

encounter across the Jordan, as he did to Sihon and Og on the eastern side of the Jordan. Yet Israel must be *strong and courageous* in carrying out this task (v. 6). At the same time, Moses' imminent death (vv. 2, 16) and Joshua's succession and encouragement (cf. 1:38 and 3:28), using the same terms/language given to Israel, are located at important junctures within the chapter (vv. 7–8, 14 and 23). At the structural heart of the chapter (vv. 14–23), the Lord appears at the Tent of Meeting to speak of Moses' imminent death and Joshua's commission. Israel will *prostitute* themselves to the foreign gods of the land that they are entering, and thus *break the covenant*. This will lead to Yahweh *hiding his face* from them (vv. 17–18). The response to this situation is a written song, which will serve as a perpetual *witness* against Israel in time to come (vv. 19–22). On either side of this centrepiece is the *written* law first given to the priests, the sons of Levi, to be read publicly every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles to an *assembly* of all the people, in four categories: men, women, children and aliens (vv. 9–13). Then at verses 24–29, the *written* Book of the Law is given to the Levites to place beside the ark of the covenant, as a passive *witness* against Israel, anticipating their future *rebellion* and *corruption*. This leads to a second assembly (v. 28) of all the elders and officials (possibly also four in number; cf. 29:10[ET]), echoing the gravity of the assembly at Horeb (cf. 4:10), as a counterpart to verse 12. They gather as Israel's responsible leaders, in view of certain future failure and the danger of replicating the sin of the golden calf episode (vv. 27 and 29). In the meantime, the Lord, through Moses, will speak *these words* to them, which probably means the words of the song to follow in verse 30, and at the same time he calls upon the third *witness* of *heaven and earth* against their inevitable apostasy, thus fulfilling the maximum requirement of the law (17:6; 19:15).

## B. Moses' song of witness (32:1–43, 44–47)

### *Context*

This song, and Moses' blessing in chapter 33, are the only poetic sections in Deuteronomy and are therefore most likely meant to be viewed together. The form of the song, as a *witness* against Israel (31:21), resembles that of the later 'covenant lawsuit' (*riib*), especially

found in the prophets (Isa. 1:2–26; 3:13–15; Jer. 2:4–13; Mic. 6:1–8; cf. Ps. 50:1–15; Huffmon 1959: 285–295). Within this form, an opening appeal is made to heaven and earth and in praise of Yahweh (vv. 1–4). This is followed by a charge against the accused (vv. 5–6), and the grounds of the charge in terms of the recital of past blessings (vv. 7–14), leading to the indictment (vv. 15–18), and climaxing with the sentence itself (vv. 19–25). At this point, a new theme is introduced which is not found in the lawsuit pattern, namely Yahweh's relenting and the defence of his reputation towards the enemy (vv. 26–35), followed by his final vindication of himself and the salvation of his elect people (vv. 36–43; cf. 4:25–31 and 30:1–10). Thus the song gives theological meaning to Israel's experience of disaster, and affirms the potential for restoration (Nelson 2002: 369). The song's form may also resemble that of a hymn, whose purpose is instructional (v. 2), with a call to *praise* at both ends (vv. 3 and 43), on the basis of Yahweh's character (v. 4), reflected in past (vv. 7–14) and future mercies (vv. 36–43).

### Comment

**1–4.** Moses begins (vv. 1–3) with the first person (*I* and *my*), thus denoting the divine voice. In the opening verse, the 'heavens and earth' represent a universal forum, and are summoned to *hear* the words of the teaching that follows. As such, they bear objective and impartial *witness* to the lawsuit charges, as well as to the fairness of Israel's punishment from history (Isa. 1:2; Jer. 2:12; Mic. 6:1–2). Verse 2 contains four similes, *like rain, dew, showers* and *abundant rain*, using life-giving water as a metaphor in order to compare the teaching to gentle fruitful rain falling upon tender young plants. Understood in this way, the song is meant to produce positive, spiritual life as it is sung and memorized (cf. Job. 29:22–23; Isa. 55:10–11). Verse 3 completes the direct address to the heavens and earth, revealing that the song is a doxology, proclaiming the *name* (or character) of the Lord (v. 4; cf. Exod. 34:5–7), as well as the imperative (forming a bracket with v. 43) to praise his *greatness* (used of Yahweh's actions in redeeming his people from Egypt; 3:24; 5:24; 9:26; 11:2; cf. Num. 14:19).

**4.** Finally, verse 4 proclaims the theological axiom that governs the poem (Nelson 2002: 370). *Our God* (the last words of verse 3) is

*the Rock* (*šûr*; first word of v. 4), a term which appears seven times in the song (vv. 4, 15, 18, 30, 31 [twice], 37). It is an ancient title for deity, first found in the farewell blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:24; although as *'eben*). But in this chapter, the *rock* metaphor stands primarily for Yahweh's *perfect* (*tāmîm*, cf. 18:13) and *just* nature (*mišpāt*; cf. 4:8; also see 1:17; 10:18; 16:19; 24:17; 27:19; 32:41). This is supported by the following fourfold moral attributes of God (*'ēl*): *faithfulness* (*'ēmūnā*), *without wrong* (*'āwel*; cf. Lev. 19:15, 35; Deut. 25:16; esp. Jer. 2:5), *just* (*šaddîq*) and *upright* (*yāš'ār*). Within the song, the *rock* metaphor also carries the meaning of *Creator* and *Saviour* (v. 15), *father* (v. 18), *refuge*, *stability* and *security* (vv. 30, 37), *dependable* and *reliable without equal* (v. 31; cf. 1 Sam. 2:2 and 2 Sam. 22:1–51). As a title for deity found in Canaanite and other Ancient Near Eastern religions, there is also probably a polemical use of it here, especially in verses 31 and 37, which would implicate the first three commandments.<sup>6</sup>

5–6. An abrupt counterbalance to the attributes of God in verses 3–4 is now presented in the form of a brief statement of Israel's folly in verse 5, followed by two accusing questions in verse 6. There is a difficulty in translating verse 5. It is possible that because of Israel's 'blemish' (*mûm*), or 'sinful disposition' (29:19; cf. Lev. 21:16–24), they have acted corruptly towards God, and thus have become a *warped and crooked generation* (the opposite of Yahweh, who is *perfect* and *upright*, v. 4). Further, Israel's 'blemish', already intimated at 29:19, would not be forgiven (cf. 31:21, 27, 29). This has its background in 'blemished' sacrifices which could not be offered to the Lord (Deut. 15:21; 17:1), as well as 'blemishes' that would make people unacceptable for the priesthood (Lev. 21:16–24; cf. Deut. 33:8–11). Perhaps verse 5 qualifies as the strongest reason yet offered in Deuteronomy for the non-application of the designation *kingdom of priests* (Exod. 19:6) to Israel as a nation. Finally, the emphatic question at the beginning of verse 6 (*Is this the way you repay*

6. The word *rock* (*šûr*) first occurs at Exodus 17:6, and is used here for the Lord as the *Rock* who will satisfy Israel's spiritual thirst (32:1–4), and at the same time *test* the rock or gods in which they have taken refuge (32:37–38; cf. 1 Cor. 10:1–22).

*the Lord?*) indicates that Israel's response is totally disrespectful (expressed as *foolish*; *nābāh*; cf. v. 21b, relating to those who are not a people, with *no understanding*) and *unwise*. Further, *Is* [Yahweh] *not your Father, your Creator* (*qānā*; cf. Gen. 4:1), the one who *made* ('*āsā*'; cf. Gen. 1:26) and *formed* (*kān*; cf. Exod. 15:17; 1 Sam. 7:13, 24) you (cf. Exod. 4:22; Deut. 1:31; 8:5; 32:18–20)?

7–14. It was a regular practice of the lawsuit (*riḅ*) pattern to state the grounds for the accusation, by reciting past kingly acts of the suzerain performed for the vassal. The proclamation of Yahweh's faithfulness at verse 4 is now displayed in many gracious acts during Israel's past. Three imperatives begin at verse 7: *remember* the days of old; *consider* (or discern) the years of many generations; and *ask* your father and elders for explanation (cf. 6:20–25). It is assumed that the ancient traditions (*of old*) would be well known to the elders, corresponding to three great facts of Israel's history: their election going back to primeval times (vv. 8–9); their exodus and wilderness wanderings (vv. 10–12); and Yahweh's gift of Canaan to his people (vv. 13–14; cf. 4:32–38).

8–9. At the beginning of history, the *Most High* ('*elyōn*'; cf. Gen. 14:18–20) allotted to the nations their own *inheritance* (Gen. 10:1–32; cf. Deut. 2:5, 9, 19), and fixed the boundaries of peoples in relation to the *sons of Israel* (understood to be seventy in all according to the nations of Gen. 10:1–32, and also possibly aligning with *Jacob*, whose family numbered seventy when he went down into Egypt; cf. Gen. 46:27). There is disagreement among the textual traditions at this point. The LXX reads 'according to the number of the angels of God', which may have been a modification of a fragment from cave four at Qumran (4QDeut<sup>1</sup>) which reads 'sons of God'.<sup>7</sup> On this basis, scholars adopt either the idea of 'national gods/intermediate divinities' to whom the nations are appointed (Nelson 2002: 371), or the notion that each nation had its own 'angelic deputies' (cf. Isa.

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7. If an original text tradition had 'sons of God' (so Wright 1996: 306), this may have referred to *both* human judges and rulers of nations who were considered divine and part of God's *inheritance* (Ps. 82:6–8; cf. Gen. 6:1–4), as well as to the *sons of Israel* (Gen. 10:1–32; Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1–2; 32:5; cf. Ps. 2:7; John 10:34–36).

24:1; Ps. 82:6; Dan. 10:13, 20, 21), with a link to the political and judicial authorities in the nations and their territorial jurisdiction (Wright 1996: 307). But with Driver (1996: 356), there is no need to adopt these alternative readings, as the Hebrew text makes perfectly good sense as it stands, supported by verse 9.<sup>8</sup>

**10–12.** Having determined that Israel's inheritance was in Canaan, Yahweh sets about bringing his people there. These verses explore Yahweh's care of Israel during the wilderness period after leaving Egypt. The picture begins (v. 10) with the *barren* (*tōhû*; Gen. 1:2; cf. 1 Sam. 12:21) and *howling waste* of the desert, similar to the chaotic condition of the universe prior to creation. Yahweh's care during this period is depicted using three metaphors: as an encircling (*shielded*; NIV) protector who guarded Israel as *the apple of his eye* (lit. 'little man of his eye'); as an eagle that stirs up her young and *hovers* (*rāḥap*; Gen. 1:2) over them, spreading its wings to catch and carry them (1:31; cf. Exod. 19:4–6); and as a kindly shepherd or leader who guides his people (1:32–33; cf. Exod. 15:13; Ps. 78:52), without any *foreign god* to help him (v. 12; cf. Ps. 81:9[ET]). Emphasis is placed on the fact that *the LORD alone* led Israel. This made Israel's turning to other more *recent* gods all the more shameful (vv. 15–18; cf. Hos. 9:10; 13:4).<sup>9</sup>

**13–14.** The contrast is now drawn between the desert and the rich fare of Canaan. The expression, *He made him ride on the heights of the land* (v. 13; cf. 33:26), might be an extension of the transport metaphor of verse 11b, and relates to the taking of the mountainous heartland of Israel, *the hill country of the Amorites* (cf. 1:7–8). Here Israel feasts on all the choicest of products, even from unlikely places, with bees producing honey in crags (Ps. 81:16 [ET]), and olive trees supplying oil among rocks. This is followed by milk products, and the *fattened* lambs and choice rams, including the prized Bashan bulls and goats (cf. Amos 4:1; 6:4), along with the *finest grains* (lit.

8. This reading may find additional support at 33:6–25, where the number of colons in the Tribal Sayings (seventy) most probably represents Israel, and by extension the entire world (Kelley 2007: 61).

9. This is preferable to the suggestion of Nelson (2002: 372) that the *foreign god* of v. 12 alludes to the *nations* and 'divine beings' of vv. 8–9

‘kidney fat’) of wheat (Ps. 81:16 ET]), and the *foaming blood* of the grape. Such exotic language speaks of rich provision.

15. The song now shifts to the indictment upon *Jeshurun* (lit. ‘the upright one’; cf. 33:5, 26; Isa. 44:2), as a display of irony. Israel has *fattened up* (a pun with the opposite meaning, using the same Hebrew consonants of desert *waste*, *yšmn*; v. 10) on Yahweh’s rich abundance, and has forgotten the source of provision, and the obedience and praise due to the Lord (cf. 8:10–18). Rather, Israel behaved like an unruly beast and *grew fat* (or ‘stubborn’) and *kicked* (*bā’at*, v. 15; cf. 1 Sam. 2:29; Hos. 4:16). The middle of verse 15 returns to the second-person singular: ‘You grew fat, bloated, and gorged’ (NRSV; cf. v. 18). Such a state of satiation led to the rejection of God their Creator, and ‘scorn’ (or ‘light esteem’) for the Rock their Saviour, as a final display of irony.

16–18. Forgetting the Lord consequently leads to idolatry (cf. 8:19–20; Hos. 4:17), making Yahweh jealous of their *foreign gods* and angry at their *detestable idols* (cf. v. 12; 6:14–15; 7:25). Other gods are exposed as *demons* (*šēdīm*; cf. Ps. 106:37), which are *not god*, gods they had *not known*, which had *recently appeared* in the land, and whom the fathers had not feared/worshipped (or were ‘acquainted’ with), as a parallel to *not known*. Finally, verse 18 is a sharp accusation of ingratitude, highlighting Israel’s (sing.) preference for such new deities and *forgetting* (cf. 6:10–15; 8:11, 14, 19) the Rock *who fathered you*, and the God who, as a mother, *gave you birth*.

19–25. The judicial sentence is now pronounced by Yahweh. As a result of what Yahweh *saw* (vv. 16–17; cf. 9:13), he *rejected* (or ‘spurned’; *nā’as*) his *sons and daughters* (only here referring to corporate *Israel* in Deuteronomy; cf. 2 Cor. 6:18), reversing Israel’s ‘spurning’ of the Lord and turning to other gods at 31:20. As a result, Yahweh’s anger will follow, and he will *hide his face* (meaning to ‘withhold favour and send punishment’) on account of their turning to other gods (cf. 31:17–18). He will now *see* what their end will be (cf. vv. 28–29), for they are a *perverse* and *unfaithful* generation (v. 20).

21. Here, the same verbs, *make jealous* and *provoke*, are transferred from Yahweh to Israel by means of wordplay, with *no god* (*lō’ ’ēl*) and *not a people* (*lō’ ’am*; cf. Hos. 1:9; 2:23; Rom. 10:19). The identity of the *foolish* (*nābāl*), non-covenant nation is not clear, but it will

replicate Israel's foolishness (v. 6; cf. 4:6) in treating the Lord with levity and contempt (v. 15b).

**22–25.** The rejection and destruction of Israel are depicted in terms reminiscent of the curses found in chapter 28 and at 29:19–28, only here in reverse order, using the language of the Divine Warrior. Framing this section (v. 22) is the *fire* of divine wrath (29:19–28; cf. 4:24; 6:14–15) and the *sword* (v. 25) (implying siege) that will make people childless *in the street*, and *in the home* (or safe haven) terror will reign where the sword cannot reach (28:25–26, 49–52). Between these frames, the five *arrows* of the Divine Warrior include *wasting* (or ‘sapping hunger’), *consuming/ferocious pestilence* (cf. Hab. 3:5; Ps. 76:3[ET]; 78:48), *deadly plague* (Ps. 91:6), *fangs of wild beasts* and *venom of vipers that glide in the dust* (cf. Gen. 3:14–15). No-one will be spared by the Divine Warrior on the grounds of location, sex or age.

**26–35.** This section begins a new deliberation by God. Its main concern is that the enemy will claim credit (cf. 8:17) for what the Lord alone is doing through them, in terms of the refining judgment of Israel (v. 21). At the same time, there seems to be a subtle interplay between the accusation of the enemy and that of Israel in verses 28–35 (McConville 2002: 457).

**26–27.** Verse 26 opens with *I said*, which could be translated ‘I thought to myself’ or ‘I had intended’. The word for *scatter* (*pā’â*) is found only here in Hebrew, but has an Arabic cognate meaning, ‘cut’, used for effacing an inscription (Tigay 1996: 309) and, together with the unique verb *blot out* (*šābat*), recalls with horror and irony what was to happen to Amalek at 25:19 (cf. 4:27; 28:64). But this would not be carried out here. God would refrain from erasing the memory of his people, lest her enemies should say, *Our hand has triumphed; the LORD has not done all this* (v. 27; cf. 9:28). Ultimately, Israel's hope depends on Yahweh's intrinsic integrity and concern for personal reputation (v. 4; cf. Ps. 135:13–14; Nelson 2002: 375).

**28–29.** It is possible that these verses are deliberately ambiguous. On the one hand, they could refer to Israel, *without sense and discernment* (v. 28; cf. 4:5–8), as a continuation of verse 26 and supported by verse 30 (also see vv. 36–38; cf. Ps. 81:13–16). On the other hand, scholars have argued that these verses refer to the enemy, supported by verse 27 (cf. v. 21b) and verses 31–35 (Nelson 2002: 375–376).

**30.** The point here is that, if a comparatively small force could overthrow a whole nation, then Yahweh, the Rock of Israel, must have delivered his people over to the enemy (cf. Isa. 30:17).

**31-33.** Verses 31 and 32 continue the previous thought, beginning with *For* (*keš*). The enemy's rock is not like Israel's Rock. This is a conclusion that even the enemy has *conceded* or adjudged to be true (*pālīk*; cf. Exod. 21:22). The enemy can only reach this conclusion, because their own gods and the worship of them (v. 32) have their source and evil roots in the same kind of perversion represented by the metaphorical language of the *vine* of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. 29:22-28; Harman 2001: 271). As such, their grapes are filled with *deadly poison* (v. 33).

**34-35.** *This* (wine) is gathered and sealed in Yahweh's storerooms, awaiting the time (v. 35) when he alone will *avenge* (*nāqām*) in justice the nations (cf. the *end* of v. 29) that have overstepped their bounds as agents of divine wrath (30:7; cf. Isa. 10:5-19, 24-27; Jer. 25:12-14; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30).

**36-43.** The final stanza of the song emphasizes the unique power and sovereignty of Yahweh in matters of life and death (v. 39).

**36.** In contrast to verses 34-35, the *just* judgment of God upon the wicked enemies of Israel will prepare the way for Israel's restoration (cf. 4:25-31). The Lord will vindicate (*dīn*) *his people* (cf. Gen. 15:14; 30:6; 49:16; Jer. 21:12) and have compassion (*nāḥam*) on *his servants* (9:27-29; cf. Ps. 135:14), when he sees that their strength (lit. 'hand') is gone.

**37-38.** But Israel's restoration will not come without Yahweh's indictment of their apostasy (cf. 1 Sam. 12:1-25), which here may vindicate Yahweh's estimation of Israel as being *without sense* and *discernment* at verse 28. With rhetorical sarcasm, the gods and rock they took shelter in are directly challenged to provide the help and shelter in which Israel falsely and vainly trusted (cf. Ps. 135:13-18).

**39-42.** The word of Yahweh himself (v. 39) declares his uniqueness at the centre of the final stanza (*I, myself am He!* and *There is no god besides me*; cf. Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 13; 44:6; 45:6-7, 21-22; 48:12). This statement provides a frame to Moses' testimony of Yahweh's uniqueness and incomparability at 4:35, 39. In both frames, the false gods are impotent and therefore qualify as *no gods*. Only Yahweh as Divine Warrior can kill and make alive, wound and heal, and *no-one*

*can deliver out of my hand*, anticipating the inevitability of judgment on his adversaries (vv. 40–43; cf. 4:32–34). The lifting of the hand to heaven (v. 40) would appear to be an act of oath taking, in conjunction with the word *declare* (cf. Gen. 14:22), but it might also symbolize the Divine Warrior's upraised fighting arm (Josh. 5:13; Ps. 10:12; cf. Thutmose III 1490–1436 BC described as 'Great of (raised) Arm who smites the Nine Bows'). Now the *flashing sword* is turned against the enemy of verse 25 in *judgment*, and the arrows directed against Israel (v. 23) are also against the enemy and its leaders. The scene is one of complete carnage.

43. The nations of the world are invited to join Yahweh's people in singing the praise of the God of Israel as one who avenges the blood of *his servants* as his chief concern (v. 36; cf. 2 Kgs 9:7; Isa. 61:1–2; Rev. 6:10; 19:2), brings judgment on *his enemies* and *covers* his land and people (cf. vv. 8–9). The verb 'cover' (*kipper*), also translated *make atonement* (NIV), may refer to the pollution that bloodshed brings upon the land in warfare (cf. Num. 35:33; Deut. 21:1–9). It may also relate to the moral and cultic abuses of idolatry within the land (vv. 16–17, 21; cf. Rom. 10:19).

44–47. These verses return to prose narrative, with verse 44 providing a frame for 31:30. The speaker of the song is strictly Moses, but Joshua is introduced in order to point to the song's intended use in Israel's future (also see commentary on 31:19). The song is not only included in *all these words* of verse 45, but is linked to *all the words of this law (tôrâ)* in verse 46. And these words must be *taken to heart* and passed on to future generations, emphasizing again the instructional intent of Deuteronomy (4:9; 6:7, 20–25; 11:19; 31:9–13). Finally, Moses points out that *this law (tôrâ)* is *not just idle words (dābār)*. *They are your life*, and by *this word (dābār)* you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess (v. 47; cf. 30:15–20).

### Meaning

A law-book stored beside the ark may be forgotten. What the people needed was something short enough to be committed to (long-term) memory that would make the same point as Moses' sermons (Wenham 2003: 141). This is what the Song of Moses offers in its highly individual way, especially as a witness to the deep and abiding love of Yahweh for his people (McConville 2002: 461). Best viewed

as a song or hymn containing a form of covenant lawsuit against God's people, it takes up a number of important themes relating to primeval times, including creation leading to the table of nations (vv. 8–9; cf. Gen. 10:1–32). But there is no *explicit reference* to Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and the twin covenants of Horeb and Moab are passed over, as are the promises made with the Patriarchs. These are no doubt assumed, making way for exposure of the sin of idolatry. The song moves from the chaotic *barren and howling waste* of the desert (v. 10), to the contrasting rich fare of the Promised Land, where *Jeshurun* ('the upright one') abandoned the *Rock* (mentioned seven times in the chapter), his Creator and Saviour (v. 15), in preference to the gods of the land (vv. 16–17, 21). As a result, Yahweh will *hide his face* from them (v. 20), and Israel will experience the full fury of his fire and wrath by sword and various plagues, as a display of his protecting *jealous* love (v. 21; cf. 4:23–24). However, lest the enemy should say, *Our hand has triumphed; the LORD has not done this* (v. 27), the Lord will bring judgment upon the enemy (vv. 34–35) and have compassion upon *his servants*, when he sees that their strength is gone (v. 36). Israel's restoration will not come without a final reminder of their apostasy (vv. 37–38), at the same time establishing Yahweh's uniqueness and incomparability as the only true God, who alone is able to judge his enemies and avenge the blood of *his servants*, and make *atonement* for his land and people (vv. 39–43; cf. 4:35).

### C. Moses prepares for death and blesses the people (32:48 – 33:29)

#### *Context*

The exclusion of Moses from the land and his ascent of Mount Nebo (32:48–52) have been anticipated since Numbers 27:12–14 (cf. Num. 20:2–13), and are followed by the appointment of Joshua as a successor (Num. 27:15–23; cf. Deut. 1:37–38; 3:26–29; 4:21–22; 31:1–3). Now the time for Moses' death was at hand. He ascended Mount Nebo to view the land of promise from afar, and then delivered his final blessing to the people before his death, resembling that of Jacob (Gen. 49:1–28).

### *i. Moses commanded to ascend Mount Nebo (32:48–52)*

#### *Comment*

48–52. On the same day as the Song of Witness was delivered to the people, Moses received the command to ascend Mount Nebo, where he was to die (vv. 48–49; cf. 3:27; Num. 27:12–14). This was probably one of the prominent peaks of the *Abiram* range, at the north-eastern end of the Dead Sea, east of Jericho, across the Jordan. The privilege of *viewing* the land (as a frame to this section; vv. 49 and 52) may be seen as a minor concession to Moses' plea at 3:25: *Let me go over and see the good land* .... Moses would die on a mountain top (v. 50), just like his brother Aaron, who died on Mount Hor, and be *gathered to your/his people* (meaning 'united with your deceased ancestors, and/or deceased relatives in death'; 31:16; cf. Gen. 25:8; 49:29–33; 2 Kgs 22:20). The reason for Moses' and Aaron's exclusion (v. 51) is because they *broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh ... and did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites* (Num. 20:2–13; cf. Exod. 17:1–7). Instead of simply speaking to the rock, as Yahweh had commanded (cf. 8:3), Moses first addressed Israel as a bunch of *rebels*, and then *struck* the rock with his staff. In this way, God's holiness (or *righteous presence/command/will*) had not been upheld, because the people should have been shown that water came out of the rock by divine intervention (i.e. creation by the 'spoken word'; cf. Gen. 1:1–31), and not by human posturing and power. But as a final act of Yahweh's grace, Moses is allowed to *bless* the Israelite tribes (33:1–29) before he dies (34:1–12).<sup>10</sup>

### *ii. The blessing of Moses (33:1–29)*

#### *Context*

Following the Song of Witness, Moses' final speech before his death relates to his blessing of the tribes, in a manner similar to Jacob

10. The ten-times repeated *he said* in the blessing of Moses might echo the Ten Commandments themselves (Deut. 5:6–21) as the blueprint for Israel's life and blessings within the land.

(Gen. 49:1–28). However, whereas the song had a somewhat ambiguous turning point in Israel's favour, the chosen status of Israel is now celebrated openly (McConville 2002: 467). In contrast with Genesis 49, Moses prefaces his blessing of the tribes by recalling God's coming to Sinai within the context of the giving of the law (33:2–5). The importance of the law is thus emphasized, providing a frame for Yahweh the Divine Warrior and the people Jacob/Jeshurun (33:26–29). Thus, these framing verses surround the individual tribal blessings with Yahweh's comprehensive blessings of law, kingship, safety and fertility (33:6–25; Nelson 2002: 387).

Also, whereas Jacob emphasized the most important political tribes of Judah and Joseph for extended treatment, Moses pays greatest attention to the priestly tribe of Levi as teachers of the law (33:8–11) and to Joseph (33:13–17), divided by the verses on Benjamin, *the beloved of the LORD* (33:12), as a kind of threefold central section.

In contrast to Genesis 49, Yahweh is directly addressed in the blessings of 33:6–25, and there are no indictments of tribal character or behaviour (e.g. as with Reuben, Simeon and Levi at Gen. 49:3–7). This reinforces Yahweh's main intent within Deuteronomy to *bless* Israel, and not bring curse upon her (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; Num. 22:1 – 24:19). However, Deuteronomy 33 does not reproduce the so-called Messianic predictions of Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 24:17. Apart from Levi, the blessings refer to each tribe as an eponymous individual, and are framed by verses 2–5 and 26–29, which share the themes of the uniqueness of Yahweh and of Israel, his chosen people. Further, these frames share the reference to Yahweh the sovereign king of *Jeshurun* at verses 5 and 26. In this way, they provide a link with the Song of Moses (32:15), as well as a conceptual parallel to the frames of chapter 4 (vv. 5–8 and vv. 35–39), thus enclosing the entire book of Deuteronomy.

### Comment

1. *This is the blessing* is one of five headings that organize the final form of Deuteronomy, together with 1:1; 4:44; 6:1; 28:69 [ET 29:1]; 33:1 (Olson 1994: 14–17). In a manner replicating that of Jacob, Moses blesses the tribes before his death (cf. Gen 49:1–28). For the first time in Deuteronomy, Moses is called *the man of God*. Its next

use, together with *Servant of the Lord*, is found at Joshua 14:6–9, recalling Moses' prophetic authority in terms of his promise to Caleb about the Promised Land. This suits the prophetic direction of chapter 33 (cf. 1 Sam. 9:6, 9).

2. While the text of verses 2–5 bristles with difficulties, it is still possible to gain an overall sense of their meaning. They balance the closing verses (vv. 26–29) in celebrating Yahweh the Divine Warrior, who *came* from the southern mountains of Sinai, *dawned over them* (for Israel's sake) from Seir, and *shone forth* from Paran (cf. Judg. 5:4–5; Pss 50:1–6; 68:7–8, 15–18 [ET]; 80:1–3 [ET]; Isa. 60:1–3; Hab. 3:3–6). The Bible refers to Sinai/Horeb several times as *the mountain of God* or *the mountain of the LORD*, even before the burning bush episode (Exod. 3:1), as well as on other occasions (Exod. 4:27; 18:5; 24:13; Num. 10:33; 1 Kgs 19:8). Also, these references may well reflect the Israelites' initial departure from the Desert of Sinai to the Desert of Paran at the Lord's command through Moses (Num. 10:11–36; cf. Ps. 68:1–3 [ET]). Thus the translation of verse 2b, *He came with myriads of holy ones*, might incorporate both the holy ones of Yahweh's army as well as his holy people Israel in the light of Numbers 10:35–36 (followed by LXX; cf. Ps. 68:1–3, 17 [ET]). Finally, the LXX may reflect the original reading with 'angels with him' (see Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). Thus the translation of the second half of verse 2 would be: 'He came with myriads of his holy people, on his right hand (or from the south) his angels came with him.'

3–5. Verse 3 is difficult, but *the peoples* probably refers to the tribes of Israel. They are the *holy ones* who are held in the hand of Yahweh, and received his instruction (*tôrâ*) at Sinai through Moses. Yahweh's kingship *over Jeshurun* (cf. 32:15) or Jacob was acknowledged by Israel's acceptance of his law when the leaders and tribes gathered in assembly at Sinai (cf. Exod. 15:18; 19:3–8).<sup>11</sup>

6. **Reuben.** The blessing on Reuben is expressed as a wish that this tribe might continue to exist (either 'great in number' LXX; or *few*

11. Also, the literary form of Deuteronomy resembling that of a Near Eastern treaty is a tacit recognition of Yahweh's kingship in covenant relationship with his people (Thompson 1974: 308).

*in number* NIV margin), and anticipates Reuben's uncertain future and early decline in population (Gen. 49:3–4; 2 Kgs 10:32–33).

**7. Judah.** Judah's blessing is expressed as a prayer, and differs from the order of Genesis 49. Simeon has disappeared from this earlier list, possibly reflecting its early absorption into Judah (cf. Josh. 19:1–9). Missing from Genesis 49:8–12 is the Messianic role of Judah (Gen. 49:10). But the present verse points to Judah's isolation from the rest of the tribes, as well as its military role, reflecting Genesis 49:8–9 (cf. Num. 2:9). Moses implores God to assist Judah in battle and bring him back to his people in peace (Targum Onkelos aptly paraphrases: 'Accept, O Lord, the prayer of Judah when he goes forth into battle, and bring him back safely to his people').

**8–9. Levi.** The blessing and prayer for Levi is longer and quite different from the negative portrayal at Genesis 49:5–7, which begins to reveal Levi's importance for Deuteronomy as the true priestly tribe, perhaps over against rival priestly claimants (cf. Num. 16:1 – 18:32). This is continued with the reference to the *Urim* (curse = a negative response) and *Thummim* (perfect = positive response), only in reverse order here (v. 8a). These were a means of ascertaining the divine will in different matters, possibly by the use of two stones which had to agree with each other (Exod. 28:30; cf. Num. 27:21). The phrase *belong to the man you favoured* (v. 8a), meaning the one who is 'devoted' or 'loyal', may reflect the Levites' actions at Exodus 32:25–29 within the golden calf episode, in spite of Aaron's actions (cf. Num. 25:1–13; Ezek. 44:15; 48:11). The following wordplay (v. 8b), *You tested him at Massah; you contended with him at the waters of Meribah*, is unique, and may possibly refer to either Exodus 17:1–7 or Numbers 20:1–13, although there is no specific mention of the Levites in these texts (6:16; 9:22; 32:51; cf. Ps. 81:7 [ET]). Another possibility is that in Moses and Aaron, leaders of the tribe of Levi, the whole tribe was on trial on these occasions (Thompson 1974: 310). But if the reference to Massah and Meribah (v. 8b) is meant to be read in the light of the framing verses 8a and 9, which could also refer to the golden calf incident, then the Levites may have acted in a way comparable to that of Horeb (Exod. 32:25–29; cf. Num. 25:1–13). On these occasions the Levites manifested a spirit which is here predicated of the whole tribe (v. 9b; lit. 'they [pl.] watched over your word and guarded your covenant'; cf. 13:6–13).

10. Because of such devotion to God's covenant word (v. 9b), the Levites were given the dual responsibility of guarding and teaching the law (vv. 9b and 10a), and undertaking the various duties associated with the offering of sacrifices (v. 10b). The area of teaching is defined as the *precepts* (*mišpāṭim* = 'norms' or 'judicial decisions') and the *law* (*tôrâ* = 'teaching' or 'instruction'; cf. Hos. 4:6; Mic. 4:11; Mal. 2:1-9). In the area of cultic observances, the Levites were to bring incense before Yahweh (lit. 'they shall place incense before your face/in your nostrils'), and offer *whole burnt offerings* (*kālîl*; cf. 13:16; Lev. 6:22-23 [ET]; 1 Sam. 7:9; Ps. 51:19 [ET]) on his altar.

11. The first explicit *blessing* in the chapter is invoked upon Levi's *skills* (*ḥayil*) and the work of his hands. This could mean: (1) Levi's wealth and material blessings (cf. 8:17-18); (2) his military valour (cf. Gen. 34:25-31; 49:5-7); (3) Levi's priestly calling and authority as teacher and cultic mediator in the light of verse 10. The problem is to reconcile these suggestions with verse 11b: *Smite the loins* (rendering one impotent, unable to produce progeny) *of those who rise up against him*. (cf. vv. 7, 11, 17). The first suggestion may have implications for those who decide not to support the Levites with the blessings of the land, thus endangering their life support (12:19; 14:27). The last two suggestions could equally suit the context of the entire passage as this relates to different historical situations involving the Levites and their potential enemies (cf. Gen. 34:25-31; Exod. 32:25-29; Num. 16:1-11; 25:1-13).

12. **Benjamin.** In Genesis 49:27 (cf. Judg. 5:14) Benjamin is described in warlike terms as a *ravenous wolf*, but here this imagery disappears altogether, and is replaced by a term of endearment, *beloved* (*yādîd*). Benjamin, as the youngest son of Jacob, was particularly loved by his father (cf. Gen. 42:38; 43:14; 44:20). Despite the difficulties posed by the translation of this verse, it is probably best understood in terms of the *rest* and security enjoyed by Benjamin, which frames (as the first and last word in Hebrew = *šākan*) the actual words of the blessing itself (cf. v. 28). And so a rough literal reading would be: 'Let the beloved of the Lord (Benjamin) *rest* (dwell) secure in him (God), for he (God) shields him (Benjamin) all day long, and he (Benjamin) *rests* (dwells secure) between his (God's) shoulders.' Benjamin's blessing also provides a divider between the

two weightiest blessings in this chapter, of Levi and Joseph, who are unique in receiving a prayer for the direct blessing of God (vv. 11 and 13), framing Benjamin's blessing as the *beloved of the LORD* in verse 12.

**13–17. Joseph.** This is the longest of the blessings and is close to its counterpart in Genesis 49:22–26. Verses 13–16 (cf. Gen. 49:25–26) are held together by the repetition of the term *bounty* (*megeḏ*), but with different expressions in each verse. However, the political status in verse 17 corresponds to Genesis 49:22–24, although here in verse 17 the strength of Joseph is likened to that of a *firstborn bull* (symbolizing strength and assertiveness, rather than fertility), which is familiar in ANE texts (especially Egypt, Babylon and Canaan).<sup>12</sup> But this is also linked to the image of a wild ox (cf. Num. 23:22; 24:8), whose horns will gore the nations, even to the *ends of the earth*. It is possible that Joseph's two horns represent Ephraim and Manasseh, even though Ephraim is presented as the dominant tribe through a rhetorical 'step-down', reversing the usual order of *thousands* and *ten thousands* (contrast 32:30; cf. 1 Sam. 18:7; 21:11 [ET]; 29:5; Nelson 2002: 391).

The petition Moses made for Joseph (including Ephraim and Manasseh) is divided between a wish for the fertility and productivity of the land (vv. 13–16) and for strength, whereby Joseph might be the means of God's judgment upon the nations (v. 17). Joseph's blessing mirrors, more than any other, Deuteronomy's theme of the rich deposit of the land. The abundance of food for Joseph's descendants is a fitting blessing (cf. Gen. 41:35–37), which speaks of the *heaven above*, the *deep* (*tēhôm*) *waters below* (v. 13), the *sun* and *moon* (v. 14), the *ancient mountains* and *everlasting hills* (v. 15),<sup>13</sup> and the *earth* in all its fullness (v. 16a). Such primordial descriptions of the earth probably also conceal a polemical thrust, for these blessings come from Yahweh alone, and no other god (cf. 4:15–24). Finally, the description of Yahweh as *him who dwelt in the burning bush*

12. If the MT reading, 'his bull', is accepted, the image could refer to Ephraim as Joseph's favourite son.

13. This reference could include wood, stone, mineral reserves and food-stuffs (cf. 8:9; Tigay 1996: 328).

(v. 16b)<sup>14</sup> is the only reference to that event outside Exodus 3, and supports the theological importance of this event for Deuteronomy (see commentary on 4:11). According to Wright (1996: 311), ‘the poetic phrase produces a brilliant bathos’ (‘step-down’). After the list describing nature’s awesomeness, the blessing seeks the favour of God who was found in a *bush* (also see the use of rhetorical ‘step-down’ above in v. 17). In verse 16b Moses entreats God to make all of the previous blessings rest on Joseph’s head as the *prince among his brothers* (*nēzîr*), the one *separated* as highest in status (cf. Gen. 49:26). Joseph’s brother tribes would recognize this importance, as would the nations at large (see comment on v. 17 above).

**18–19. Zebulun and Issachar only.** These two sons of Leah are commonly paired in this order (Gen. 49:13–15; Judg. 5:14–15), but at Genesis 30:17–19 Zebulun is the sixth son, and Issachar the fifth. Here this might also correspond to the previous paired order of the sons of Rachel – Benjamin and Joseph (the twelfth and eleventh sons respectively) – and, before that, the framing paired tribes of Leah, Judah and Levi (the fourth and third sons respectively). Attention has already been drawn to the importance of Levi and Joseph in this chapter. But Issachar may also provide a frame for Levi in the opening Leah group, as offering sacrifices. The following list relates particularly to the reversal of birth orders:

Judah	sons of <b>Leah</b> (vv. 7–11)
<b>Levi</b>	
Benjamin	sons of <b>Rachel</b> (vv. 12–17)
<b>Joseph</b>	
Zebulun	sons of <b>Leah</b> (vv. 18–19)
<b>Issachar</b>	

The combined blessing in verse 18 underlines the fact that Zebulun and Issachar shared a common border in the northern part of the

14. The reading ‘thorn bush’ (*sěneh*) is preferable to the emendation ‘Sinai’ (*sěnay*) (NRSV).

land, and also had easy access along the Jezreel Valley to the riches of the sea and coast. But the contrast between the expressions *going out* and *in your tents* (a merismus for a community's whole life) suggests that in sea trade Zebulun would be successful (v. 19b; cf. Gen. 49:13), but in sedentary, agricultural and worship pursuits (involving the offering of *sacrifices of righteousness*; cf. Ps. 51:19 [ET]), Issachar is in view in verse 19a (cf. v. 10b; Gen. 49:14–15). The expression *peoples* (v. 19a) probably refers to fellow Israelites or kinship groups, and may also be a reference to the existence of a Yahweh shrine on Mount Tabor, later occupied by Zebulun (cf. Josh. 19:12, 22; Judg. 4:6, 12; Hos. 5:1–7). Finally, Zebulun will extract (or 'suck out') riches derived from maritime wealth (v. 19b), which may include the famous purple dye produced from shellfish (*treasures hidden in the sand*).

**20–21. Gad.** Following the previous order, the sons of Leah provide a frame for the sons of Rachel in the centre, reversing the order of Genesis 49:16–21 (cf. Gen. 30:1–13). The sons of Leah receive two verses each, and the sons of Rachel just one verse each.

**Gad** – son of **Leah** (through Zilpah) (vv. 20–21)

**Dan** – son of **Rachel** (through Bilhah) (v. 22)

**Naphtali** – son of **Rachel** (through Bilhah) (v. 23)

**Asher** – son of **Leah** (through Zilpah) (vv. 24–25)

This is the only blessing in the chapter referred to as either from or to God (cf. Gen. 9:26) for anyone helping to *enlarge* (cf. 19:8) Gad's population (cf. Reuben at v. 6). As such, it provides a frame for the same word *blessed* (passive participle) at verse 24, relating to the tribe of Asher itself (cf. v. 23). Gad is portrayed in warrior-like terms as a lion (v. 20b; cf. Gen. 49:19). In time, Gad appears to have absorbed Reuben, which may explain verse 21a: *He chose* or 'saw' the best land for himself (cf. Num. 32:1–42), which *was kept* (*sāpûn*) *for him* (possibly also reflecting the portion of an 'honoured' leader, as in post-biblical Hebrew). The rest of verse 21 may refer to Gad's leadership in battle as this related to the Transjordan, as well as to the *LORD's righteous will* and *judgments* also to fight across the Jordan (Num. 32:28–30). Thus, by acting in the van of his people to fulfil the Lord's design and his decisions for Israel, Gad provides a frame

for Asher at verses 24–25, as one who was also to be held in special esteem by his brothers.

**22. Dan.** Dan's blessing is an aphorism with cryptic content. His small size as a *lion's cub* (applied to Judah at Gen. 49:9) may initially provide a parallel with Gad, who is described as a *lion* with great strength (v. 20). But whereas in Genesis 49:16 Dan will provide *justice* for his people, nothing of that is mentioned here (cf. v. 21). This may be because *justice* has already been connected with Gad in verse 21. It may also relate to Dan's apparent lack of *justice* at Judges 18:27, and to the Danite Samson's unsuccessful struggle against the Philistines (Judg. 13:1 – 16:31). The expression *springing out of Bashan* is difficult, since Bashan was never a locale of Dan.<sup>15</sup> One suggestion is that it could be part of the lion metaphor, in which the aggressiveness of lions towards cattle in Bashan became proverbial (Nelson 2002: 392). But Genesis 49:17 may provide the real clue, where Dan is described as a *viper*. Thus the word *Bahan* (*bāšān*) may disguise a cognate to the Ugaritic word *bṭn* ('serpent'), which may be translated: 'who leaps forth like/from (or quicker than) a snake' (Nelson 2002: 392). This would suit the sense of Genesis 49:17 and Judges 18:27. Finally, Dan's connection with Judah as a *lion's cub* may serve a *geographical* as well as a *leadership* purpose, in the sense that Dan is the northernmost tribe (although not originally so; Josh. 19:40–48; Judg. 18:1–31), and Judah is the southernmost tribe (noting that Simeon is unaccountably left out of this song). This produces an image of Israel protected by lions on either side (Friedman 2001: 676).

**23. Naphtali.** Naphtali's possession was also in the far north, in upper Galilee (Josh. 19:32–39). But unlike Dan, it is described as *abounding with the favour of the LORD, and full of his blessing* (note that Dan is omitted from the list of tribes in Rev. 7:5–8, possibly because of its connection with idolatry; cf. Judg. 18:30–31). This may relate to Naphtali's productive land bordering the Sea of Galilee, as well as to its independent spirit and freedom in such an isolated area of

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15. However, this point is not entirely beyond dispute, as vv. 22–25 seem to link Dan, Naphtali and Asher together in the Galilee area (Thompson 1974: 316).

the northern hill country (cf. Gen. 49:21). The final phrase is more difficult: *he will inherit southward to the lake*. The word *lake* (*yām*) can mean ‘west’ (cf. 3:27), so that the line might read: ‘he will inherit to the west and south’ of the Sea of Galilee.

**24–25. Asher.** The final blessing upon Asher (= *blessed*) as a wish frames the account of Gad at verses 20–21 with the word *blessed* (passive participle). But whereas for Gad the blessing related to anyone who would *enlarge* his tribe, here the blessing takes the form of a wish for the tribe itself: *Most blessed of sons is Asher*. Like Joseph (v. 16b; *prince among his brothers*) and Gad (v. 21; *esteemed among the tribes*), he is compared with other tribes. The blessing, *Let him [Asher] be favoured by his brothers*, appears to be linked to the next line, *let him bathe his feet in oil* (v. 24), speaking of the abundance of natural wealth (especially olives; Gen. 49:20; cf. 49:11). But Asher’s land may have been vulnerable to outside attack, hence the wish for strong fortifications (v. 25). The link between the two wishes may turn on a play on words, since the Hebrew *min’āl* (*bolts of your gates*, only here) is similar to the word for *bolt* and *sandal* (*na’al*; LXX = ‘His sandal shall be iron and brass’; Thompson 1974: 316). The final blessing of *strength* (LXX) or ‘security’ (*dōbe’*; only here) *will equal your days* (v. 25b), and may also be a conceptual parallel to the enduring nature of *the bolts of your gates* as iron and bronze (v. 25a).<sup>16</sup>

**26, 29.** Verses 26–29 provide a frame to verses 1–5 and emphasize the *uniqueness* of the God of *Jeshurun* as Israel’s Warrior God (v. 26a). But on this occasion he reappears, riding on the clouds of heaven in his *majesty* (*ga’āwā*), in order to *help* (lit. ‘as your help’; v. 26b; cf. Ps. 68:33–34 [ET]). Verses 26 and 29 form a bracket around these final verses, with the uniqueness of Yahweh (*no-one like*; v. 26a) and of Israel (*who is like*; v. 29a) reflecting the same order as verses 2–5. It is therefore fitting that the book closes on the note of the uniqueness of Yahweh as the God of *Jeshurun*, and the derived uniqueness of Israel as his people, forming a frame for the entire book (cf. 4:5–8 and 4:32–40 expressed in reverse). Moreover, verses

16. Porter (1994: 267–270) offers an alternate interpretation that blesses Asher as a matchless warrior rather than a prosperous tribe, supported by v. 25 and vv. 26–29.

26 and 29 share the terms *his majesty* (v. 26b), *your majestic sword* (v. 29b), as well as your *helper* ('*ēzer*, v. 26b and 29b; cf. Gen. 2:18–20; esp. Ps. 115:9–11). Taking these terms together, in verse 26 'your helper' equates poetically with *his majesty*, and in verse 29 *your shield and helper* equates with 'your majestic sword' in an a/b/a/b fashion. This all adds up to the activity and protection of Yahweh as the Divine Warrior on Israel's behalf, highlighting their triumph over the enemy.

27–28. Israel's *refuge* (cf. Ps. 90:1; 91:9) is focused on the *eternal* God (*qedem*; cf. Ps. 68:33 [ET]), whose *everlasting* arms ('*ōlām*; cf. v. 15 for both terms *eternal* and *everlasting*) carry Israel (cf. 1:31), as well as *drive out* the enemy of the land, saying *destroy him*, which finally leads to Israel's dwelling apart (cf. Num. 23:9) in safety and peace (*alone*) within the land (cf. 4:32–40; 7:17–24). Thus, Jacob's *spring* (offspring) will be made secure within the land. The bounty of Israel's land (v. 28) is marked by the divine provision of *grain*, *new wine* and *dew*, reflected at 7:13 within the context of holy war (cf. 11:8–15), and in Isaac's blessing of Jacob (Gen. 27:28).

29. The last words from Moses are a final *blessing* relating to Israel's unique status as a people (7:6; 26:16–19), whose distinctiveness consists in being *saved* by the Lord (cf. Rev. 5:9), made possible only by the uniqueness of their God, and his commitment to the Abrahamic promise (v. 26; cf. 4:5–8, 32–40; 7:7–12). But the second half of the verse is not what we might have expected: *He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword* (cf. Gen. 15:1; Ps. 115:9–11). Verse 29b describes Israel as either trampling down the *high places* of their enemies (Heb. *bāmôt*; cf. Num. 33:52) or 'treading on their backs/necks' (so LXX; cf. Josh. 10:24), possibly suggested by the previous line (*your enemies will cower before you*). Why does Moses end with the defeat of Israel's enemies? Two answers are possible. (1) The conclusion to the blessing of Moses (33:26–29) parallels that of the Song of Moses on this theme (32:39–43). (2) It was important for Israel not to *fear* the enemy in the taking of the land (7:17–26; cf. 1:26–46), and this would continue to gauge their success in doing so.

### Meaning

The final blessing of Moses (33:1–29) follows the tribal blessings of Jacob just before he died (Gen. 49:1–28), thus replicating the canonical end frame of the first book of the Pentateuch. Here, these

blessings are framed by the notice of Moses' impending death and the Lord's *showing* him the Promised Land (32:48–52; 34:1–12). This suggests that Moses' role in these final blessings is to express God's approval of the one who was excluded from the land because of Israel's sin. Also, God's primary intent is to 'bless' Israel rather than bring 'curse' upon her (cf. Num. 22–24). Now Moses can even *bless* the tribes of Israel in ways that often depart from Jacob's original words to them, especially in deviating from the original prominence given to Judah, and drawing attention to a fresh importance given to the tribes of Levi and Joseph. The Levites are given the role of teaching the Torah to all Israel (33:8–11), and the tribe of Joseph is pictured as enjoying the most abundant part of the land (33:13–17). This is a way of emphasizing the participation of all of the tribes in the blessing and systematic filling of the land from south to north, including the Levitical priests, who are otherwise excluded from its inheritance. The tribes of Levi and Joseph also symbolize the theological importance for Deuteronomy of Torah obedience, and its connection to the possession and enjoyment of the rich abundance of the land. This is a picture of theological history unfolding, with shifting centres of gravity for all the tribes. But framing this blessing is the Lord, who shines forth from Sinai as king over Jeshurun in giving Israel the law (33:1–5), and finally as warrior king who rides on the clouds of heaven and drives out the enemy from the land, so that Israel might possess it in fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise (33:26–29).

#### D. The death of Moses (34:1–12)

##### *Context*

Deuteronomy's epilogue fulfils the previous command given to Moses to ascend Mount Nebo to view the Promised Land before he died (32:48–52; cf. Num. 27:12–14). It also provides a frame for 3:23–29 (cf. Num. 27:15–23) in terms of Joshua's appointment as Moses' successor as Israel's shepherd-leader. Thus the death of Moses becomes a crucial theme for the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>17</sup>

17. See D. T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses* (Fortress, 1994).

In terms of this chapter's outline, we may follow the concentric structure given by McConville (2002: 476):

- A. Moses is shown the land (vv. 1–3)
- B. It is the land promised to the Patriarchs (v. 4)
- C. Death of Moses (vv. 5–8)
- B.<sup>1</sup> Joshua succeeds Moses (v. 9)
- A.<sup>1</sup> The uniqueness of Moses (vv. 10–12)

### *Comment*

1. Deuteronomy begins with Mount Horeb (1:6), and concludes with Moses climbing Mount Nebo from *the plains of Moab* (cf. 1:5). This is further described as the *top of Pisgah, across from Jericho*. The mountain in question was part of a range east of the Dead Sea and Jordan called the *Abarim* (32:49; cf. Num. 27:12; 33:47–48). Pisgah may have been the northern part of this range facing west (Josh. 13:20), and Nebo would have been a prominent peak on its top slope (cf. 3:27), from which the entire Cis-Jordan could be viewed. It is identified as Jebel Es-Siyâgha, some five miles south-west of Tel Hesban, and about fifteen miles east of Jericho (Merrill 1994: 451–452).

2–3. The Lord himself *showed* Moses the land in a geographical, anti-clockwise sweep (cf. Abraham at Genesis 13:14–15), starting from the far north, then west and then south as far as Zoar. Despite the superb view, it really does not extend beyond Mount Gilboa, the highlands of Gilead on the east, and the Judean hills to the west. But the portion that was visible symbolized the whole (Thompson 1974: 319), and provides a mental map for the reader.

4. Following a visual presentation of the land to Moses for the first time, this is also the Lord's last word to him within the book. The land Moses can see was pledged on oath to the Patriarchs long before (cf. Gen. 12:7). This pledge frames the book of Deuteronomy (cf. 1:8), and dominates Moses' discourse throughout as a major theme. As an accompanying frame to the book, Moses is also forbidden to enter the land (1:37), indicated a total of seven times within frame passages as a lead up to its eighth and final mention at 34:4 (1:37; 3:23–29; 31:2, 14, 16, 27–29; 32:48–52).

5. At the centre of the chapter (vv. 5–8) is the report of the death

of Moses, *the servant of the Lord* (v. 5; cf. 3:24; 9:27; 32:36, 43; also 33:1 *the man of God*), perhaps in the sense of a royal minister who is trusted, loyal and intimate with his master (cf. Num. 12:6–8; Heb. 3:5 = *in all God's house*). The phrase, *as the Lord had said* or commanded (lit. 'he died at God's mouth'; cf. Num. 33:38), recalls 8:3 as equally applicable to the manner in which God's servants embrace death.

6. The Masoretic text has 'He (the Lord) buried', whereas other versions have the plural: 'They buried' (SamP, LXX). Perhaps God removed Moses' body from the mountain, where everybody knew he had gone to die, in order to keep his grave a secret (Tigay 1996: 338). The site was located in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor (3:29; 4:46). If a connection with the earlier Baal of Peor (cf. 4:3–4) is maintained, then the choice of the site may also serve as a rhetorical and polemical indicator of Moses' loyal stand as the servant of the Lord against idolatry, even in his death. In any case, the notice that the Lord himself buried Moses may be seen as offering a form of approval and compensation for not allowing Moses to enter the Promised Land (3:23–29; 32:48–52). The final note that *to this day no-one knows where his grave is* may add further poignancy to Moses' exclusion from the land (McConville 2002: 477). But it may also draw attention to Israel's greater need to seek Moses' most enduring legacy in terms of the written *tôrâ*, rather than indulge in a form of grave worship (cf. 14:1–2; 26:14; Blenkinsopp 1995: 1–16). Thus, even the notice of Moses' death serves as a message of spiritual life and death for Israel (cf. 30:15–20).

7. Moses dies at 120 years of age (cf. Gen. 6:3 as the maximum lifespan, found in Sumerian literature as well). The point here is that Moses' old age is characterized by freshness and vitality, and he dies either because he has reached the divinely appointed limit (cf. 31:2), or he has died prematurely. Aaron also dies at 123 years of age (Num. 33:39) in the fortieth year of wilderness wandering, suggesting that both options are possible.

8. The people wept for Moses for thirty days in the plains of Moab where he was buried (cf. Aaron; Num. 20:29).

9. In Deuteronomy, Moses' death is closely connected with Joshua's succession at the frames (3:21–22, 23–29; 31:14, 23; 32:44; 34:9). Moses must die before the next stage of salvation history can progress with Joshua, already anticipated at Numbers 27:12–23

(which mentions only the conferral of Moses' *authority* to Joshua at Num. 27:20). Here the laying on of both hands has the effect of transferring Moses' *wisdom* and authority to Joshua, but Joshua will be no new Moses standing in an equivalent prophetic relationship to Yahweh (vv. 10–12; cf. Num. 27:21). Finally, while Israel now listened to Joshua, signifying their acknowledgment of his leadership, their obedience was to all that Moses had given them from the Lord (v. 9b; cf. Josh. 1:7–8; 23:6).

10. From the final narrator's point of view, the prophetic status of Moses as the one whom the Lord knew *face to face* is incomparable (Exod. 33:11; Num. 12:6–8; cf. Jer. 23:18). Already attention has been drawn to the centrality of 18:14–22 within the law code of chapters 12–26, as this relates to Israel's temptation to discern the Lord's will in occult practices of various kinds (18:9–13), including prophets who seek to claim falsely that the Lord had said something to them (13:1–5). Therefore, the purpose of verse 10 may be to validate Moses' teachings of uncompromising monotheism against competing versions of what Yahweh was supposed to have said in Israel, countering 'syncretistic Yahwism' (Tigay 1996: 137–143).

11–12. The language that is used of the Lord's mighty power at 3:24 and 4:32–34 is now applied to Moses in the final extravagant tribute of verses 11–12, as if the Lord is now returning an affectionate compliment along the lines of: 'Moses said of me there is none like Yahweh, and so I now bear witness that there is none like Moses' (Goldin 1987: 219–225). But why conclude with Moses' *mighty power and awesome deeds*, when the entire focus of Deuteronomy has been upon Moses the law-giver? Wenham (2003: 124) suggests that this is the last part of a biography of Moses within the Pentateuch. Watts (1998: 421) puts forward that the omission of the laws here may have been a way of preserving their divine and fixed status as coming from Yahweh. But this has already been stated at the frame passage of 1:3b. These verses most probably serve a rhetorical and legitimating purpose, highlighting the *signs and wonders* of Moses as giving support and authority to his prophetic word and office, performed *in the sight of all Israel* (v. 12; cf. 4:32–40; esp. 6:20–25, and see commentary on 11:2–7). Also, the use of signs and wonders performed by a prophet may demonstrate that his message

really comes from God (Deut. 13:2; cf. Exod. 4:30–31; 14:31; 1 Sam. 7:2–17; 12:16–25; 1 Kgs 17:24; 18:36–37). Thus Moses is here remembered as a *prophet*, whose main role in Deuteronomy is to announce the consequences of obeying and disobeying God's previously stated laws.

Finally, Moses next appears within the land in glorious splendour on the Mount of Transfiguration talking with Elijah and Christ about the 'exodus' which Jesus was about to accomplish in Jerusalem for the salvation of the world (Luke 9:30–31). Jesus was the long-awaited *prophet like Moses* par excellence, whom the people must now listen to, or perish (Luke 9:35; Acts 3:22–23; cf. Deut. 18:15–19). Further, as Moses was a faithful *servant in all God's house*, testifying to what would be said in the future, Christ now fulfils the role of faithful *son over God's house* to those who place their hope in him (Heb. 3:1–6).

### *Meaning*

The death of Moses has been awaited since Numbers 27:12–23, and so provides an important frame around the book of Deuteronomy. Within these frame passages Moses is also forbidden to enter the land, which in turn is linked to the succession of Joshua seven times (1:37–38; 3:23–29; 31:2, 14, 16, 27–29; 32:48–52), followed by an eighth in 34:4. Moses must therefore die before God's plan of salvation history can continue through Joshua. This succession is further linked to the realization of the promise of the land to the Patriarchs also framing the book at 1:8 and 34:4. At the centre of the epilogue (vv. 5–8) is the report of the death of Moses, the *servant of the LORD*, thus adding further mystery and poignancy to his life and authority as a true prophet, whose word must be listened to and obeyed because of the witness of the many mighty deeds that he performed. Moses will speak even louder in death than in life, as the temptation to revive a cult of the dead gives way to the enduring legacy of his word and obedience to it, which alone gives the promise of life and not death (30:11–20; cf. Isa. 8:18–20).

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