LIFE IN THE PROMISED LAND

In this second quarter of 2020, we will read from Deuteronomy through 1 Samuel.

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As we celebrate the death and resurrection of King David’s greater Son, Jesus Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, may we more clearly see God’s great love, mercy, and patience for us; and praise Him for His deliverance.

In Jesus Christ,

[Signature]

Wayne Palmer
Make an “appointment with Jesus.” Ink it into your daily calendar. You will need about twenty minutes.

Forestall interruptions. Turn off the phone. Close your office door. Do whatever you need to do to get alone with your Lord.

Make the time pleasant for yourself. I read first thing in the morning over coffee. Choose a time and place you will be comfortable, relaxed, and focused on the Word of God.

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- **God’s promises** ...blue
- **Ways to love God & others** . .orange
- **Giving** ........ .pink
- **Jesus’ return** . . .purple
- **The Church** . . .green
- **Sin & Satan** .... .gray

- **Old Testament promises of the Savior to come**
- **What God says about my heart**

### April 2020

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- Giving ........ pink
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## Old Testament promises of the Savior to come

- What God says about my heart

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Old Testament promises of the Savior to come
What God says about my heart

June 2020

1  1 Samuel 1
2  1 Samuel 2
3  1 Samuel 3
4  1 Samuel 4
5  1 Samuel 5–6
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8  1 Samuel 8
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18 1 Samuel 18–19
19 1 Samuel 20–21
20/21 1 Samuel 22
22 1 Samuel 23
23 1 Samuel 24
24 1 Samuel 25
25 1 Samuel 26
26 1 Samuel 27–28
27/28 1 Samuel 29
29 1 Samuel 30
30 1 Samuel 31
O Lord GOD,
You have only begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand.
For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as Yours?

Deuteronomy 3:24
Get the Big Picture

Today, you will begin to read the first of three sermons that together make up the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses preached these on the Plain of Moab as he prepared to turn his leadership responsibilities over to Joshua. In sermon 1 (1:1–4:40), Moses recalls the nation’s history from its roots to the present. As you read, look for his themes—faith and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. But above all, look for evidence of the Lord’s faithfulness in the face of His people’s faithlessness.

Sharpen the Focus

Suppose you loaded up a moving van in Bangor, Maine, and headed for Walla Walla, Washington. You might expect the journey to take about ten unhurried days or so.

But suppose your arrival was delayed? delayed by, say, forty years? That scenario parallels Israel’s history quite closely (Deuteronomy 1:2–3).

“What took you so long?” concerned relatives or angry employers might ask. And we might ask the same question of ancient Israel. Today’s reading begins to answer that question. Moses paints an answer so classic, so typical of human beings, that we might consider his sermon a paint-by-number project.

If we’re honest, we recognize in Israel’s unbelief our own. Failure to trust. Failure to obey. The story of Israel’s life. And of ours. Still, in all of forty years, the faithful Lord did not abandon His children in the desert. He did not shake the dust from His sandals and walk away. Instead, He continued to guide, forgive, strengthen, and protect His people. The story of Israel’s life, and of ours. Thank God!

Zoom In

You will read about Israel’s victory over kings Og and Sihon (Numbers 21:32–35) again and again in the first part of the Old Testament and in the Psalms. These early victories gave Israel confidence as they approached the Promised Land. Think today about some “early victories” the Lord has given you. How can God’s faithfulness to you then give you confidence for today’s battles?
Get the Big Picture

Moses continues to review Israel’s wilderness wanderings. As he does so, he makes it clear that the Lord will give Israel the land He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but only that land. Some of the territory surrounding that land will belong to others: the hill country of Seir to Esau’s descendants (2:4) and the area of Moab and Ammon to Lot’s descendants (2:9, 19). As you read again today, note the Lord’s constant faithfulness toward His people and His promises.

Sharpen the Focus

Look at your hands. Take a moment right now and really do it. Take a long look. What work do they do? Maybe your hands type on computer keys or grip power tools or diaper babies or direct choirs or swing a baseball bat or write traffic tickets. Most of us use our hands to make a living. But we also use our hands to make a life. Maybe your hands paint the railing on the front stairs of your house or insert pictures into a scrapbook or bake chocolate chip cookies or pick apples. Maybe your hands write a lonely relative a letter or give a child a high five in recognition of a job well done or dry someone’s tears.

Moses told Israel, “The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands” (2:7). Israelite hands did much the same work as your hands do—they prepared food, repaired dwellings, washed clothes, comforted friends and family, and worshiped the Lord.

Before you end your time with your Savior today, fold your hands. Thank Him for stretching out His hands on the cross to receive the nails—for you. Thank Him that because He did, the Father can bless all the work of your hands today. Then think of one way you will use your hands to bless someone who needs the touch of the Savior’s love right now.

Zoom In

A verse to remember:

*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.*

Ecclesiastes 9:10
### Moses’ Three Sermons

**Israel**—camped east of the Jordan River across from Jericho  
**Moses**—120 years old and ready to enter the “promised land” of heaven

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Get the Big Picture

Moses continues his first sermon, rehearsing Israel’s history, including the victory over King Og of Bashan and Moses’ agreement to give land east of the Jordan River to Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. The chapter concludes with the Lord’s appointment of Joshua as Moses’ successor.

Sharpen the Focus

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

The Lord’s Prayer

In one way or another, each of these petitions of the Lord’s Prayer asks that our Lord would preserve and extend His kingdom. We ask the following:

- That we would be enabled to live, speak, and teach in such a way that those around us would see our Father’s majesty, grace, power, purity, and holiness; and that seeing it, many would fall on their knees in worship to Him.
- That the Lord would bring many into His family: His kingdom, the Church; and that He would bring His family safely home to Himself when our mission—His mission—here on earth ends.
- That we would receive His power to do His will as gladly and willingly as the angels in heaven; and especially that He would use us to bring the message of the salvation Christ won on the cross to those who do not yet know or love Him.

Our warfare—the spiritual battle to which our Lord calls us—differs from the wars ancient Israel fought. In essence, though, we wrestle with the same ultimate enemy: Satan. We face no less danger. And like Israel before us, we know the outcome. Victory already belongs to us because of Christ’s cross.

Zoom In

Where do you see your Father’s kingdom embattled today? Talk to Him about that battle now. Claim the powerful promises of Deuteronomy 3:22 and Matthew 16:18. Then praise God for the victory that is His—and yours—in Jesus.
Get the Big Picture

Moses closes the first of his three sermons in Deuteronomy by summarizing the covenant the Lord had made with Israel. As you read, look for the evidence Moses cites to prove the uniqueness of our God and His worthiness of our praise.

Sharpen the Focus

“Has such a great thing as this ever happened?” Moses asked Israel, “Has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation . . . which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt?” (4:34).

Moses’ audience would have answered, “No. Never. Nothing so great as the exodus has ever happened.”

But if Moses were to preach this sermon today, his questions would draw a different response. He would hear from our lips words like these: “The exodus was a great thing. God’s rescue of His people from Egypt and all the wonders He performed were great things. But we’ve seen something even greater. We’ve seen the Son of God—who is God Himself—die for us and rise again from death! And we’ve received new life from Him by His grace through faith in what He has done!”

God’s Old Testament people saw the shadow of God’s mercy; we see the Son in all His blazing glory. God’s Old Testament people had a foretaste of God’s love; we feast on a magnificent banquet of His grace and truth.

No other group of people has ever been so highly blessed as we—God’s New Testament children. As He was for Israel, so He is—in full—for us:

A merciful God . . . [who] will not leave [us] or destroy [us] or forget the covenant with [our] fathers that He swore to them. Deuteronomy 4:31

Zoom In

Deuteronomy 4:25–31 accurately foretells Israel’s falling away from the Lord and the exile He would impose as a result. These words also foretell God’s mercy to His repentant people. All this about a thousand years before it happened!
Get the Big Picture

With today’s reading, we begin Moses’ second (and longest) sermon in Deuteronomy. Having rehearsed the past, Moses moves to Israel’s present. He will again rehearse the Lord’s unfailing commitment to the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob over four hundred years before.

Sharpen the Focus

No doubt you’ve heard this expression: “Everything I love is either illegal, immoral, or fattening.” Maybe you’ve said it yourself in jest. And maybe, sometimes, you’ve found yourself wondering if it actually might be true—especially when your eyes and nose meet up with a freshly baked fudge brownie, when you leave home late but make up time with a heavy foot, or when you feel a little stir as your married co-worker puts a hand on your shoulder!

Since Eden, human beings have harbored the suspicion that God is holding out on us, that He takes pleasure in tantalizing us with good things and then denying us those things.

But check out 5:29 and 5:33 once again. Here, we see God’s heart; He wants to bless His people! He wants us to have good things. But as the Ten Commandments make so clear, He doesn’t want our good things to have us. And so, He fences off our greed (5:19, 21). He commands us to balance work, leisure, and worship (5:12–15). He tells us how to have the happiest families (5:16, 18). He prohibits us from hurting one another (5:17, 20). And most of all, He commands us to do the things that maintain a healthy relationship with Him (5:6–12).

Whether we believe it or not, “the way of the treacherous is their ruin” (Proverbs 13:15). The Lord who rescued Israel from Egypt, the Lord who bled and died for our transgressions on the cross—this same Lord offers us the power we need minute by minute to have “such a mind as this” that we will fear Him and keep all His commandments (5:29).

Zoom In

Where do you need your Lord’s strength to hear and to do God’s good and gracious will today? Ask Him for it!
Get the Big Picture

The family is the primary building block of society. And so the Lord, through Moses, gives His people specific directions for sharing His covenant and its promises with their children. As you read, think about the children and young people in whose lives you are a person of influence.

Sharpen the Focus

A careful reading of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John shows that the Lord Jesus knew a great many verses from the Book of Deuteronomy. Compare Deuteronomy 6:5 with Matthew 22:37, for instance. When do you suppose Jesus learned these words? Probably at the feet of Mary and Joseph as they obeyed the commands of Deuteronomy 6:6–9, 20–25.

Jesus’ parents taught Him the rest of God’s Law as well—the Law He was even then keeping in our place. The Law He would continue to keep throughout His life for us.

Several recent studies have shown the power parents have over the spiritual lives of their children. A parent who shares with his or her child a conversation from the heart about “what Jesus means to me” has more impact on whether that young person continues in the Christian faith than if the parent were to send that child to church every week for a year! Although, of course, Christian parents will want to both witness to and worship with their children.

What encouragement our Lord gives us to witness to the children we love!

Zoom In

“When I witness to my children, my nieces, my grandsons, what will I say?” If you’re asking that, study Deuteronomy 6:21–25—God’s witnessing outline for parents in ancient Israel. Start with God’s goodness, His rescue—at Mount Calvary. We were slaves to sin, but now we’re God’s own sons and daughters in Jesus. Don’t neglect God’s Law (6:24–25), but be sure the Gospel predominates!
Get the Big Picture

Moses’ second sermon continues. He’s repeated the covenant (chapter 5) and commanded the people of Israel to teach it to their children (chapter 6). Now he moves to God’s command that Israel conquer Canaan and utterly destroy the gross idolatry practiced by the Canaanites.

Sharpen the Focus

A friend of mine tells me that when he was a teenager, his father set very few rules. The two enjoyed a balanced, healthy relationship—a remarkable relationship, really. Whenever the son would leave on a date or to attend a ball game or concert, his dad would hug him and say, “Remember, you’re my son.” Those words, my friend says, echoed in his ears and kept him from giving in to temptation more than a few times.

That’s what our Lord says to us in today’s Bible reading too. “Remember, you’re My sons and daughters. Remember, I love you. Remember, you’re My treasure; My special, chosen, holy people” (see 7:6–8).

God’s treasure. God’s jewel. How can you be sure of that? Because the Lord says so, and because He has backed His word of promise by giving up the crown jewel of His kingdom, His one and only Son, to ransom you from the enemies that held you hostage—sin and Satan, hell and death.

Think for a few moments about the fact that you are precious to your Lord, His unique treasure. How does remembering that change your purpose for living? your attitude toward others? your approach to problems and temptations?

Zoom In

Count the nations God promises to defeat for Israel (Deuteronomy 7:1). You will encounter this number many times as you read the Scriptures. It signifies completeness. God wanted to give the people of Israel total victory over their enemies, just as He wants to complete in you the victory over sin He won at the cross.
Get the Big Picture

Perils or prosperity—each brings its own spiritual dangers. As you read today, study especially what Moses says about each. Recall what you know about Israel’s wilderness wanderings and the people’s reactions to their circumstances. Then ask yourself how peril and prosperity each affect your spiritual health.

Sharpen the Focus

Do troubles drive you to the Savior, and remind you of His death? Or do they tend to drive a wedge between you and Him?

Do blessings drive you to your Savior? Or when things go well do you tend to wander, to forget the One who died for you?

As you consider your own “wilderness wanderings”—caused by both the trials and triumphs of life—thank Him for His faithfulness and forgiveness in Jesus during your times of unfaithfulness and forgetfulness. You may find the words of this hymn helpful as you ask Him to help you grow in trusting Him:

The God of Abr’ham praise,  
Whose all-sufficient grace  
Shall guide me all my pilgrim days  
In all my ways.  
He deigns to call me friend;  
He calls Himself my God.  
And He shall save me to the end  
Through Jesus’ blood.  
Thomas Olivers

Zoom In

One of the main purposes for studying Scripture is to get to know God better and better. The Savior who died for you on a cruel wooden cross is the same Lord who brought Israel out and led them through the wilderness to do them good (8:14–16). What evidence have you seen in your own life that the Lord still does these things for His children—you and me?
Get the Big Picture

As Moses’ second sermon continues, so does his theme: what the Lord expects of Israel in the now. Instead of mere outward compliance to His will, He wants inward commitment to it.

Sharpen the Focus

“Circumcise . . . your heart,” the Lord tells His people through Moses (10:16). What radical surgery! What in the world could this expression mean?

Think for a moment about a New Testament passage with a similar word picture. The crowd who gathered around the apostle Peter on Pentecost heard the Word of God accusing them of grave sin—they had killed their Messiah, the Christ! Convicted of their responsibility, the people “were cut to the heart” and said, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37; emphasis added).

Ancient Israel and the Jews of Jesus’ day often fell for Satan’s lie that following the rules, obeying the outward regulations of God’s Law (like the law of circumcision), was enough. What else could God expect?

The Lord could and did expect much more—circumcision of the heart. A heart broken before God in repentance. A heart humbly dependent on Him for right standing before the throne of judgment.

What about us? Are we ever satisfied with mere outward obedience? with mindlessly following the rules? Are we content to go through the motions of church attendance, Bible reading, a respectable lifestyle? Even if we are, our Lord is not.

No earthly doctor can cut our hearts to reveal our sins, our need. Only our Savior-God can. No earthly doctor can heal the wounds those sins have caused. Only Christ and His cross can. His resurrection assured us of His healing power!

Zoom In

Rejoice that our resurrected Lord promises His life-changing, spirit-renewing power to you.
Get the Big Picture

Moses reminds the people of times they have seen the Lord act in love and power on their behalf. Now, as they continue to obey Him, He will bless them with victory. They will settle in Canaan to live in peace. In response, they are to worship their Lord in joy.

Sharpen the Focus

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.
Philippians 4:4

The apostle Paul echoes the command of Moses (Deuteronomy 12:7, 12, 18). “Rejoice!” both say. If Friday was payday and the weekend promises plenty of warm spring sunshine, that may not be too hard to do. On the other hand, if the kids are sick or the car needs $900 worth of repairs or someone you love is very ill, rejoicing could be the last thing on your agenda.

Paul’s wording gives us a key clue: the little phrase “in the Lord.” These words transform a command into a possibility. They hold out to us our potential as forgiven children of God. Our Lord does not say to us, “I know you’ve had a bad week, but try hard to rejoice in Me anyway.”

No. Rather Paul reminds us that we are “in the Lord.” In our Baptism, He has joined us to Himself, to His righteousness, to His resurrected life. We are in Him, and nothing—nothing!—can separate us from Him. This relationship forms the foundation on which we stand and from which we can continue to grow more and more fully into a lifestyle marked by love, joy, peace, patience, and all the other fruit the Spirit produces in the Father’s children (Galatians 5:22–23).

You may be laughing today—go ahead and laugh, and rejoice in the Lord. You may be weeping today—let your Savior hold you as you cry, and rejoice in the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit to comfort you with His presence and the promise that you are His—“in the Lord”—now and forever.

Zoom In

Read Romans 8:31–39 slowly as you think about your present circumstances. Ask the Lord to make His awesome love more of a reality to you as you meditate.
Get the Big Picture

Today’s reading reveals the Lord’s anger at attempted murder—spiritual murder. As you read, think about why the Lord prescribed the death penalty for this crime under Old Testament law.

Sharpen the Focus

False prophets hardly ever wear a sign around their necks saying, “False prophet—beware!” Wolves come into the flock disguised as sheep, Jesus warns (Matthew 7:15). They may even perform miracles; their forecasts about the future may materialize, Moses adds (Deuteronomy 13:1–2).

Jesus echoes Moses’ warnings:

*False christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.* Matthew 24:24

So how are we to know the truth? Not by following our hearts—our feelings can deceive us. Not by following our heads—our minds have been warped by sin and can lead us astray. Not by following the opinions or ideas of other people—our friends and even members of our own family may be blind and confused while not even knowing it.

We follow Christ. We use His Word as our compass. We align our thoughts with His truth. How important for us, then, to know the Scriptures well! To be steeped in them. To let God’s Word have its way in us as it transforms our mind and our feelings so thoroughly that we know the mind and will of the Father. In this way, the Lord’s forgiven children escape the spiritual and intellectual traps Satan has set for them.

Zoom In

When we meditate on God’s Word—think about it, roll it over and over in our minds, and talk to God about it—the Holy Spirit deposits His truth in our hearts. It’s like a spiritual bank account from which He can draw to help us in times of decision, temptation, or challenge to our faith. Read about that concept in Proverbs 2:1–9.
Get the Big Picture

Continuing his sermon on what the Lord requires of Israel as the nation enters the Promised Land, Moses repeats and expands several of the laws we've encountered before. What new information do you find?

Sharpen the Focus

Tucked away in a quiet corner of these little-known chapters lies one of the most beautiful pictures in all the Bible. It speaks of the believer’s relationship with Christ (15:12–17).

Every seventh year, Hebrew servants were to go free, their debts paid and duty done. But suppose a servant didn’t want to go! Suppose he found himself thinking, “My life right now is better than it’s ever been. I feel like part of the family. Living here is surely the best thing that has ever happened to me. I don’t want freedom. I love my master! My service is not a burden but a blessing.” What then?

Deuteronomy 15:16–17 tells the story, and the process poses a question or two for us:

• Do you see your service for Christ as a burden or a blessing?
• Have you said, in love, to your Master, “Pierce my ear”?
• Deep down in your heart, do you sometimes regret that request?

We all serve halfheartedly at times. Usually, it happens when we forget the poverty, the spiritual emptiness, from which Christ rescued us. We forget the crushing sin our Savior lifted from our shoulders and carried to His cross.

If you find yourself burdened by or even resentful of your service for the Lord Jesus, resist the urge to grumble.

Take time to remember your former slavery to Satan and to the Law. Take time to remember the freedom from guilt and sin that is now yours in Jesus. Let your Savior’s love shine from His cross into your heart and melt the hardness there.

Zoom In

Read Revelation 22:1–5, especially verse 5, and note the “work” you will get to do in heaven as Christ’s servant.
Get the Big Picture

As Moses continues to prepare Israel for life in Canaan, he reminds the people of the three observances the Lord requires each year. He reviews the authority and responsibilities of the judges and priests in judging legal questions. And he provides for the day when Israel will ask for an earthly king.

Sharpen the Focus

Pomp

Power

Wealth

So often, people push for leadership positions because of the perks that come along with that leadership. We’ve probably all known someone who wanted authority while skirting the responsibility that went along with it. Maybe you’ve even picked up the pieces after such a person.

God made His will for Israel’s kings crystal clear: only one thing mattered—knowing the Lord and obeying Him (17:18–19). Not wealth. Not the web of political alliances that could be had with multiple marriages to foreign princesses. Not power.

Knowing God. Obeying God. That’s where God-pleasing leadership begins. That’s where authority links up with responsibility and a servant’s heart is born. The kind of heart that led King Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and all the way to Calvary on Good Friday.

Think of those you lead today—in your family, at your church, on the job, in the community. Ask the Holy Spirit to point out any self-seeking motives that keep you from servant-leadership. Then, repentant and relying on your Lord’s forgiveness in Jesus, move forward in His power toward more Christlike service as you lead.

Zoom In

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Matthew 20:28
Get the Big Picture

Israel is to avoid false teachers and the false gods they proclaim, and the nation is to administer justice with an even hand. Our Lord Himself and also the apostle Peter quoted verses from the chapters you will read today. See if you can spot the “quotable quotes” as you read.

Sharpen the Focus

Because the work our Lord Jesus would do for us was so big, so thorough, the Scriptures couldn't describe it all in one name or one set of word pictures. Many Old Testament titles and pictures filled in the total portrait, detail by detail.

In 18:15–19, we read another in a series of Old Testament “job descriptions” for the coming Messiah. Moses calls God's promised Savior a prophet. In fact, the Messiah would serve God's people as prophet in many of the same ways the prophet Moses himself did.

Most often, we think of prophets as foretelling future events. Moses certainly did that. (See, for instance, Deuteronomy 30:1–10.) And so did Jesus. (See, for instance, Matthew 24:4–31.)

But a prophet’s main task involved declaring God’s Word, God’s will, with power to God’s people. Moses did that—today’s reading is one example. And so did Jesus. In fact, Jesus was Himself the Word of God, the Word made flesh as the apostle John wrote (John 1:1, 14). “You must listen to Him,” Moses says (Deuteronomy 18:15).

How good of a listener are you? Do you hear and obey? Or do you hear and forget God’s Law? Do you hear the Gospel? Do you rely on it wholeheartedly? Or do you beat on yourself for your failures and insist on trying to earn more of God’s love with good behaviors?

Talk to Jesus, your great Prophet, before you close your Bible today. Ask for His grace, for open ears, and for a willing, obedient heart.

Zoom In


April 16 Thursday

Read Deuteronomy 18–19.

If time is short, focus on 18:15–22.

Psalm 119:17–32

Proverbs 13:11

Deuteronomy 18:1–22

Priests and Prophets

Deuteronomy 19:1–14

Three Cities of Refuge

Deuteronomy 19:15–21

Two or Three Witnesses
Get the Big Picture

Moses continues his second sermon as he now turns to specific situations likely to occur after Israel settles in Canaan. You will recognize some of the issues: Who can be drafted for military service? What do we do with habitual criminals? What if there’s a serious crime but no suspect? As you read, try to take off your twenty-first-century glasses. Remember, the Lord gave these laws to people of another time, another culture.

Nevertheless, the laws reveal much about our God—His justice and His mercy. Ask yourself, “What benefits did the Lord intend to give His people through these civil laws?”

Sharpen the Focus

Think about the last time you felt truly afraid. The doctor’s verdict: surgery. The police officer’s voice: “We’re holding your son.” The siren’s wail: tornado. The news-caster’s announcement: “A massive explosion leveled several buildings downtown today.” How did you get the courage you needed to walk through your own time of fear?

Each time Israel went to war, the people were to pause and remember the truth—the truth about the Lord’s love and faithfulness to them. Reread the words of encouragement the priests were to speak (20:1–4). As you do, think about the “enemies” you battle today, the fears you face.

Then remind yourself that since God Himself is for you, since He freely gave His Son into death in your place, nothing and no one can stand against you. In Jesus, you are safe. You can face life (or death) confident in His love.

Zoom In

Since victory came from the Lord and not from the puny plans or strength of human beings, Israel could count on victory. The person whose heart wasn’t in it could leave the battlefield without shame (20:5–7). Such people could concentrate on the more important priorities of home and family. And Israel’s army was protected from the corrosive influence of the halfhearted or fearful.
Get the Big Picture

Today’s reading includes regulations about everything from personal property to personal hygiene. One thread runs through both chapters: the people of Israel belong to the Lord. They are His holy people, set apart from the nations to serve Him and to display His goodness to the world.

Sharpen the Focus

“It’s not my problem!” Someone leaves a wallet in the shopping cart. A stranger walks away from his car in the parking lot, forgetting to turn off his headlights. An unknown neighbor’s dog wanders onto your property, hot and in distress. You find a pair of glasses or a cell phone on the plane or train seat next to you. What do you do?

Ignoring needs like these hardly seems like a major offense. We lead hectic lives. Someone may find a silly reason to sue us if we get involved. But despite the self-justifying excuses we might offer, Deuteronomy 22:1–2 sets a God-given principle for His people. When a neighbor’s property is at risk, we are not to look the other way.

The idea of doing random acts of kindness has become quite trendy in our culture, including within secular circles. The premise is simple: do kind things at random throughout your day, and you’ll find your life is happier. This shouldn’t have been a new idea to God’s people. Part of becoming like our Savior involves demonstrating Christlike kindness.

When we hold our own hearts and lives up next to our Savior’s heart and life, we see how far short we fall. We recall the times we think and act thoughtlessly and selfishly. We see how much we need His kindness and mercy. And we see how richly He offers it! Rejoice in that today, child of God, and draw from it the strength you need to grow in His kindness toward others.

Zoom In

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy. Titus 3:4–5
Get the Big Picture

This part of Moses’ sermon continues the recitation of miscellaneous laws that regulated specific situations God’s people would encounter in Canaan. As you read, note the Lord’s concern for the dignity of persons, His compassion for the poor, and His commitment to justice for the innocent.

Sharpen the Focus

Over and over again, we read the formula found in 24:22. “Remember who you were,” the Lord says to His people. “Remember where you’ve come from,” He commands. In saying this, God is not trying to be manipulative. He’s not trying to shame His people into actions they don’t really want to take.

Instead, He wants to help them find joy and motivation for the obedience that brings peace and fulfillment. He wants to help them grow up to spiritual maturity. We see New Testament writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, offering us the same joy and motivation Moses held out to ancient Israel. Read Ephesians 2:1–10, and jot down notes about the “before” and “after” picture Paul paints:

Who I was:

Where I came from:

Who I am now:

Zoom In

In what specific area of your Christian walk do you need Christ’s joy and motivation to keep on growing?

How do the facts you just remembered comfort you and refresh you for that process of growth?
Get the Big Picture

Moses concludes his second sermon by highlighting the Lord’s goodness and reminding Israel of the covenant He has made with His people.

Sharpen the Focus

What’s your opinion of the Church? Maybe you grew up in a congregation that supported and encouraged you. Maybe you view your present congregation as a kind of second family, your spiritual family. On the other hand, maybe you’ve seen too many scandals, too much politics, too much hypocrisy.

Some Christians get so down on their spiritual leaders or on their brothers and sisters in the faith that they refuse to have any more to do with God’s family. They drop out entirely. Others attend worship services, but end their association with Christ’s Church there. Believers caught in this distancing trap act more like third or fourth cousins than like the brothers and sisters that they, in Christ, are.

No doubt about it, Christ’s Church on earth has her warts. But—and there’s no doubt about this either—Jesus loves the Church! Note 26:19. These words describe the high view the Lord has of His sons and daughters, His people: “He will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations.” In Jesus, the heavenly Father has set us apart for such a privilege.

While we live and work in the Church on earth, we live and work with sinners. If we forget that fact or try to ignore it, we set ourselves up to be hurt. Still, while we live and work in the Church on earth, we live and work with God’s saints too. If we ignore or doubt that fact, we will miss out on opportunities to be blessed and to bless others in the family of our Father.

Zoom In

As you worship with your church family this weekend, take a careful look around at God’s people, His covenant people. Thank Him for them. And pray that He will continue to work His will in you and in them, even as He has redeemed you all in Christ the crucified.
Get the Big Picture

This chapter begins Moses’ third and final sermon. In it, he arranges for a permanent “billboard” display of the covenant to be set up in Canaan (27:1–8). And he arranges an “audiovisual” demonstration as well (27:9–26). As you read, note especially the Lord’s concern for the spiritual well-being of His people and His compassion for the poor and weak.

Sharpen the Focus

The old covenant—the one given first at Sinai and ratified by Israel just before they entered Canaan—was a good and glorious thing. The Lord intended it to bless His people, but the people did not receive the fullness of God’s blessings through it. Not because it was flawed, but because they were. Neither they nor we could “keep the whole commandment” (27:1). The Law written on stone tablets or on stone billboards could only bring sinful human beings under a curse.

Speaking for God centuries later, the prophet Ezekiel offered a solution—a new and better covenant:

*I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules.*

Ezekiel 36:26–27

If you belong to Christ, that new heart is yours today. Your “heart of stone” has been replaced with a “heart of flesh.” And now, God “works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). In what specific way will you use that power today?

Zoom In

It’s not by accident that God commanded Israel to erect an altar for sacrifice next to the stones on which the Law appeared. The altar gave God’s people hope. Even though their disobedience to the Law brought down God’s curse, their God would send a Savior. That Savior would sacrifice Himself for them (and for us) on the altar of the cross to deliver sinners from the curse of the Law.
Get the Big Picture

Imagine the scene: The priests standing between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal with the ark of the covenant; the people of six tribes of Israel on Gerizim, the people of the other six tribes on Ebal. As the priests pronounce the blessings and curses, the people reply, “Amen!” In this way, the covenant was to be ratified. (Joshua 8:32–35 tells us that Israel later did what God through Moses had commanded here.)

Sharpen the Focus

Deuteronomy 28:66 describes the curse that would fall on those who disobeyed the Lord’s covenant:

*Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life.*

Commenting on these words, the reformer Martin Luther wrote, “I have never seen a passage which describes more clearly the misery of a guilty conscience, in words or thoughts so fitting or appropriate. For this is just the way in which a [person] is affected who knows God is offended, i.e., who is harassed with the consciousness of sin.”

Maybe you’ve known this curse, the misery of a guilty conscience, firsthand. Maybe you’ve felt the fear that chills human hearts when we realize how greatly our sins offend the holy God. Maybe that curse sends shivers up your spine today. If so, thank God that on the cross Jesus suffered the punishment you deserve. Then read the promise of Galatians 3:13–14. Know for sure that in Christ you are set free from the Law’s curse. You have now inherited all of God’s magnificent blessings and, best of all, forgiveness and life in Jesus!

Zoom In

Deuteronomy 28:2 and Psalm 23:6 both picture the blessings of God running after His children and chasing them down. How eager your Lord is to give you every one of His good gifts!
Get the Big Picture

Once again, Moses reminds the entire nation of who they are and of what the Lord has done for them. Then he invites them to enter fully, personally, and wholeheartedly into the covenant God wants to give them (29:12). But if they refuse—individually or as a group—the curse will most certainly fall.

Sharpen the Focus

The Christian life is a process of continual repentance and renewal. From our Lord’s side, the covenant is never broken. His promises stand forever sure. Yet every day, we break faith with our promise to love and obey Him. Still, our faithlessness need never be fatal. His word of love reaches out to us in our unfaithfulness:

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Joel 2:13

The new covenant began on Calvary. It was ratified at Jesus’ open tomb. It was sealed for you personally at your Baptism. No sin is so great, no number of sins so many, as to cancel that covenant. We can always go home. We can always return to our Father’s waiting arms. Don’t hesitate. Don’t put it off. Remember:

In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. Isaiah 30:15

Zoom In

Deuteronomy 29:5 provides for us one glimpse into the thoroughness of the Lord’s tender care for His people during their wilderness wanderings. To what evidence of His attention to detail can you point in your own life?
Get the Big Picture

How well the Lord knows human hearts! Despite the spiritual growth He had brought about in the hearts of His people, times of unbelief and sin lay ahead. Future generations would wander from the covenant and from the Covenant-Maker, their Lord. As you read today, look for the message of Law (judgment on sin) and the message of Gospel (grace for the repentant sinner).

Sharpen the Focus

Some people think of life as a cherry pie. They slice off one wedge and reserve it for their family. They slice off another wedge for their job. Hobbies, entertainment, chores, perhaps school or a special project—all get a slice. And of course, the Lord gets the biggest slice.

As life’s pressures mount, the slices get thinner. Tempers fray. The joy all but disappears. Deuteronomy 30:20 cues us in to the true nature of the problem:

He [the LORD] is your life and length of days.

Paul picks up the same thought in almost the same words in Colossians 3:4:

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Christ is our life. Not a part of it. Not a slice—no matter how big a slice. He is our life. In Him, we have eternal life, an eternal relationship with the Father. His life in us transforms our life here on earth into something significant, meaningful, beautiful, joyful.

We who know Christ as our life have a choice. We can relegate Him to a corner of our consciousness. Or we can ask Him to keep us mindful of His presence, His strength, His direction each minute of every day. We can rely on His Spirit to help us see the people around us with His eyes. We can live our life as an adventure—an adventure of receiving God’s grace and letting that grace flow through us into the lives of others. He is your strength. Let Him live through you today!

Zoom In

I have all the time I need to do the things the Lord has in mind for me to do today.
**Get the Big Picture**

Moses concludes his third sermon by inaugurating Joshua as Israel’s new leader. After Moses’ death, the people are to review the covenant regularly and teach it to their children. Nevertheless, Moses warns them, this covenant will fail. Not because the Lord will break it but because human beings cannot fulfill it from their side. We are, by nature, rebels (31:27).

**Sharpen the Focus**

It seems futile, foolish even. Why set up an elaborate system of laws, of rules, of directives that can’t be obeyed, followed, practiced? Why did the Lord bother with the old covenant anyway? Even Moses the lawgiver saw that Israel was made up of lawbreakers.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Lord intended His Law to serve His old covenant people in much the same way it serves us, His new covenant people.

God intended His Law to show the people of Israel their utter powerlessness to do and be what He wanted them to do and be. He intended it to show them their sin and their need for a Savior.

Has God’s Law done that for you as you’ve read the Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy) these past four months? Have you stood in Israel’s sandals and seen your plight? Do you realize that your problem isn’t your circumstances? that it isn’t the people around you? Do you see your own personal need for that “heart transplant” Ezekiel wrote about (36:26–27)?

If so, know that the Lord’s mercy in Jesus is here for you now. Remember the new covenant He put into effect at Calvary. His body was given there—for you! His blood was spilled there—for you! Rest in His unchanging, forgiving love.

**Zoom In**

Paul clearly presents the differences between the covenant God made with Abraham and the covenant He made at Sinai in Galatians 3:16–29. Set aside several minutes to study that passage this week. Let God use it to encourage your heart!
Get the Big Picture

Have you ever gotten the words or the tune of a song caught in your mind? When that happens, often against our will, we listen to the lyrics over and over. In today’s reading, Moses teaches Israel a song. Years later, centuries later even, the people would find their minds playing and replaying these lyrics. Caught in their sins and in sin’s consequences, they would remember the Lord, His Law, and His invitation to return to Him.

Sharpen the Focus

Like many songs today, Moses’ song is chock-full of powerful word pictures. Take 32:10 for example. Imagine yourself exhausted, dirty, hot, dressed in rags, and marooned in a wilderness. That’s the picture of our plight Moses paints here. Our sins had made us outcasts. We wandered alone and helpless.

But look at the rest of the picture! The Lord found us! He came after His runaway children. He shielded us. He guarded us as carefully as we guard the pupil of our eyes.

- Having read the first five Old Testament books, you can see specific ways the Lord did those things for Abraham and for ancient Israel.
- Having seen God’s love in Jesus, you can see how our Savior accomplished these things for us in an even more powerful way through His cross and open tomb.
- Having come to faith in Him by His grace, you can see how He continues to shield you from sin and Satan, hell and eternal death. You know how He cares for your needs and how faithfully He stands guard over your life.

Why not find a hymnal or put on a CD and sing a song of praise to Him for His faithful mercy right now? Maybe your praises will even replay in your mind and heart all day long!

Zoom In

The prophet Ezekiel later picked up Moses’ picture in Deuteronomy 32:10 and expanded on it to write a very touching story of God’s grace to His sinful people. You can read it in Ezekiel 16:1–14.
Get the Big Picture

In his last official act, Moses blesses the people whom he has led for the past forty years. As you read, zero in on the details of the Lord’s goodness Moses mentions.

Sharpen the Focus

Suppose you found yourself in big trouble. Falsely accused of a crime and jailed, for instance. Or your home burned to the ground with all your earthly possessions inside. Or standing at the bedside of someone you dearly love who is dying.

None of us wants to face situations like those alone. Suppose you phoned your closest friend, a friend who lives across the continent or even across the ocean. Suppose that friend said, “I’ll be on the next jet. I’m headed for the airport right now.” It’s hard to imagine more comforting words, isn’t it? To have a friend who cares—who cares enough to come.

That’s the truth behind 33:26. Our God “rides through the heavens to your help.” When we His children cry out to Him, nothing can keep Him from racing to our side. To be with us. To support us. To shelter and to strengthen us.

Note, too, what Moses calls God’s people—Jeshurun (33:5, 26). It means “the upright one.” In the Messiah who was to come, Israel was righteous. In Jesus, the Savior who has come, you and I are upright, righteous, too. We’re “all right” with God. We have right-standing with Him because in Jesus “[our] guilt is taken away, and [our] sin atoned for” (Isaiah 6:7).

Since that is true, we can call our Friend to help us in any need. He delights in caring for us and in riding on the heavens to help us.

Zoom In

Sinai, Seir, and Paran (33:2) are all associated with Israel’s wilderness experience. See Exodus 19:11; Numbers 10:12; Deuteronomy 2:1.
Get the Picture

How would you like to be remembered after Jesus calls you home? As a hard worker? a trusted friend? a faithful and dedicated parent, son or daughter, grandparent, aunt or uncle? In today’s Bible reading, we will review the death and burial of Moses and reflect on God’s gifts to His people through the life and ministry of Moses.

Sharpen the Focus

The final chapter of Deuteronomy provides an obituary for Moses, the great man of God. It says simply:

And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. (34:10–12)

As great as Moses was, his accomplishments were not his own. Moses served in God’s kingdom (humbly) with the power God Himself provided.

The New Testament writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews pictures the people of God as God’s house. Moses, the text says, was a faithful servant in God’s house. But Jesus is faithful as a Son over God’s house. Note the distinction. Moses serves, but Jesus is over the people of God.

Because Jesus came to save us by faith, we, too, are members of the house of God through the working of the Holy Spirit. By the work of the same Spirit, we, like Moses, can serve faithfully in God’s house. It’s great to serve in God’s house because Jesus, the Son, is over us all.

Zoom In

What better epitaph could be written about any of God’s people than the simple words, “a servant of God”? Whom among God’s people can you serve today?
DEUTERONOMY QUIZ

1. What did Moses do on the top of Pisgah (Deuteronomy 3:23–27)?
   a. encouraged the Israelite army as it engaged the Amorites in battle
   b. received the Law of God on two tablets of stone
   c. viewed the Promised Land
d. buried Aaron

2. Which of the following is not listed among the detestable practices forbidden by God in Deuteronomy 18:9–13?
   a. child sacrifice
   b. divination and sorcery
   c. casting spells or consulting with mediums
d. worshiping at pagan temples

3. The cities of refuge were established in Israel as protection for (Deuteronomy 19:3–4)
   a. those not belonging to one of the twelve tribes of Israel.
   b. someone who had killed a neighbor unintentionally.
   c. those receiving no inheritance.
d. persons escaping from slavery.

4. Moses’ song ends with a reminder of the greatness of Israel’s blessings. Moses identifies Israel as a people (Deuteronomy 33:29)
   a. mighty in battle.
   b. rich in wealth and heritage.
c. saved by the Lord.
d. righteous before God.

5. Deuteronomy 34:10 tells us that since the days of Israel’s early history as a nation there has been no prophet like Moses whom
   a. the people followed willingly and obediently.
b. Israel’s enemies feared.
c. the Lord knew face-to-face.
d. God’s people honored and obeyed.

ANSWERS

1. c—Because of his act of disobedience at Meribah, God denied Moses’ request to enter the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 3:27). But God in His grace and mercy did allow Moses a panoramic view of the land from a high elevation.

2. d—Worshiping at pagan temples is understood rather than specifically mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:9–13. Nevertheless, the person responsible could seek sanctuary in any of these cities (Deuteronomy 19).

3. b—Until the circumstances surrounding the unintentional death are determined, the person responsible could seek sanctuary in these cities (Deuteronomy 19).

4. c—The greatest blessing to the nation of Israel is God’s saving grace (Deuteronomy 33:29).

5. c—Moses’ relationship with God was personal and intimate (see also Numbers 12:8). Moses knew God face-to-face (see also Numbers 12:8). His relationship with God was personal and intimate (see also Numbers 12:8).