THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

The King Who Says Choose Life

Deuteronomy, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Says Choose Life: The Book of Deuteronomy, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” Deuteronomy might sound like a rerun. The name even means second law. Haven’t we already heard the Ten Commandments? Didn’t we already cover the wilderness? Why do we need Moses to say it all again?

Here’s why. Deuteronomy is a goodbye. Moses is 120 years old. He’s led Israel for forty years, and he knows he’s about to die without setting foot in the promised land. Standing on the plains of Moab, looking across the Jordan River, he gathers a whole new generation, the kids who grew up in the wilderness, and gives them everything he’s got. If you knew you had one last chance to tell the people you love what matters most, what would you say? Deuteronomy is Moses’ answer.

It’s also the book Jesus quoted more than almost any other. When the devil tempted Him in the wilderness, He answered three times from Deuteronomy. When someone asked Him for the greatest commandment, He quoted Deuteronomy 6. The book is full of love: God’s love for His people, His call to love Him back with everything you have, and His command to love the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. It also has some of the hardest passages in the Bible, and we’ll face those honestly.

At the end, Moses puts a choice in front of Israel, and in front of you. Life or death. Blessing or curse. Let’s hear him out.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Deuteronomy in nine chapters: Moses' first sermon looking back (Deuteronomy 1–4), the Ten Commandments again (5), the Shema (6), not by bread alone and the hard conquest commands (7–11), worship and care for the poor (12–16), kings, priests, and a prophet like Moses (17–20), laws for everyday life (21–26), blessings, curses, and choose life (27–30), and Moses' song and death (31–34). The detailed laws are summarized more briefly than the big ideas.

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what kind of book Deuteronomy is, where it fits, and the world it came from. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as who wrote Deuteronomy and when, and how to understand the commands to destroy the Canaanites, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Deuteronomy in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the fifth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Deuteronomy raises questions teens will ask. I've presented the main views fairly on its authorship, including the traditional view that Moses wrote it and the scholarly view connecting it with the book of the law found in the temple under King Josiah, and on the commands to devote the Canaanite cities to destruction (the Hebrew herem), including readings that take them as hyperbolic war language, as a unique judgment, or as a deeply troubling text Christians must read through Jesus. I'd encourage you to share your own church's view with your teen, and to explain why other Christians see it differently.

These hard passages are handled carefully and age-appropriately, with the clear statement that they are not a model for violence, prejudice, or hatred toward any people today. Real Talk boxes address memory and faith, money and contentment, the occult, fairness, family, and grief, and point readers to trusted adults and, where relevant, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament sees Deuteronomy fulfilled in Jesus, the prophet like Moses, who answered temptation with Deuteronomy and took the curse of the law on Himself, while acknowledging that Jewish readers treasure Deuteronomy and still pray the Shema daily. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will hear in Deuteronomy the voice of a God who loves them and calls them to choose life.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

Second Law

The name Deuteronomy comes from the Greek for second law, from a phrase in Deuteronomy 17:18 about a copy of the law. That's a little misleading. Deuteronomy isn't a different law; it's the same covenant, retold and applied for a new generation about to enter the land. In Hebrew, the book is called Devarim, which means words, from its first line: These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel.

Part Five of the Torah

Deuteronomy is the last of the five books of Moses. Genesis tells of creation and the promises to Abraham. Exodus tells of the rescue from Egypt. Leviticus and Numbers cover the laws and the wilderness years. Deuteronomy ties it all together, and it sets up everything that follows. The books of Joshua through Kings tell Israel's history by measuring it against Deuteronomy.

Three Sermons and a Song

Most of Deuteronomy is speeches. Moses gives a first sermon looking back on the wilderness years (chapters 1–4), a long second sermon on the commandments and laws (chapters 5–28), and a third sermon calling Israel to commit to the covenant (chapters 29–30). Then come his song, his blessing on the tribes, and the account of his death (chapters 31–34). It all happens in a few weeks, on the plains of Moab, in the fortieth year after the exodus.

The Treaty Format

Deuteronomy is shaped a lot like an ancient treaty. Kings in the ancient Near East, like the Hittites in the 1300s BC and the Assyrians in the 700s BC, made treaties with smaller nations. Those treaties usually had a preamble naming the great king, a history of his relationship with the smaller nation, the rules the smaller nation had to keep, instructions to store and read the treaty, witnesses, and blessings and curses. Deuteronomy follows a similar outline. It's a covenant document between the great King and His people, except that this King rescued them, loves them, and wants their hearts.

Who Wrote Deuteronomy?

Deuteronomy says that Moses spoke these words and wrote this law (Deuteronomy 31:9), and Jewish and Christian tradition has long held that Moses wrote it, apart from the account of his death. Many scholars believe that Deuteronomy, or an early form of it, was the book of the law found in the temple in Jerusalem in about 622 BC, during the reign of King Josiah (2 Kings 22), and that it was written or edited in that era. Others argue it preserves Mosaic material that was lost and rediscovered. Some point out that its structure resembles the older Hittite treaties more closely, others the later Assyrian ones. Christians with different views agree that Deuteronomy is God's Word.

Hard Passages

Deuteronomy includes commands to destroy the nations of Canaan, which are among the most troubling passages in the Bible. We'll face them honestly in chapter 4. Including a command in the Bible doesn't make it a model for violence today, and Christians read every part of the Old Testament through Jesus. If anything you read

brings up something painful in your own life, talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, pastor, or school counselor.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Deuteronomy 1–4): Looking back.

Chapter 2 (Deuteronomy 5): The Ten Commandments again.

Chapter 3 (Deuteronomy 6): The Shema.

Chapter 4 (Deuteronomy 7–11): Not by bread alone.

Chapter 5 (Deuteronomy 12–16): Worship and the poor.

Chapter 6 (Deuteronomy 17–20): Kings, priests, and a prophet.

Chapter 7 (Deuteronomy 21–26): Laws for everyday life.

Chapter 8 (Deuteronomy 27–30): Choose life.

Chapter 9 (Deuteronomy 31–34): Moses' last day.

Contents

Setting the Scene 7

1 Looking Back *1–4* 11

2 Ten Words Again *5* 17

3 Hear, O Israel *6* 21

4 Not by Bread Alone *7–11* 26

5 Open Your Hand *12–16* 32

6 A Prophet Like Me *17–20* 37

7 Laws for Everyday Life *21–26* 42

8 Choose Life *27–30* 46

9 Moses' Last Day *31–34* 52

Where This Points 57

CHAPTER 1

Looking Back

Deuteronomy 1–4

"These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan." That's how Deuteronomy opens. Not with a law, but with a speech. It's the fortieth year since Israel left Egypt. The people are camped on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho. Almost everyone who was an adult at the exodus has died. The crowd in front of Moses is mostly made up of people who were children or teenagers when it all started, or who were born in the desert. They know the stories, but many of them weren't there for the big moments. So Moses tells them again.

His first sermon is a history lesson. He reminds them how God told them to leave Mount Sinai and take the land. He tells them how he appointed leaders and judges to help him, and how he charged the judges to be fair. "You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgment is God's." Then he tells the painful story of the twelve spies, how their parents refused to go in, even though God had promised to fight for them and had carried them through the desert "as a man carries his son."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Treaty Shape**
>
> Ancient treaties between a great king and a smaller kingdom, like those made by Hittite kings in the 1300s BC, usually began with a preamble naming the

king and then a historical prologue describing everything the king had done for the smaller nation. The point was gratitude: look what I've done for you, so be loyal to me. Deuteronomy 1–4 works the same way. Before Moses gives a single command, he reminds Israel of all God has done. The laws come after the love. Assyrian treaties from the 700s BC, by contrast, often skipped the history and went straight to threats and curses. Scholars debate which kind Deuteronomy resembles more, and what that says about when it was written. Either way, the order matters: God rescues first, then He asks for obedience.

Moses also tells them about the long journey around Edom, Moab, and Ammon. God told Israel not to fight those nations, because they were relatives, descended from Esau and from Abraham's nephew Lot, and God had given them their land too. Then come the victories over Sihon and Og, two Amorite kings east of the Jordan, which gave the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh their land. And Moses sums up the whole forty years in one sentence. "These forty years, the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing."

Think about that. Forty years in the desert, and they lacked nothing. Not because life was easy. It was hard, hot, and often frightening. But God was there. Every morning there was manna. When there was no water, God gave water. Their clothes didn't wear out, and their feet didn't swell. That's a remarkable way to describe a wilderness.

REAL TALK **Remember**

The word remember shows up again and again in Deuteronomy, and so does its opposite, forget. Moses knew that the biggest danger for the new generation wasn't the giants in Canaan. It was forgetting. "Only be careful, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes saw, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life." It's easy to forget what God has done, especially when life is going well, or when you're

busy. One of the best things you can do for your faith is to keep a record. Write down answered prayers, hard times God brought you through, and moments when you knew He was real. On the days when faith feels distant, you'll have something to look back on.

There's a lesson in how Moses tells the story, too. He doesn't make himself the hero. He admits his own failures and his frustration with the people, and he keeps pointing back to what God did. The victories over Sihon and Og weren't because Israel was strong; God handed those kings over. The forty years of survival weren't because Moses was a great leader; God carried them. When you tell your own story, whether in a testimony at church, a college essay, or just a conversation with a friend, it's worth asking the same question: who's the hero? Gratitude changes the way you remember. It helps you see God's hand in places where you once saw only your own effort, or only your own pain.

Moses also tells the people something personal. He begged God to let him cross the Jordan and see the good land. God said no, because of what happened at the rock in Numbers 20, and told Moses not to bring it up again. Instead, God let him look at the land from the top of a mountain and told him to encourage Joshua, who would lead them in. It's honest and painful. Moses doesn't hide his disappointment. But he obeys.

REAL TALK **When God Says No**

Moses asked God for something good, and God said no. Maybe you know that feeling. You prayed for someone to get better, or for a door to open, or for your family to stay together, and it didn't happen. That can be confusing and painful, and it's okay to say so. Moses did. Notice that God didn't stop loving Moses or talking with him. He gave him a different gift: a view of the land, and a role in preparing the next leader. A no from God isn't the end of the story. If

> you're struggling with an unanswered prayer, talk about it with someone you trust, and keep talking to God about it too. He can handle your honesty.

Moses also says something important about God's word itself. "You shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall you take away from it." It's tempting to do both. Some people add extra rules to God's commands, making faith a heavy list of dos and don'ts that God never gave. Others take away the parts they don't like, keeping the comforting verses and ignoring the challenging ones. Jesus criticized the religious leaders of His day for doing the first (Mark 7:8), and the prophets criticized Israel for doing the second. The healthiest faith takes God's word as it is, all of it, and lets it shape us rather than the other way around.

Chapter 4 brings the first sermon to its climax, and it's one of the most beautiful chapters in the Old Testament. Moses reminds the people of the day at Mount Sinai, when they heard God's voice from the fire but saw no form. That's why they must never make an idol. God can't be captured in a statue. Then Moses asks two amazing questions. Has any other nation ever had a god so close? "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to them as the LORD our God is whenever we call on him?" And has any god ever rescued a nation from slavery the way God rescued Israel?

Moses warns that if they turn to idols, they will be scattered among the nations. But even then, there will be hope. "But from there you shall seek the LORD your God, and you will find him when you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul." Why? "For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not fail you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers." Then Moses delivers the bottom line. "Know therefore today, and take it to heart,

that the LORD himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath. There is no one else."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Only One God**

Most ancient peoples believed in many gods, each with its own territory: a god of the storm, a god of the sea, a god of this city or that nation. When Israel conquered a land, their neighbors would have assumed their gods were stronger than the local ones. Deuteronomy says something far more radical: there is only one God, and He rules heaven and earth. That belief, called monotheism, was unusual in the ancient world. Today it's shared by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and it began, as far as history can tell us, with Israel.

REAL TALK **Seek and Find**

Deuteronomy 4:29 is a promise for anyone who feels far from God. Even if you've wandered away, even if you're in a place you never expected to be, if you seek Him with all your heart, you will find Him. You don't need to be in church, have the right words, or have your life together. You just need to look for Him honestly. If you're not sure where to start, open the Psalms and read one a day, pray even if it feels awkward, and ask a Christian you trust to talk with you. God isn't hiding from you. He's waiting to be found.

KEY VERSE

Know therefore today, and take it to heart, that the LORD himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath. There is no one else.

Deuteronomy 4:39 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Moses began with a history lesson instead of the laws?
2. Moses said Israel lacked nothing in forty years of wilderness. Looking back on a hard season in your life, what did God provide?
3. How do you handle it when God says no to something you've prayed for?
4. What helps you remember what God has done in your life?

TRY THIS *Start a remember list. Write down ten things God has done for you or your family. Keep adding to it this month, and read it when you're discouraged.*

CHAPTER 2

Ten Words Again

Deuteronomy 5

Moses' second sermon begins with the Ten Commandments. He gathers all Israel and says something surprising. "The LORD didn't make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive today." Technically, most of these people weren't adults at Sinai. Some weren't even born. But Moses insists: this is your covenant. Not your parents' faith. Yours.

> **REAL TALK** **Your Faith, Not Your Parents'**
>
> Maybe you grew up going to church because your parents took you. That's a gift, but at some point the faith has to become your own. Moses wanted the new generation to understand that God wasn't just their parents' God. He was speaking to them, today. The same is true for you. You can't ride on someone else's faith forever. It's okay to have questions and doubts on the way; wrestling honestly is often how faith becomes real. And if you didn't grow up in a Christian home, Deuteronomy 5 is good news too. God's covenant isn't inherited like a last name. It's for anyone who hears His voice and responds.

Then Moses repeats the Ten Commandments, almost exactly as they appear in Exodus 20. They begin the same way, with who God is and what He has done. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Then come the commands. Have no other gods. Make no idols. Don't misuse God's name. Keep the Sabbath. Honor your father and mother. Don't

murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Don't covet.

But there are a few differences, and they're interesting. In Exodus, the reason given for the Sabbath is creation: God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. In Deuteronomy, the reason is the exodus. "You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." The Sabbath isn't just about rest. It's about freedom. Slaves never got a day off. Israel's servants, animals, and foreign workers had to get one too, so they could rest just like their masters.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Two Versions**

Why are the two versions of the Ten Commandments slightly different? Besides the Sabbath reason, Deuteronomy lists a neighbor's wife before his house in the last commandment, and adds his field to the list of things not to covet. Some scholars think the original tablets had a short form of each command, and that Exodus and Deuteronomy each added explanations for their setting. Others think Moses, retelling them forty years later, adapted the explanations for a people about to own fields and houses. Either way, the commands themselves are the same, and Moses says God wrote them on two tablets of stone and put them in the ark.

REAL TALK **Rest Is for Everyone**

Deuteronomy's version of the Sabbath has a justice angle. The rest wasn't just for you. It was for the people who worked for you, too. Think about who works so that you can rest: parents, cafeteria workers, store clerks, delivery drivers. How could you make their lives a little easier? Say thank you. Clean up after yourself. Be patient when service is slow. And notice whether your own life has any rest in it. If you're constantly busy, stressed, or online, you might be living like a slave in Egypt. God wants you free.

Notice too that the Ten Commandments start with grace. Before God says you shall not, He says I am the one who brought you out. The commands aren't a ladder to climb up to God. They're the way of life for people God has already rescued. That's why Christians can read them with joy rather than fear. They describe what love for God and love for neighbor look like, and Jesus summed them up in exactly those two commands. When you fail to keep them, and everyone does, the answer isn't to try harder to earn God's favor. It's to come back to the God who rescued you, receive His forgiveness, and start again.

> **REAL TALK** **Coveting and Comparison**
>
> The last commandment, don't covet, is the only one that's entirely about what happens inside you. Coveting means wanting what belongs to someone else so badly that it eats at you: their house, their stuff, their relationship, their life. Social media is basically a coveting machine. You scroll through other people's best moments and start feeling like your own life isn't enough. Deuteronomy's version even adds the neighbor's field, the thing a farmer in the new land would be most tempted to envy. The cure for coveting isn't pretending you don't want things. It's gratitude for what God has given you, and trusting that He knows what you need. If comparison is making you miserable, try taking a break from the apps that feed it.

After the commandments, Moses reminds the people what happened at Sinai. They were terrified by the fire and the voice from the mountain, and they asked Moses to go and listen for them, promising to do whatever God said. And God said something tender in response. "Oh that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" You can almost hear the longing. God doesn't give His commands to make people miserable. He gives them so that it will go well with them.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ten Commandments in Public**

The Ten Commandments have shaped laws and cultures around the world, and they've also been the subject of court cases in the United States about whether they can be displayed in public schools and courthouses. Christians disagree about how much the government should promote religious texts. But almost everyone agrees that many of the commands, like don't murder, don't steal, and don't lie in court, have become foundations of justice in many societies. You can learn them, live them, and talk about them respectfully whatever your school or community decides.

KEY VERSE

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Deuteronomy 5:6 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Moses said the covenant was made with the people in front of him, not their parents?
2. In what ways is your faith your own, and in what ways are you still relying on someone else's?
3. Why do you think Deuteronomy connects the Sabbath with freedom from slavery?
4. God said He wanted it to go well with His people. How does that change how you think about His commands?

TRY THIS *Write the Ten Commandments in your own words, one sentence each, as if you were explaining them to a ten-year-old. Then pick the one you find hardest and pray about it every day this week.*

CHAPTER 3

Hear, O Israel

Deuteronomy 6

If you had to pick the most important passage in the whole Old Testament, this might be it. It's called the Shema, from its first Hebrew word, which means hear. "Hear, Israel: The LORD is our God. The LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might."

For three thousand years, Jewish people have said these words every morning and every night. Children learn them as soon as they can talk. Jewish tradition says that people facing death have spoken them as their last words. And when someone asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest, He went straight here. "The greatest is: 'Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The LORD Is One**
>
> The first line of the Shema can be translated several ways: the LORD our God, the LORD is one; or the LORD is our God, the LORD alone. Both make the same point. Israel's God isn't one god among many. He's the only one, and Israel belongs to Him alone. Christians, who believe in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, still affirm the Shema completely. The Trinity isn't three gods; it's one God in three persons. The Hebrew word for one, echad, can describe a

unity, as when Genesis says a husband and wife become one flesh. Jewish and Christian readers have discussed this for centuries, and both say the Shema with all their hearts.

Notice what the Shema asks for. Not just obedience, but love. And not just a little love, but everything: heart, soul, and might. In Hebrew, the heart is the center of your thoughts and choices, not just your feelings. The soul is your whole life, your very self. Might means your strength, your resources, everything you've got. Jesus added mind, making it even clearer: love God with every part of who you are.

That might sound like a lot to ask. But think about who's asking. This is the God who rescued Israel from slavery, carried them through the wilderness, and fed them every day for forty years. He's not a tyrant demanding attention. He's the one who loved them first. Deuteronomy says it plainly in the next chapter: God chose Israel simply because He loved them.

REAL TALK **All of Me?**

What would it look like to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? It doesn't mean you have to think about God every second, or that you can't love your friends, your family, or soccer. It means God is first, and everything else finds its place around Him. It means your thoughts, your choices, your body, your time, your money, your talents, even your phone, all belong to Him. Nobody does this perfectly. But you can start by asking, each morning: God, what does it look like to love You today? And then try to live it.

Then Moses tells them how to keep these words alive. "These words, which I command you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you

lie down, and when you rise up." Faith isn't meant to stay in church. It's for the kitchen table, the car, bedtime, and breakfast.

"You shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the door posts of your house and on your gates." Many Jewish people take this literally. They wear tefillin, small leather boxes containing these verses, on the arm and forehead during morning prayer. And they put a mezuzah, a small case with the Shema written inside, on the doorposts of their homes, touching it as they come and go.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Mezuzah**
>
> A mezuzah is a small decorative case, often made of wood, metal, or ceramic, attached to the right side of a doorframe in Jewish homes. Inside is a tiny handwritten scroll with Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and 11:13–21. Many Jewish people touch the mezuzah and then their lips when they pass through the door, as a sign of love for God's word. Archaeologists have even found tefillin among the Dead Sea Scrolls, from the time of Jesus. Some Christians put Scripture on their doorposts or walls too, as a reminder that their homes belong to God.

The rest of chapter 6 gives a warning and a promise. When Israel enters the land and moves into houses they didn't build and eats from vineyards they didn't plant, they'll be tempted to forget God. "Then beware lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Comfort can be more dangerous than hardship.

And then comes a beautiful picture. Someday a child will ask, what do all these laws mean? And the answer isn't a list of rules. It's a story. "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand." The commands only make sense in

light of the rescue. That's still true. Christians obey God not to earn His love, but because He has already rescued us.

> **REAL TALK** **Talking About Faith at Home**
>
> Deuteronomy 6 imagines families talking about God naturally, all through the day. For some teens, that's normal. For others, it feels awkward or impossible, maybe because your family isn't Christian, or because faith is something nobody talks about at home. If that's you, you're not failing. You can still keep God's words on your heart, and you can find other places to talk about faith, with friends, at youth group, or with a mentor. And if your family does talk about God, take part. Ask your parents how they came to faith, what they struggle with, and what they've learned. You might be surprised by the answers.

KEY VERSE

Hear, Israel: The LORD is our God. The LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. These words, which I command you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the door posts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Jesus chose the Shema as the greatest commandment?
2. What does it mean to love God with your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength? Which is hardest for you?
3. Why might comfort be more dangerous to faith than hardship?
4. How could you keep God's words in front of you during an ordinary day?

TRY THIS *Memorize Deuteronomy 6:4–5. Write it on a card and tape it to your door, mirror, or phone case. Say it every morning and every night this week, like Jewish families have for thousands of years.*

CHAPTER 4

Not by Bread Alone

Deuteronomy 7–11

Chapters 7–11 continue Moses' second sermon, and they swing between some of the most comforting words in the Bible and some of the hardest. Let's start with the hardest, because Moses does.

Chapter 7 tells Israel what to do with the seven nations living in Canaan. "When the LORD your God delivers them up before you, and you strike them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy to them." The Hebrew word behind utterly destroy is herem, which means to devote something completely to God, often by destroying it. Israel was not to intermarry with these nations or adopt their religion. They were to smash their altars and burn their idols.

REAL TALK **The Hardest Commands**

Let's be honest: commands to destroy whole nations are deeply troubling. Christians have wrestled with them for centuries, and you should know the main ways they've been understood. First, some see them as a unique judgment from God on societies that had become extremely corrupt, including practices like child sacrifice (Deuteronomy 12:31); God had waited centuries for them (Genesis 15:16), and He judged Israel just as severely when they did the same things. Second, many scholars point out that ancient war accounts used sweeping, exaggerated language, the way a fan says their team destroyed the other side; the same books that say the Canaanites were utterly

> destroyed also say many of them were still living there afterward (Judges 1), and the very next verses forbid intermarrying with them, which only makes sense if they would still be around. Some think the focus was on wiping out Canaanite religion and its power more than every person. Third, some Christians say honestly that these passages remain a mystery and a pain they don't fully understand, and that the full picture of God is seen in Jesus, who loved His enemies and died for them. What every Christian view agrees on is this: these commands were for one time and place, they were never a general license for war, and no one can use them to justify violence, racism, or hatred toward any people today. If these passages bother you, that's okay. Keep asking questions, and talk about them with a pastor or youth leader.

It's also worth noticing who in the Bible was spared from these commands. Rahab, a Canaanite woman in Jericho, trusted Israel's God and was welcomed into Israel; she became an ancestor of King David and of Jesus (Joshua 2; Matthew 1:5). The Gibeonites, another Canaanite people, made peace with Israel and lived among them (Joshua 9). Ruth, from Moab, one of the nations Deuteronomy says couldn't enter the assembly, became David's great-grandmother. The door was never completely shut. Again and again, the Old Testament shows outsiders who turned to God and were received. That points forward to the gospel, where people from every nation are invited in.

Right after that hard command comes one of the most tender explanations of grace in the Old Testament. Why did God choose Israel? Not because they were impressive. "The LORD didn't set his love on you nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you." That's it. God loves them because He loves them. There's no deeper reason. And Moses adds, "Know therefore that the LORD your God himself is God, the faithful God, who keeps

covenant and loving kindness to a thousand generations with those who love him."

Chapter 9 makes the same point from the other side. Don't think God is giving you the land because you're good. "Know therefore that the LORD your God doesn't give you this good land to possess for your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people." Moses goes on to retell the golden calf disaster in painful detail. Israel didn't earn anything. It's all grace.

> **REAL TALK** **Chosen Because Loved**
>
> A lot of people think God loves them because they're good, or that He'll stop loving them if they mess up. Deuteronomy 7 says the opposite. God's love isn't a reward for being impressive. Israel was small, weak, and stubborn, and God loved them anyway. The same is true for you. You don't have to perform to earn God's love: not grades, not looks, not popularity, not being a perfect Christian. He loves you because He loves you. That's not a reason to stop trying to follow Him. It's the reason you can follow Him without fear.

Then comes chapter 8, one of the most important chapters in the book. Moses tells Israel to remember the wilderness, and why God led them through it. "He humbled you, allowed you to be hungry, and fed you with manna, which you didn't know, neither did your fathers know, that he might teach you that man does not live by bread only, but man lives by every word that proceeds out of the LORD's mouth."

The wilderness was a classroom. God let them get hungry, then fed them with something completely new, so they'd learn that their lives depended on Him, not just on food. Fourteen hundred years later, Jesus quoted those words in His own wilderness.

After His baptism, Jesus went into the desert for forty days, fasting. Forty days for Him, like forty years for Israel. At the end, the devil

came to Him and said, if You're the Son of God, turn these stones into bread. Jesus answered from Deuteronomy 8. "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of God's mouth.'" The devil tried twice more: throw Yourself off the temple, and worship me and I'll give You the world. Each time, Jesus answered from Deuteronomy. "You shall not test the Lord, your God," from Deuteronomy 6:16. And, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve him only," from Deuteronomy 6:13.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jesus Relives Israel's Story**

The temptation story in Matthew 4 deliberately echoes Israel's story. Israel was called God's son (Exodus 4:22) and went through the waters of the Red Sea, then spent forty years in the wilderness, where they were tested and failed. Jesus, God's Son, went through the waters of baptism, then spent forty days in the wilderness, where He was tested and passed. Where Israel grumbled for bread, tested God, and worshiped an idol, Jesus trusted God, refused to test Him, and worshiped Him alone. He succeeded where Israel failed, and He did it for them, and for us.

REAL TALK **Fighting Temptation**

Jesus fought temptation with Scripture. Not with willpower or a long argument, but with words from God that He knew by heart. That's a strategy you can use too. When you're tempted to lie, to look at something you shouldn't, to lash out, or to give up, it helps to have a verse ready. You might memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13, Philippians 4:8, or Deuteronomy 8:3. It's not magic. But God's words remind you what's true when temptation is shouting lies. And if a temptation feels too strong to fight alone, like an addiction or a habit you can't break, tell a trusted adult. Even Jesus had angels come and care for Him afterward.

Chapter 8 ends with a warning that's especially relevant today. When Israel gets rich in the land, they'll be tempted to say in their

hearts, "My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth." But Moses says, "But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth." Success is a gift, not just an achievement.

REAL TALK **Money and Contentment**

Deuteronomy 8 warns that success can make you forget God. You might not feel rich, but compared with most people in history, you probably have more than enough: food in the fridge, a phone, clothes, a place to sleep. It's easy to always want more, especially when ads and influencers are constantly telling you what you're missing. Moses' answer is to remember where it all comes from, and to say thank you. Contentment doesn't mean you can't work hard or have goals. It means you're not ruled by wanting more. Try this: for one week, every time you're tempted to buy something you don't need, thank God for something you already have.

Chapter 10 asks the big question. "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul?" Then Moses describes God in a way that might surprise you. He is "God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty, and the awesome, who doesn't respect persons or take bribes." And what does this mighty God do? "He executes justice for the fatherless and widow and loves the foreigner in giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the foreigner, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt." The God of gods spends His time caring for orphans, widows, and immigrants. If that's what He's like, that's what His people should be like too.

KEY VERSE

He humbled you, allowed you to be hungry, and fed you with manna, which you didn't know, neither did your fathers know, that he might teach you that man does not live by bread only, but man lives by every word that proceeds out of the LORD's mouth.

Deuteronomy 8:3 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. How do you handle the commands to destroy the Canaanites? Which explanation helps you most?
2. What does it mean to you that God chose Israel because He loved them, not because they were impressive?
3. Why do you think Jesus answered every temptation with Deuteronomy?
4. Moses says the mighty God cares for orphans, widows, and foreigners. What does that tell you about Him?

TRY THIS *Pick one temptation you face often. Find a verse that speaks to it, memorize it, and use it the next time the temptation comes, the way Jesus did.*

CHAPTER 5

Open Your Hand

Deuteronomy 12–16

With chapter 12, Moses gets into the details of the laws, and they cover almost every part of life. They begin with worship. When Israel enters the land, they must tear down the Canaanite shrines on every high hill and under every green tree. Instead, they're to worship God at one central place. "But to the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes, to put his name there, you shall seek his habitation." Deuteronomy never names the place, but later it became Jerusalem, where Solomon built the temple.

BACKGROUND CHECK **One Place**

Why one place of worship? In the ancient world, every town had its own shrine, and it was easy for worship of the LORD to blend with local gods. A central sanctuary helped keep Israel's worship pure and united the tribes as one people. Scholars who connect Deuteronomy with King Josiah point out that Josiah closed the local shrines and made Jerusalem the only place of sacrifice (2 Kings 23). Others note that Joshua and Samuel worshiped at several places before the temple was built. Either way, Christians believe that Jesus changed the question entirely. He told a Samaritan woman that true worshipers would worship the Father in spirit and truth, not on one particular mountain (John 4:21–24).

Chapter 12 also says something lovely about worship. It's supposed to be joyful. Families are to bring their offerings and tithes to God's

place and eat them there, rejoicing before the LORD with their sons and daughters, servants, and the Levites. Worship is a party, and everyone's invited.

Chapter 13 warns against anyone who tries to lead people away from God, even a prophet who performs signs, or a close friend or family member. Chapter 14 repeats the clean and unclean food laws from Leviticus. Then it adds a remarkable rule about tithes. Every third year, the tithe was to be stored in the towns, so that "the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, as well as the foreigner living among you, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your gates shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied." The tithe wasn't just for worship. It was a food bank.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Vulnerable Four**
>
> Again and again, Deuteronomy mentions four groups: the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow. In the ancient world, these people had no land of their own and no man to protect them, which made them easy targets. Deuteronomy builds protections for them into Israel's tithes, harvests, festivals, and courts. James, in the New Testament, says the same thing: "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." If you want to know whether a society is following God, look at how it treats people with no power.

Chapter 15 describes the year of release. Every seventh year, debts owed by fellow Israelites were to be canceled. And Moses anticipates the obvious problem. What if people refuse to lend when the seventh year is close, because they know they'll never get paid back? He addresses it directly. "If a poor man, one of your brothers, is with you within any of your gates in your land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your poor brother." Then comes an honest admission and a command. "For the poor will never cease out of the

land. Therefore I command you to surely open your hand to your brother, to your needy, and to your poor, in your land."

Jesus quoted the first part of that verse when a woman poured expensive perfume on Him and the disciples complained it should have been sold for the poor. You will always have the poor with you, He said (Mark 14:7). Some people use His words as an excuse not to help, as if poverty is just a fact of life. But in Deuteronomy, it's the opposite. Because there will always be poor people, you must always open your hand.

> **REAL TALK** **Open Hand, Closed Fist**
>
> Deuteronomy 15 talks about the heart and the hand. You can harden your heart and shut your hand, or you can open both. Think about how you react when you see someone in need: a classmate who never has lunch money, someone sleeping outside, a family at church going through a hard time. It's easy to look away, or to assume it's their fault. Deuteronomy says: open your hand. That might mean sharing food, giving some of your money, donating clothes you don't wear, or volunteering at a shelter or food bank. You don't have to fix everything. But you can open your hand to the person in front of you.

The chapter also says that Hebrew servants were to be freed in the seventh year, and not sent away empty-handed. Their masters had to give them generously from their flocks, threshing floors, and winepresses. Why? "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you." Israel's memory of slavery was supposed to make them generous, not harsh.

Chapter 16 lists the three great pilgrim festivals: Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths. At each one, the whole family was to rejoice before God, along with the servants, Levites,

foreigners, orphans, and widows. The chapter closes with a command for judges. They must not twist justice, show favoritism, or take bribes. “You shall follow that which is altogether just, that you may live.” In Hebrew, it’s even stronger: justice, justice you shall pursue.

REAL TALK **Justice at School**

You might not be a judge, but you probably see injustice every day. Somebody gets blamed for something they didn’t do. The popular kids get away with things others don’t. Someone is mocked because of their race, their family’s money, a disability, or the way they talk. Deuteronomy says God cares about justice, and so should His people. You can stand up for someone who’s being treated unfairly, refuse to join in mocking, tell the truth when it matters, and report bullying to a trusted adult. Pursuing justice doesn’t always mean a big protest. Often it means doing the right thing in one hallway, one lunch table, one group chat.

KEY VERSE

For the poor will never cease out of the land. Therefore I command you to surely open your hand to your brother, to your needy, and to your poor, in your land.

Deuteronomy 15:11 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God wanted worship to be joyful, with everyone included?
2. Who are the vulnerable people in your community, like the Levite, foreigner, orphan, and widow?
3. How can you open your hand to someone in need this week?
4. Where have you seen injustice at school or online, and what could you do about it?

TRY THIS *Find a local food bank, shelter, or charity. Volunteer for a few hours, or organize a collection of food or clothes with your friends, family, or youth group.*

CHAPTER 6

A Prophet Like Me

Deuteronomy 17–20

Chapters 17–20 describe the leaders Israel would have in the land: judges, kings, priests, and prophets. They're like a constitution, and they say something important about power. In God's kingdom, nobody is above the law.

Take the king. Israel didn't have one yet, but Moses expected they would want one, like the nations around them. If they did, the king had to be an Israelite chosen by God. He must not build up huge numbers of horses, take many wives, or pile up silver and gold. And here's the most striking rule. "It shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write himself a copy of this law in a book." He was to keep it with him and read it all his life, "that his heart not be lifted up above his brothers." The king was not a god. He was a brother, under the same law as everyone else.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Kings Who Ignored the Rules**
>
> Centuries later, King Solomon did every single thing Deuteronomy 17 warned against. He imported thousands of horses from Egypt, married hundreds of wives, many of whom led him into worshiping other gods, and accumulated so much gold that silver was considered nearly worthless in Jerusalem (1 Kings 10–11). After his death, the kingdom split in two. The books of Kings tell Israel's whole history with Deuteronomy as the measuring stick, judging each king by whether he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD.

REAL TALK **Power and Humility**

Deuteronomy limits power because power is dangerous. It's easy for people with power to think they're better than others, to take what they want, and to ignore the rules. You might have more power than you think: as the oldest sibling, the team captain, the one with the most followers, the one who decides who sits at the lunch table. How are you using it? The king had to read God's law every day so his heart wouldn't be lifted up above his brothers. Jesus said that among His followers, whoever wants to be great must be a servant (Mark 10:43). Real leadership is about serving others, not using them.

Chapter 18 forbids Israel from consulting the occult in any form. "There shall not be found with you anyone who makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who tells fortunes, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer." The list goes on to include casting spells, consulting the dead, and talking with spirits. The Canaanites did these things to try to control the future or the gods. Israel was to listen to God alone.

REAL TALK **Horoscopes and Tarot**

Fortune-telling isn't just ancient history. Horoscopes, tarot cards, Ouija boards, psychics, and manifesting are popular today, sometimes as entertainment, sometimes very seriously. Deuteronomy 18 says God's people shouldn't turn to these things to know the future or find guidance. Partly because they don't work, and partly because some of them can open the door to spiritual darkness. But mostly because they replace trust in God with trust in something else. If you're anxious about the future, bring it to God in prayer, read His word, and talk to wise people who love you. If you've gotten involved in the occult and feel scared, confused, or oppressed, talk to a pastor or trusted Christian adult. You won't be judged. You'll be helped.

Then comes a promise that echoes through the rest of the Bible. Instead of fortune-tellers, God will send prophets. "The LORD your God will raise up to you a prophet from among you, of your

brothers, like me. You shall listen to him." God tells Moses, "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him." Moses also gives a test for false prophets. "When a prophet speaks in the LORD's name, if the thing doesn't follow, nor happen, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken."

Who is this prophet like Moses? In one sense, all the true prophets who followed, like Samuel, Elijah, and Isaiah. But the very last chapter of Deuteronomy says no prophet had yet arisen like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. So Israel kept waiting. When John the Baptist appeared, the religious leaders asked him, are you the Prophet? (John 1:21). After Jesus fed five thousand people with bread in the wilderness, the crowd said, "This is truly the prophet who comes into the world." And Peter, preaching in the temple after Pentecost, said directly that Jesus was the prophet Moses had promised (Acts 3:22–26).

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Jesus and Moses**
>
> The Gospels draw many parallels between Jesus and Moses. Both were threatened as babies by a king who killed children. Both came out of Egypt. Both fasted for forty days. Both went up a mountain and taught God's law; Matthew's Sermon on the Mount echoes Sinai. Both fed God's people with bread in the wilderness. And at the transfiguration, Moses himself appeared with Jesus, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." Those last words, Listen to him, echo Deuteronomy 18:15. Jesus is the prophet like Moses, and more than a prophet: the Son.

Deuteronomy also includes a test for prophets that's still useful. If a prophet's prediction doesn't come true, he wasn't speaking for God, and you don't have to be afraid of him. Chapter 13 adds another test: even if a prophet's sign does come true, if he tells you to follow

other gods, don't listen. In other words, true messages from God match what God has already said, and they lead you toward Him, not away from Him. Today you'll hear plenty of people claiming to speak for God, online, in books, even in churches. Test what they say against Scripture, look at the fruit of their lives, and ask wise Christians you trust. God's voice won't contradict His word.

Chapter 19 sets up the cities of refuge, and warns against moving a neighbor's boundary stone. It also requires at least two or three witnesses to convict anyone of a crime, a principle Jesus and Paul both used (Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1). Chapter 20 gives rules for war. Before battle, priests were to encourage the soldiers not to be afraid. Anyone who had just built a house, planted a vineyard, or gotten engaged could go home. So could anyone who was afraid, so his fear wouldn't spread. Israel had to offer peace to distant cities before attacking them, and they couldn't cut down fruit trees during a siege. The chapter also repeats the command to devote the Canaanite cities to destruction, which we discussed in chapter 4 of this book.

KEY VERSE

The LORD your God will raise up to you a prophet from among you, of your brothers, like me. You shall listen to him.

Deuteronomy 18:15 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God required the king to write and read his own copy of the law?
2. Where do you have power, and how could you use it to serve others?
3. Why do you think God forbade fortune-telling? What do people turn to today to know the future?
4. How is Jesus like Moses, and how is He greater?

TRY THIS *Make a chart comparing Moses and Jesus, using Exodus, Deuteronomy, and the Gospel of Matthew. List at least five similarities and two differences.*

CHAPTER 7

Laws for Everyday Life

Deuteronomy 21–26

Chapters 21–26 are a grab bag of laws. Some will seem strange or harsh to modern readers. Others are surprisingly kind, practical, and ahead of their time. Taken together, they show that God cared about every corner of His people's lives, from the roof of your house to the way you treat a bird's nest.

Start with the roof. "When you build a new house, then you shall make a railing around your roof, so that you don't bring blood on your house if anyone falls from there." In ancient Israel, people used their flat roofs like porches: for drying grain, sleeping on hot nights, and hanging out. A railing kept people from falling off. It's basically an ancient building code. Loving your neighbor means thinking ahead about their safety.

Other laws in these chapters show the same kind of care. If you find your neighbor's lost ox or sheep, you can't pretend you didn't see it; you must return it, or keep it safe until the owner comes looking (22:1–3). If you find a bird's nest, you can take the eggs, but you must let the mother go (22:6–7). A newly married man doesn't have to go to war for a year, so he can stay home and make his wife happy (24:5). You can't take a person's millstone as security for a loan, because that's how they make their daily bread (24:6). If you lend to a poor person and take his cloak as a pledge, you have to

give it back before sunset, so he has something to sleep in (24:12–13). And "you shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the grain." Even the animals got to eat while they worked.

> **REAL TALK** **Love in the Details**
>
> It's easy to think loving your neighbor means big, dramatic acts. Deuteronomy shows it's often about small, practical things: building a railing, returning something lost, paying people on time, not taking advantage of someone who's struggling. What are the railings you could build in your life? Maybe it's driving carefully when you get your license, not leaving your little brother alone with something dangerous, returning the phone you found in the hallway, or checking on a friend who seems down. Love pays attention to details.

Many of these laws protect the vulnerable again. Workers must be paid the same day, because they're poor and are counting on it (24:14–15). Children must not be put to death for their parents' sins, nor parents for their children's (24:16). And the foreigner, orphan, and widow come up again and again. "You shall not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, nor take a widow's clothing in pledge." At harvest, if a farmer forgot a bundle of grain in the field, he had to leave it. "It shall be for the foreigner, for the fatherless, and for the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." The same went for olives left on the trees and grapes left on the vines. And every time, Moses gives the same reason: remember that you were slaves in Egypt.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Hard Laws**
>
> Some laws in these chapters are hard to read. Chapter 21 describes how a stubborn, rebellious son who refused to listen to his parents could be brought to the town elders and executed. Chapter 22 includes laws about marriage and sexual crimes with penalties that seem shocking today. How should Christians read these? Several things help. In their ancient setting, many of

these laws actually limited what could happen; for example, parents couldn't punish a son themselves but had to bring the case to the elders, and Jewish teachers later said the rebellious son law was so tightly restricted that it was never actually carried out. These were civil laws for Israel as a nation, and Christians don't apply their penalties today. And Jesus showed a new way when He welcomed sinners, told the story of the prodigal son, and said, let the one without sin cast the first stone. If any of these passages connects with something painful in your life, like abuse at home, please talk to a trusted adult. In the United States you can call or text the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453.

REAL TALK **Parents and Rebellion**

The law about the rebellious son is hard to read, but it does raise a real question: how should you relate to your parents when you disagree with them? The Bible says to honor your father and mother, which means treating them with respect, even when you think they're wrong. It doesn't mean pretending you never disagree, or doing something that's clearly wrong because they told you to. If you're in constant conflict with your parents, try talking at a calm moment, listening as well as speaking, and asking a trusted adult like a youth leader or counselor to help. And if a parent is ever hurting you, that's not about honor. That's abuse, and you should tell someone right away.

Chapter 26 closes this section with a beautiful ceremony. When Israel was settled in the land, each family was to bring the first fruits of their harvest to God's place and say these words: "My father was a Syrian ready to perish. He went down into Egypt, and lived there, few in number. There he became a great, mighty, and populous nation." The wandering Aramean was probably Jacob. The worshiper would then tell the whole story of slavery and rescue, and finish by setting the basket before God and rejoicing with the Levites and the foreigners. Every gift came with a story, and every story ended in thanks.

KEY VERSE

When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go again to get it. It shall be for the foreigner, for the fatherless, and for the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

Deuteronomy 24:19 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Which of the practical laws in these chapters surprised you most?
2. What are some railings you could build to protect others in your life?
3. Why do you think Moses kept reminding Israel that they had been slaves in Egypt?
4. How do you handle laws in the Bible that seem harsh to you?

TRY THIS *Write your own first-fruits story, like Deuteronomy 26. Tell in a paragraph where you came from, what God has done for you, and what you're thankful for. Read it to someone in your family.*

CHAPTER 8

Choose Life

Deuteronomy 27–30

The second sermon ends with blessings and curses, just like an ancient treaty. In chapter 27, Moses tells Israel that once they cross the Jordan, they must set up large stones covered with plaster, write all the words of the law on them, and build an altar on Mount Ebal. Then half the tribes would stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, and half on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses, with the Levites calling out and all the people answering, Amen.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim**
>
> These two mountains face each other across a narrow valley near the city of Shechem, in the center of the land. Their slopes form a natural amphitheater, where a voice can carry surprisingly far. Joshua carried out Moses' instructions there (Joshua 8:30–35). In the 1980s, an archaeologist found a large stone structure on Mount Ebal that he identified as an ancient altar, possibly the one Joshua built, though other archaeologists disagree. The site is still debated. Later, the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, which is why the Samaritan woman told Jesus, our fathers worshiped on this mountain (John 4:20).

Chapter 28 is one of the longest chapters in Deuteronomy. It begins with blessings. "It shall happen, if you shall listen diligently to the LORD your God's voice, to observe to do all his commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you

high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you, and overtake you." Blessed in the city, blessed in the field. Blessed coming in and going out. Good rain, big harvests, healthy children, peace, and victory.

Then come the curses, and they go on for a long time. "But it shall come to pass, if you will not listen to the LORD your God's voice, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come on you and overtake you." Disease, drought, defeat, siege, famine, and finally exile, scattered among the nations. It's terrifying to read, and it was meant to be. Sadly, the history books that follow describe much of it coming true, when Assyria and Babylon conquered Israel and Judah centuries later.

> **REAL TALK** **Does Obedience Mean an Easy Life?**
>
> Deuteronomy 28 can sound like a deal: obey God and everything goes great; disobey and everything falls apart. But be careful. These blessings and curses were part of God's covenant with Israel as a nation in the land. The rest of the Bible shows that good people often suffer, like Job, Jeremiah, Paul, and above all Jesus, and that bad people sometimes prosper for a while (Psalm 73). Some preachers today teach that if you have enough faith, God will make you healthy and rich. That's not what Deuteronomy, or Jesus, teaches. What's true is that God's ways lead to life, and turning from Him leads to brokenness. And for Christians, the deepest blessing isn't stuff or success. It's knowing God, and being known by Him.

Notice how the curses end. Not with destruction, but with Israel scattered among the nations, longing for home. It's not God's last word. Chapter 30 will show that even after the worst has happened, God's mercy will still be waiting. That's the pattern of the whole Bible. God's judgment is real, but His mercy is deeper. And Paul says that Christ took the curse of the law on Himself when He hung

on a cross (Galatians 3:13), so that the blessing promised to Abraham could come to everyone who believes. The curses of Deuteronomy 28 fell on Him, so the blessings could fall on us.

Chapter 29 begins Moses' third sermon, a call to renew the covenant. Moses admits that the people still don't fully understand. Then he says something wise and humble. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." There are things about God we'll never understand. But what He has revealed is enough to live by.

> **REAL TALK** **Unanswered Questions**
>
> You'll probably have questions about God and the Bible that you can't answer, maybe some from this very book. Why did God command what He did in Deuteronomy 7? Why does He allow suffering? What about people who never heard of Jesus? Deuteronomy 29:29 doesn't tell you to stop asking. It tells you that God knows things you don't, and that you can still trust Him with them. Keep asking, keep studying, and keep talking to wise people. But don't let what you don't know cancel out what you do. God has told us enough to know Him, to love Him, and to follow Him.

Chapter 30 is where the whole book has been heading. Moses looks into the future and sees Israel scattered in exile because of their sin. But even there, if they return to God with all their hearts, He will bring them back. And then comes a promise that goes deeper than anything else in the book. "The LORD your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your offspring, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." In other words, God Himself will give His people new hearts, so they can do the very thing the Shema commands. The prophets picked up this promise (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26), and Christians believe it's fulfilled through the Holy Spirit.

Then Moses says the commandment isn't out of reach. "For this commandment which I command you today is not too hard for you or too distant." It's not up in heaven or across the sea. "But the word is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." Paul quotes this passage in Romans 10 and applies it to the gospel. "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart;" that is, the word of faith which we preach. You don't have to climb to heaven or search the world to find God. In Jesus, He has come near.

Notice something about how Moses talks here. He doesn't say the choice is easy. He doesn't pretend the people will always get it right; he's just predicted they won't. But he still says the choice is real, and that it matters. You might feel like your choices don't matter much, or that you've already made too many bad ones for anything to change. Deuteronomy 30 says otherwise. Even for people who had been scattered because of their sin, the way back was open. If they returned to God with all their hearts, He would restore them. That's still true. It's never too late to choose life.

Finally, Moses puts the choice in front of them. "Behold, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and evil." Then he calls witnesses, just like an ancient treaty did, but instead of calling on the gods, he calls on creation itself. "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, that you may live, you and your descendants, to love the LORD your God, to obey his voice, and to cling to him; for he is your life."

REAL TALK **Choosing Life**

Choose life. It's one of the most powerful sentences in the Bible. In Deuteronomy, choosing life means choosing God, loving Him, listening to

> Him, and holding on to Him, because He is your life. Every day, in big and small ways, you're choosing between what leads to life and what leads to death: the friends you pick, what you put into your body and mind, how you treat people, whether you turn toward God or away from Him. If you're going through a dark time, and life itself feels hard to choose, please tell someone. Talk to a parent, counselor, pastor, or trusted adult, or call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time. Your life matters, to God and to the people around you. Choose life, and let others help you hold on to it.

KEY VERSE

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, that you may live, you and your descendants, to love the LORD your God, to obey his voice, and to cling to him; for he is your life, and the length of your days, that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Deuteronomy 30:19–20 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Deuteronomy spends so much time on the curses?
2. How would you respond to someone who says that if you have enough faith, God will make you rich and healthy?
3. What questions about God do you have that you can't answer? How do you live with them?
4. What does choosing life look like for you this week?

TRY THIS *Draw two columns, Life and Death. List choices you face regularly, and put each one where you think it leads. Then pick one change you want to make, and ask a friend to help you stick with it.*

CHAPTER 9

Moses' Last Day

Deuteronomy 31–34

The last four chapters of Deuteronomy are Moses' goodbye. He's 120 years old, and he knows his time is up. He calls Joshua in front of all Israel and gives him a charge that every new leader should hear. "Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid or scared of them, for the LORD your God himself is who goes with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you." Then he says it again, just to Joshua. "The LORD himself is who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you. Don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged."

> **REAL TALK** **Be Strong and Courageous**
>
> Joshua was about to take over from the greatest leader in Israel's history and lead a nation into war. No wonder he needed to hear, don't be afraid. You might be facing something that feels too big for you too: a new school, a move, a family change, a tryout, a performance, a hard conversation. Notice that Moses didn't tell Joshua to be brave because he was strong enough. He told him to be brave because God was going with him. Hebrews quotes the same promise for Christians today: "I will in no way leave you, neither will I in any way forsake you." Courage isn't the absence of fear. It's trusting that God is with you in it. And if your anxiety feels overwhelming, it's wise to talk with a parent, counselor, or doctor.

Moses writes down the law and gives it to the priests, telling them to read it aloud to the whole nation every seven years, at the Feast of

Booths, so that everyone, men, women, children, and foreigners, can hear it and learn. The book was to be kept beside the ark of the covenant as a witness.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Book Found Under Josiah**

Second Kings 22 tells a dramatic story. About 622 BC, during repairs on the temple in Jerusalem, the high priest made a discovery. "I have found the book of the law in the LORD's house." When it was read to King Josiah, he tore his clothes in grief, because Judah hadn't been following it. He led a huge reform, destroying idols, closing local shrines, and celebrating a Passover like none in centuries. Many scholars believe that the book was Deuteronomy, or part of it, because Josiah's reforms match its laws so closely. Some think it had been written recently, in Moses' name, to call Judah back to God. Others think it was an ancient book, written by or from Moses, that had been neglected or hidden during the reign of wicked kings like Manasseh, and was rediscovered. Some take a middle view, that Mosaic teaching was preserved and edited over time. Christians hold different views on this, and agree that the story shows the power of God's word to change a nation when it's finally read and obeyed.

Then God tells Moses something heartbreaking. After Moses dies, the people will turn away to other gods, and disaster will come. So God gives Moses a song to teach them, so that when trouble comes, the song will testify to what God said. Chapter 32 is that song, one of the oldest poems in the Bible. It calls God the Rock. "The Rock: his work is perfect, for all his ways are just. A God of faithfulness who does no wrong, just and right is he." It describes how God found Israel in the desert. "He surrounded him. He cared for him. He kept him as the apple of his eye." It tells of Israel's coming rebellion and God's judgment, and ends with God having compassion on His people and making atonement for His land.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Apple of His Eye**

When Deuteronomy 32:10 says God kept Israel as the apple of His eye, the Hebrew phrase literally means the little man of the eye, the pupil, where you can see your own tiny reflection when you look closely into someone else's eye. The pupil is the part of the body people protect most instinctively. You blink before anything can touch it. So to be the apple of God's eye means you're precious to Him, and He protects you with instinctive, fierce love. The phrase shows up again in Psalm 17:8 and Zechariah 2:8, and it's still used in English today.

Think about what Moses did with his final days. He didn't spend them on himself. He spent them teaching, warning, encouraging, writing, and singing, all for a generation he wouldn't get to lead into the land. He trained Joshua to take his place. He made sure the law would be read aloud for generations to come. That's a picture of what it means to finish well. You don't have to be 120 to think about it. What kind of legacy do you want to leave in your family, your school, your friendships? It starts with how you live now.

Chapter 33 records Moses' blessing on the tribes, like Jacob's blessing on his sons at the end of Genesis. And it ends with words that have comforted people for three thousand years. "The eternal God is your dwelling place. Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Then comes the final chapter. "Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is opposite Jericho." God shows him the whole land: Gilead to the north, the hills of the tribes, the Mediterranean in the distance, the Jordan valley, and the city of palm trees, Jericho, below him. And God says, "This is the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."

"So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the LORD's word." And then a remarkable detail. "He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth Peor, but no man knows where his tomb is to this day." God Himself buried Moses. Maybe the grave was hidden so it wouldn't become a shrine. Whatever the reason, God took care of His servant to the very end. "Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died. His eye was not dim, nor his strength gone." Israel mourned him for thirty days.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who Wrote About Moses' Death?**

If Moses wrote Deuteronomy, who wrote the chapter about his death? Jewish tradition gives two answers: either Joshua wrote it, or Moses wrote it prophetically, with tears. Many Christians think Joshua or a later editor added the final chapter; the phrase to this day suggests some time had passed. Scholars who believe the Torah was assembled later see this as one sign of that process. Whatever the answer, the chapter is a fitting end to the life of the greatest prophet in Israel's history.

REAL TALK **Not Getting to See It**

Moses spent forty years leading people toward a land he never entered. That's a hard ending. Maybe you've lost someone who didn't get to see something they hoped for: a grandparent who won't see you graduate, a parent who died young, a friend whose life ended too soon. Grief over what someone missed can be one of the heaviest kinds. It's okay to feel that. Talk to someone you trust about it, and if the sadness feels too much, call or text 988. Remember too that Moses' story didn't end on Mount Nebo. Fourteen centuries later, he stood on a mountain in the promised land with Jesus (Matthew 17:3). God keeps His promises, even beyond death.

Deuteronomy 34 also tells us that Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him, and the people listened to him. The handoff worked. One generation passed the

faith to the next. That's the story of the whole book: an old leader pouring everything he knew into a young generation, so they could carry it forward. Someone did that for you, if you've learned about God at all. Someday, you'll get to do it for someone else.

The book closes with an epitaph. "Since then, there has not arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face." It's a tribute, but it's also a door left open. Israel was still waiting for the prophet Moses had promised, the one God would raise up, the one to whom they must listen. The Torah ends not with arrival, but with hope. And the New Testament says that hope has a name.

KEY VERSE

Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid or scared of them, for the LORD your God himself is who goes with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you.

Deuteronomy 31:6 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What's something you're facing that requires courage? How does it help to know God goes with you?
2. Why do you think the story of the book found under Josiah matters, whatever view you take of it?
3. What does it mean to you to be the apple of God's eye?
4. How do you feel about Moses not getting to enter the land? How does Matthew 17 change the story?

TRY THIS *Write a letter to someone younger than you, like a sibling, cousin, or kid at church, telling them what you've learned about God so far. Think of it as your own Deuteronomy.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Deuteronomy ends with Moses dead on a mountain, the promised land in view, and a closing note that no prophet since has been like him. It also ends with a warning. Moses predicts that Israel will turn away and suffer the curses of the covenant. The people needed something more than good laws. They needed new hearts. And Moses himself promised that one day God would "circumcise your heart" (Deuteronomy 30:6), and that God would raise up another prophet like him.

Jewish readers treasure Deuteronomy, and observant Jews still pray the Shema every morning and evening. The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, believed that the prophet like Moses had come. Peter preached that Jesus was the one Moses spoke of (Acts 3:22). Jesus answered the devil with Deuteronomy, called the Shema the greatest commandment, and stood with Moses on a mountain in the promised land, where a voice from the cloud said, "Listen to him." And Paul says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us."

Here's what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

Deuteronomy says God chose His people simply because He loved them. He made you on purpose, and He loves you too.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We haven't loved Him with all our hearts.

Moses knew Israel would turn away. The Bible says all of us have turned from God in our own ways.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. Deuteronomy sets out blessing and curse. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus took the curse.

Jesus, the prophet like Moses, lived the perfect life of love for God, then died on the cross, taking the curse we deserved. And He rose again.

> *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.* **Galatians 3:13 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Israel was chosen by grace, not because they were great. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Choose life.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, You are the one true God, and I haven't loved You with all my heart. I've sinned against You, and I can't fix that myself. Thank You for loving me first. Thank You that Jesus took the curse I deserved on the cross, and that You raised Him from the dead. I choose life. I'm turning to You. Forgive me and give me a new heart. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want to follow Him as my King. Help me love You with all my heart, soul, and strength, and love my neighbor too. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Deuteronomy 6, 8, and 30, then read Matthew 4 and 22, and watch how Jesus lived out Deuteronomy.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Talk about it. Moses told parents to talk about God's words at home, on the road, at bedtime, and in the morning. Find someone to talk with about God every day this week.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. Deuteronomy was written so that every new generation would hear God's words for themselves. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Deuteronomy is right, the choice in front of you is life or death, and the God who loves you is urging you to choose life.

The eternal God is your dwelling place. Underneath are the everlasting arms.

Deuteronomy 33:27 (WEB)