

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week One: We Have Stayed Long Enough In The Desert (Deuteronomy 1:1-18)

Forty years after the Exodus from Egypt, Moses addresses the Israelites. He recounts for them the long journey behind them, reminds them of all God has done for them, and tells them of what lies ahead. His words leave both them and with us many spiritual thoughts to consider. For above all, they show us God's desire for us just to walk with him.

These Are The Words Moses Spoke (Deuteronomy 1:1-18)

Moses begins by reminding the Israelites of the time many years before, when God had told them to take possession of the land he had prepared for them, and he will proceed to speak all the words God had given him. As we read what follows, we will see that God meant to give them much more than a mere piece of physical land.

It could have taken eleven days to go by the Mount Seir road to take the journey Israel had undertaken (1:1-4). Yet the reason for going from Horeb, where God first spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:1-4) to Kadesh Barnea, on the edge of Canaan where God told them to go in (Numbers 13:26), was about more than giving them a physical land.

The real purpose was to bring their hearts nearer to God, which involved a much longer path. So as Moses tells them all that the Lord had commanded him concerning them, we shall see more of God's heart and of his deeper purpose.

At that time, the Lord had said several things to them that also carry meaning to us (1:5-8). God told the Israelites that it was time for them to leave the desert, because they had been there long enough. There was no home for them there, and nothing that could sustain them. So too our Heavenly Father has called us to leave this world's barren desert. We have been here long enough to see its emptiness, to see the false hopes it gives us, the false promises it makes to us.

He calls us to leave this world behind in our hearts; to abandon our false dreams of earthly things, to leave a place that can never be a true home for our hearts and spirits. *Do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do. (1 Peter 4:2-3)*

So he called the Israelites to break camp and seek a heavenly city, as he had called Abraham many years earlier (Hebrews 11:8-10). He has given us a new land too. Not just a piece of this world's dust, but a new spiritual land, a true home for our spirits and our hearts. He has called us to his side, to fulfill the promise he also made to Abraham, *I am your shield, your very great reward. (Genesis 15:1)* His call to us is to accept this new land as a gift of his unfailing love, a gift of his presence we can never earn nor deserve.

At that time, Moses was called to meet many needs in the community (1:9-18). He had learned the need to work together with others on the problems and burdens amongst the Israelites. So too, we are called to help one another with our most important need to know our God, to remind each other to stay close to God, to put our hope only in his grace and in his unfailing love.

Just as Moses exhorted the Israelites not to show partiality, so too in the New Covenant we are called to show no favoritism (James 2:1-4), because God shows no favoritism. Judgment has always belonged to God alone (Isaiah 11:3-4), because only God judges by the heart, not by external appearances. *With righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of this earth. (Isaiah 11:4)*

Our Spiritual Walk - An Overview Of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy ties together spiritual teaching, history, events, and the Levitical laws, to help the Israelites understand the call he had for them. Each of these has parallels in our own spiritual walk on God's path of truth. Even in Moses' time, God's call for them was much more than merely moving them into a physical land, which could never have been their true resting place.

God has always carried us, whether or not we knew it or admitted it (Deuteronomy 1-4, see also Isaiah 46:3-5). Has anything so great as this ever happened? (Deuteronomy 4:32-33) Not just the plagues in Egypt, not just the crossing of the sea, but rather God speaking to mere humans his words of assurance, God seeking to draw us nearer to him.

The heart of the covenant, then and now, revolved around seeking God for his own sake (Deuteronomy 5:1-6:9). His well-known words to love the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 6:4-6) were also the call of Jesus. God never wants obedience just for obedience's sake, and he never punishes for punishment's sake.

So Moses repeatedly reminds the assembly to remember our God and his words (Deuteronomy 6:10-13:18). Just as the Israelites, we are walking with God into his good spiritual land (Deuteronomy 8:6-14), where we should remember that we have everything by his grace. All God asks of us is to walk with him and love him for his sake (Deuteronomy 10:12-14). In the old covenant, the people were called to go to the place God chose to put his Name (Deuteronomy 12:4-7). Now God has put his Name on our hearts.

God's covenant with us is a living covenant (Deuteronomy 14-25, Isaiah 49:8). Even some of the more obscure commands have spiritual parallels too. Some of them are clear; as the Israelites were called to forgive each other's debts (Deuteronomy 15:1-2), we are called to forgive one another (Matthew 6:12). Likewise, God has a new Passover (Deuteronomy 16:1-3) for us too, since he has rescued us from the Egypt of this world.

Then the Israelites would renew the covenant (Deuteronomy 26-30). God told them, *What I am commanding . . . is not too difficult (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)* because his words would be near them. So he called them, and us, to choose the path of life (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

There is no one like God (Deuteronomy 31-34). He found us in the barren desert, in this world of futility, and carries us aloft. (Deuteronomy 32:10-11). And he rode across the heavens to come to us, because we could never have done anything to come nearer (Deuteronomy 33:26-27).

He is the Lord, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:4-8). True righteousness can only come from above, for God rains it down. Even in our reluctance to acknowledge his grace as the only basis for our salvation, our God will still honor us with his call just to let him into our hearts.

- Mark Garner, March 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Two: God Carries Us Every Step (Deuteronomy 1:1-4)

Moses now describes for the assembly the travels they have taken. Through these, they have seen God's hand carrying them every step of the way, and they have seen God's call for them to listen to his voice, to walk in his ways instead of following the inclinations of their own fleshy minds. These experiences will help us too, to see more clearly God's calling for us.

God Is Living As Good and (Deuteronomy 1:1-4)

Years previously, God had given the Israelites a look at the new land he had prepared for them, to assure them that it was a good land. Even though they continued to fear, he kept reassuring them that he would carry them all of the way, because they would only be able to enter by his grace. So too our God carries us all the way into our new home with him.

Before taking the Israelites into Canaan, God gave them glimpses of the new land (1:19-25). Twelve spies went in, and came back with a report and with samples of the land's fruit, to show them what it was like. Even then, they also had their 'spies' to give them a look at the true spiritual land that God was even then preparing, to help them look ahead to the Messiah, who would bring full redemption for the world (Luke 24:44-47).

Even then, Moses already carried a part of the good news of grace, as did the Psalms and the many prophets who would follow. These Scriptures still speak their truths to us, and now we have even more witnesses to tell us about the good spiritual land we have now entered, to explain its truths and help us understand what it really holds for us (Revelation 1:3, 21:1-5)

They had seen many times how God carries them (1:26-33). When they heard the report of the spies, though, their hearts melted with fear. God knew that they would have to face formidable foes into this new land, so he would use their fear so that they would let him carry them each step of the way by his own strength, not by theirs (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

Our spiritual foes are stronger and taller than we are, too (Ephesians 6:11-13). We too must face today's Anakites who want to persuade us to prove our worth to God, instead of trusting in his grace. We must face today's Amorites who trip us up with this world's faulty logic and empty philosophy, and who lure us astray with the false glitter of this world's pleasures.

Our only hope to 'fight' these foes is by wearing God's spiritual armor, and let him carry us into his presence. Our own efforts, knowledge, strength, nor will power can help us against these spiritual foes. Only God's grace, his chosen cornerstone, can carry us, as it carried the Israelites when they let him (Psalm 118:22-24). Just as he always showed them the way ahead of them, he also sent Jesus to show us the way to his side, to know God through his Son (John 14:5-7).

They Did Not Listen To God's Voice (Deuteronomy 1:4-5)

Because the Israelites did not listen to God's voice, they turned back and returned to the dreadful desert, and God declared that they would remain there for years to come. Moreover, when they tried to prove themselves to God afterwards, his presence was not with them. All the same, God remained faithful to his promises, for he would take a new generation into the new land.

When they insisted on not going into Canaan, God told them to turn back to the desert (1:34-40). Thus he cautions us not to harden our hearts to his grace (Psalm 95:6-8, see also Hebrews 4:1-11). The only way for them to enter Canaan would be by God's grace, and the only way we can come into God's presence will be by God's grace.

Sadly, even Moses couldn't enter because of the way they had provoked him (Psalm 106:22-23, see also Deuteronomy 3:21-29). Yet even then, Moses already had greater treasure than living in a tract of dust (see Deuteronomy 34). And God would bring glory to his name by fulfilling his promise to their children (Isaiah 29:23-24).

They decided to follow their own voices, and convinced themselves they could go in of their own initiative (1:41-46). They were trying to win God's favor, by proving their false courage to him. God cautions us also not to try to prove our own righteousness to him (Romans 9:30-33). Anything we can ever do is only by God's grace, and the only righteousness is his own.

When they decided to attack the Amorites, God was not with them, and they were defeated badly. If we pursue our own goals, if we try to prove ourselves to God, the external results may even impress worldly eyes, but trying to earn God's favor will just lead us even farther from him.

God's Grace Overflows (Deuteronomy 1:1-11)

As the Israelites journeyed through the desert, God had them walk past the other lands he had given to Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites. These lands had been given to them, and so Israel would not possess any of them. This extended tour would impress on them several spiritual truths that reveal some deeper truths to us as well.

He had them take a long look at their relatives, the descendants of Esau (2:1-7). He cautioned them not to provoke them, and to pay them in silver for what the Edomites gave them. God had given Esau this land long ago, as an overflowing of his grace to Abraham's family, just as God's abundant grace to Joseph, who like Abraham walked with God, even once overflowed to Potiphar and the Egyptian jailer (Genesis 39:5-6, 39:20-23). His grace even overflowed to the hard-hearted generation, tenderly caring for them all those years in the desert (Deut. 2:7, 8:4)

God's spiritual blessings overflow to us today (Psalm 65:10-12, Luke 6:38). We have no need to envy or compete with those with earthly wealth and fame, because God is our portion, who pours out his spiritual bounty on those who seek him for who he is. We have no reason to compete for these imperishable blessings; for unlike the things of this world, there is more than enough for all.

Along the desert road of Moab they would see more and learn more (2:8-23). As they walked past Moab and the Ammonites, they would see another outpouring of grace to Abraham's family, to the descendants of Lot. Meanwhile, an entire generation of 'fighting men' had perished, these men who had hardened their hearts, who had resisted God's voice.

God calls us to lay down our burdens, let God carry us each step (Isaiah 46). This world's idols, its false hopes of justifying ourselves by our accomplishments and our talents, the false allure of its empty things, these are burdens that separate us from God. With whom can we compare our God? He asks us just for our hearts, and he will gladly carry us all the way to his side.

- Mark Garner, March 2015

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Notes For Week Three: Israel & The Amorites - A Deeper Look (Deuteronomy 2:24-3:20)

Just before crossing the Jordan, the Israelites had to face two armies of Amorites. They defeated them, and God gave them their land. Yet the aftermath raises some difficult questions, which we need to answer, in view of what we know about our God. It surely gave God no pleasure to see these entire kingdoms and their children die. So we need to look beneath the surface.

A First Look At The Fate Of The Amorites (Deuteronomy 2:24-3:11)

A look on the surface does give us some helpful thoughts to understand these events a little better. Both of these armies provoked attacks they could have avoided. They also put false hope in their physical strength and their possessions. We do also see a glimmer of comfort, yet beyond these initial thoughts there are far deeper lessons that we will look at in turn.

Sihon was the first of the Amorite kings to fall (2:24-37). Moses sent them a peace offer, promising even to pay them for food and water; yet it was rejected by the obstinate king, who chose to fight (as contrasted with Jesus' parable in Luke 14:31-33). Yet this could not in itself explain why his nation was completely destroyed (or 'devoted irrevocably' to God).

God's ways can seem unfair. Two of Aaron's sons died merely from offering an inappropriate sacrifice (Leviticus 10:1-3) and Uzzah died after trying to do something helpful (1 Chronicles 13:9-10). Many innocent firstborn died in Egypt because of Pharaoh's hardness. These can in part be explained by the unclean coming too close to God's presence and his holiness. But our compassionate God understands the distress these can still cause those who seek him in truth.

Og's kingdom falls next (3:1-11). He too sought an unnecessary fight with Israel, and he put his confidence in his strong soldiers and his sixty cities that were heavily fortified. His earthly weapons could not deliver him from God's hand (Psalm 33:16-22). Yet this in itself led to the deaths of all the women and children in his kingdom too, none of whom had taken up the sword.

In Joshua, though the Canaanites' hearts were 'melting with fear' (Joshua 2:8-14), they still chose to fight. Yet Rahab saw hope, not death, in God (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). She wanted to make the living God of Israel her God, and to make their people her people. She saw deliverance not only from physical death; she also saw God coming near, to save her from spiritual death.

God's grace overflowed to her parents and sisters and brothers likewise being saved. God desires mercy, not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). Moreover, God made a special gesture to her, by including her and her descendants in his Messiah's family (Matthew 1:5-6), showing his desire even then to share his light of life with all nations. God takes no pleasure in anyone's death, no matter how wicked (Ezekiel 18:23, 18:31-32); he always prefers to give them a chance to turn to him.

God Reconciled The World To Himself (Colossians 1:19-22 & 2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

Yet it was a saddening necessity for God to offer the Canaanites only one opportunity to turn to him, or at least to flee from the Israelites. This helps us understand what God already intended to do, to reconcile all things on earth and heaven to himself by the blood of Jesus. Only by the perfect sacrifice of his Lamb could he offer an equal chance to everyone to seek him by grace.

Where would we have been? We would either have had to carry in our minds the haunting memory of striking down children, or else we and our friends would have fallen to the sword. Just as God took no pleasure in all the animal sacrifices, though they were a necessity, his heart was always looking ahead to proclaiming his covenant of peace to all nations.

So he made peace through his only Son's lifeblood (Colossians 1:19-22). This is why God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus, so that by one perfect sacrifice he could reconcile the world to himself (Hebrews 10:11-14). This one sacrifice did away with all the daily sacrifices that had only limited effects, for Jesus' cross opened up God's fountain of grace for all.

Because Jesus' grace had reconciled this fallen world with his Father, God could now let the 'weeds' keep growing (Matthew 13:24-30). This pleases God because he can give them every opportunity to come to him. It shows us the depths of two of our God's most important qualities: his inherent holiness and his deep desire to be close with the hearts his hands have made.

God's ministry of reconciliation shows the profound effects of Jesus' cross, which human minds can barely grasp, even when God opens our spiritual eyes (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). There is much more to see when we no longer look at Jesus with worldly eyes, and it is a call to regard no one from a worldly point of view, but rather seek God's wisdom from above (James 3:17-18).

Because of Jesus' ministry of reconciliation, God no longer has to count people's sins against them, just as Jesus brought spiritual justice to all nations, and treated the struggling and doubting with compassion and grace (Isaiah 42:1-4).

The Land East Of The Jordan (Deuteronomy 3:12-20)

After the defeats of Sihon and Og, God gave the land of these Amorites east of the Jordan to the Israelites. Yet this spoke somber truths to them, for they entered with blood on their hands. We can only enter our new spiritual land with blood on our hands too - the blood of Jesus. By the blessing of Jesus' ministry of reconciliation, he shed all the blood we all needed.

Even when they settled in Canaan, this was just one more step until the Lord would bring true rest (3:12-20), which could only come about by Jesus' reconciliation. So there is no more need for swords, as Jesus declared on the way to his cross (Matthew 26:47-54, Luke 22:49-51). We no longer respond to violence with violence, nor to hatred with hatred (Matthew 5:38-48).

We do have Jesus' blood on our hands, the outpouring of his precious lifeblood (Acts 2:22-24). We are called to carry the memory of his awful suffering as we reflect on the spiritual blessings it brought us. The more we contemplate the cross, we can see depths upon depths of God's compassion and his holiness, of our weakness and need, and God's desire to dwell among us. He has now given us our true rest, to live in his presence, to rest from pursuing our own works.

Isaiah's prophecy has now been fulfilled, the king who was to come and reign in righteousness (Isaiah 32:1-2, 32:12-20). Jesus turned mourning for the fallen cities and the hearts overgrown with thorns, into quietness and peace for the hearts and spirits of those who recognize his voice. He poured out his Spirit on us from on high, to bring us into a peaceful dwelling place, to give us peace with our God, a true peace that hail and storms cannot damage.

- Mark Garner, March 2015

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Notes For Week Four: The Lord Our God Is Near Us (Deuteronomy 1:1-4:1)

Moses reminds the assembly of the teachings God has given them to live by when they enter the land he has prepared for them. These decrees and laws were not intended to make them prosper in this world, but rather to keep God's presence near them. So Moses' words about them will also speak to us, about the new spiritual land he has called us to.

Follow God's Words So That You May Live (Deuteronomy 1:1-8)

After Moses explains that he will not cross the Jordan with them, he reminds them of the words God had spoken through him. God's spiritual decrees were not written to help them be prosperous in this world's eyes, but rather were given to give them a much deeper gift. His laws were righteous laws, because they would bring them what was right and true: God being near.

Though Moses would not cross the Jordan, he would see the land from Pisgah (3:21-29). His journey had never been just for the sake of a land on this earth, because he had now completed the journey home. Deuteronomy 34 will tell us of his final hours with God; for God himself had always been his life, his beginning and his end.

So Moses encourages the Israelites to follow God's spiritual decrees, so they may live in the new land (4:1-8). Like them, we should not add our own words nor to subtract any of God's words (Revelation 22:18-19). Each of God's words is full of life and light (Psalm 119:129-131). Our words of human logic or philosophy would only distract us with our own reasoning and desires.

God reminds us today as he did with Israel, to be a light to those around us. No earthly nation could find the wisdom that only our God can give us (Job 28:12-13). God's wisdom is based on what we really need, the mercy we need, meaning and purpose for our lives, our need for him. If others see anything in us, let it be clear to them that they are seeing God's own glory, not ours.

God was giving them the same gift of his closeness that he has always wanted to give us (Revelation 21:3-5). Who else could ever be so blessed as to have God near them, to talk to and to learn from. This is the true life, spiritually flourishing life our God wants to give us (Psalm 92:12-14). It is a gift our minds can barely grasp, yet he eagerly offers us the gift of himself.

You Heard His Voice But Saw No Form (Deuteronomy 4:1-14)

God often reminds us that his nature is spiritual, that we cannot describe him in this world's words nor terms. Yet he has always spoken to us, he lets us hear his voice, and he has given us his words of truth to live by. He understands that it can seem difficult to seek him without any physical images to look to, yet this is an essential aspect of seeking our God for who he is.

So he reminds us not to forget these things (4:9-14). That is, do not let them fade from our hearts. It is easy to remember them as sayings or pat answers, but he is calling us to remain close to him so that he can give these things roots in our hearts.

God speaks to us, as he did to Israel, out of fire and dark clouds (Psalm 97:1-7). For his words remind us of his holiness, and they remind us of the deep truths, the clouds of spiritual mystery,

that our minds could never grasp. He shows us much grace and patience in letting us hear his voice, and gently opening our spiritual eyes so that we may understand.

We can neither see nor describe his form, for the only images we have of him are images made of words describing him as Spirit. No human words, no earthly colors, no mathematical shapes could ever describe his true form, so he appears to us surrounded by thick clouds. Yet his Words have been written for us on stone too (Psalm 119:89-96). His words are eternal truths, for us to keep in our hearts. They are boundless truths with meaning well beyond the words themselves.

So he quietly reminds us to watch ourselves carefully, not to be led astray to worship this world's idols of self and false promise (4:15-20). God is not made of this world's things, neither flesh nor its perishable materials (John 6:63). So we cannot find God if we look at the things our physical eyes can see; we need to keep looking above, to worship him in spirit and truth.

So our God also refines us in the iron-smelting furnace as he did with the Israelites in Egypt (Malachi 3:1-3). God shows us each day our limitations, our need for him to carry us by his grace each day and with each step we take, and reminding us too that our true new land can be seen nowhere on this earth, for it is our heavenly city with God himself.

You Will Find Him if You Seek Him With All Your Heart (Deuteronomy 10:1-1)

God understands our nature and our weakness; he knows how easily we can stray from him. He cautions us that our idolatry will push his presence away from us. Yet even as he says this, he reassures us that if we seek him with our hearts, he will eagerly bring us closer to him. He has always been a God of grace.

He asks us just not to forget his covenant of grace (4:21-24) and not to allow ourselves to put our faith or our hope in ourselves or in this world's meaningless objects and accomplishments. For our God is a consuming fire; and when the earth is shaken, all that will remain will be imperishable things that we cannot see with earthly eyes (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Though we have been his scattered sheep he assures us that he will gather us too (4:25-31). When we begin to worship idols and false hopes, we have become sheep without a shepherd, and will soon be scattered from God's presence; because our idols will push him away from us when we put our hope and meaning in things that have no true life (Isaiah 59:1-2).

But if, when we have strayed back into the desert, we just seek him with our heart (Deuteronomy 4:39), he asks us only for this, just to acknowledge him as our living God and our living hope. God is faithful to his covenant even when we aren't, longing for us to give our hearts back to him as the father waited for his son in Jesus' parable (Luke 15:20)

God himself searches for his scattered sheep, because his heart always longs to dwell with them (Ezekiel 34:11-16, 34:25-31). When our hearts have been led astray from his presence, he sends our true Shepherd to look for us and to bring us back into his spiritual pasture. He will overcome the strong spiritual foes that overpower us when we are sheep without a shepherd, and he will make an everlasting covenant of peace with our hearts (Isaiah 54:10).

- Mark Garner, March 2015

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Notes For Week Five: Acknowledge & Take To Heart (Deuteronomy 4:32-5:11)

In Moses' times, the Israelites saw many great things that had never happened before. Yet we have seen even greater things, the ways that the grace of Jesus can change human hearts, the way that the love of Jesus has drawn many seeking hearts from all times and places. So God calls us today as well, to acknowledge that he is our only living God, there is no other.

Has Anything So Great As This Ever Happened? (Deuteronomy 4:32-49)

The Israelites had seen God lead them across the Red Sea, ate manna that fell from the sky, and heard God's voice speaking to them out of fire. Yet we have seen even more remarkable things. Jesus' sacrifice has brought us across the chasm of death between us and God. He is the living bread that our hearts can consume and never die. And each day he speaks his words to us.

Moses calls them to ask about these former days, and learn from them (4:32-38). We too can look back to the former days, when God lived as one of us, full of his grace and truth, in this world that badly needed both (John 1:14). Even in our own times, Jesus' blood has redeemed us and brought us back to God, a miracle in each heart who seeks God for himself (1 Peter 2:24-25).

Each time our God is near, for us to read and contemplate the truths and beauty in his words, and when he listens to us, these too are great things, greater than any earthly blessings (Philippians 4:6-8). Just to be in our God's presence is our true life, and it gives us a taste of eternal life.

And after all this, our Father only asks us to take to heart that the Lord is God (4:39-40). Just to acknowledge him in our heart, just love him, to realize that there is no other God like our living God (1 Timothy 1:17). We are always reminded that God asks us to open our hearts to him, and let his light shine in, so that we can let him live in us.

Before Moses teaches us the 'ten commandments,' we see a little more of God's grace (4:41-49). Since some of the tribes would now live east of the Jordan, God allots a refuge city to each of them, a haven of grace for those who cause unintentional death. We will see this explained further in Deuteronomy 19.

I Am Your God, Who Brought You Out Of Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:1-5:7)

Moses reminds the Israelites that God's covenant is not only with their ancestors, but also with them too. Likewise, God has made a covenant with each soul who seeks him for who he is, a living covenant that he will faithfully keep. He is our God, who brought us out of the Egypt of the world's emptiness and false hopes. So he calls us to have no other gods in his presence.

The Lord our God has made a covenant with us, not a covenant we merely inherited, rather one that God makes with each heart who seeks him (5:1-5). For we today have his New Covenant of grace, in which he writes his words on our hearts, and where each of us can know him (Hebrews 8:10-13, see also Jeremiah 31:33-34).

His call to us, that "you shall have no other gods before me," again means to acknowledge him as God in our heart; for there is no other (5:6-7). We can only find life and meaning and purpose when we look above, look beyond the things of this world (Colossians 3:1-4).

He has led each of us too, out of Egypt into his good spiritual land (Ephesians 2:1-5). He has delivered us from bondage to sin and our chains to our efforts to earn God's favor; he has broken these chains and yokes that were too strong for us. He has led us into this new land, where we can live in his presence and where he will share his spiritual blessings with us.

Worship God In Spirit & Truth (Deuteronomy 5:8-11)

These next two 'commandments' went far deeper than the Israelites understood, and they go even deeper for us today. Like all of the commandments, they have to do with God's holiness. We should not set up images in our hearts as our source of life or meaning or significance. His name is a holy name, not to use as a threat nor as a pretext to glorify ourselves nor as a lucky charm.

He tells us not to make an image in earthly form to bow our hearts to, for again we cannot find life or lasting hope anywhere in this world (5:8-10). We do not see God's form, which cannot be described in this world's words, because God is Spirit and wants to be worshiped in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). Nothings in his world, where its things are made of flesh or dust, can give true life; only the Spirit gives flourishing spiritual life (John 6:63)

With whom will we compare God? (Isaiah 40:18-21) Our images of flesh and self may look impressive on the surface, but only the slightest breath of God could topple them. He has shown us from the beginning that this world is fragile, fallen, and perishable, to call us look beyond its appearances and false hopes, to seek our God, his imperishable blessings, and his eternal truths.

He also cautions us against the numerous ways we could misuse the name of God (5:11). God's name is holy, and truly awesome (Psalm 111:9-10). It is by his name we are saved, and should not to presume to speak of things he has not told us, for no one has been his counselor (Isaiah 40:13-14). His holy name is not meant to be used as an idle threat nor as a mere afterthought.

Our God's holy name should be used to glorify him for himself and his grace, not as a pretext for claiming credit or glory for ourselves (Luke 18:10-14). God does many things for us all, yet we have not earned nor deserved the things he gives us by his own grace.

How pleasant and fitting it is to praise our God (Psalm 147), to sing songs about him instead of about ourselves. He binds up our wounds, and teaches his words of truth to us, since his understanding has no limit. Our Father takes no pleasure in our own strength; rather, he takes pleasure in those who hope in his unfailing love, in those who delight in hearing his truths.

- Mark Garner, April 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week 5: God Shows Us His Majesty & His Glory (Deuteronomy 1:1-4)

As we read more of God's spiritual decrees for his new land, we see that they reflect his holiness. When he speaks from the fire, we see also his majesty. Yet we also see his truest glory, his grace and his love for us because when he spoke to them and when he speaks to us, it is not to frighten us nor to condemn us, rather it is to draw us near and to bring us true life.

Our Sabbath Rest (Deuteronomy 1:1-1)

The Israelites' Sabbath rest was a day of the week, yet it was not about ceasing physical activity for its own sake. Rather, it was meant as God's holy Sabbath, when they would stop carrying their own loads in his presence. For us, our Sabbath rest goes even deeper. For our Sabbath rest is to rest from our own efforts to obtain reward or favor by our own efforts and abilities.

We have already seen that there is a deeper meaning to each of the 'ten commandments,' and Jesus himself gave further illustrations of this (Matthew 5:21-22). So with God's decree to keep a Sabbath day, for us it cannot mean something as simplistic as just moving it to another day.

In calling Israel to keep the Sabbath holy, God called them to refrain on that one day from working to serve themselves or to accumulate possessions or to seek reward (5:12-14). It was not to abstain from physical activity itself, for it was perfectly good to act to help others in need (Luke 13:14-16, Luke 14:5).

Even in observing this commandment outwardly, the Israelites would be reminded of their constant need for God's grace, and would remember to rely on him rather than themselves. So it was a day not to carry their own loads "through the gates" when they came into God's presence (Jeremiah 17:19-22). For one day each week, they had to set aside their trust in their own labor and abilities, and let their God carry them, as indeed he had always done, to honor him.

We were once slaves in Egypt too (5:15). We were enslaved to sin and spiritual death, and we were also chained by our own attempts to justify ourselves, which could never have succeeded (Philippians 3:8-9). The land of Canaan, nor any other land in this world, could ever be our true resting place - only in God's presence is the true resting place for our souls; and who enters God's rest rests from their own works (Hebrews 4:8-11).

Our Sabbath rest is not a day, it is every day. We are called no longer to carry our own loads in our hearts, to set aside our efforts to obtain reward or favor by our own works. Offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices, to let him transform us by renewing our minds (Romans 12:1-2).

The Commandments God Proclaimed Out Of Fire (Deuteronomy 1:1-4)

The commandments that God proclaimed out of fire spoke to them of his holiness, and too of his desire to be able to make them holy in his presence. He showed them his majesty, and he showed them his true glory, his grace for them that he wanted to speak with them to give them life, not to judge them nor to make them die.

As he called them to honor their parents, not to murder, and the other commandments, God called them to let him make them holy, to let him make them his own people, consecrated to him (5:16-22). Jesus says he came not to abolish the laws themselves, rather to fulfill them himself (Matthew 5:17-20). Yet even as he explains how much more deeply these laws go, we realize how impossible it is for us ever to be righteous by our own works and knowledge and effort.

So Jesus himself has become our righteousness, by laying down his life in our place, so that no one can boast of anything except the cross of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:28-31). He became righteousness for us, because we could never have obtained it. He has become our wisdom too, because we could never have acquired it on our own either.

In Moses' day, the Israelites realized that God could speak to them and let them live, yet they observed this in fear and reverence (5:23-27). God had shown them his majesty and glory, just as he has done for us. Even as he speaks to us about his holiness, he also shows us his heart of grace, his truest glory of his unfailing love, that he himself redeemed us because he had compassion, realizing we could never redeem ourselves or justify ourselves (Isaiah 59:14-16).

As God heard them speak these words, he only wished that their hearts would be inclined to revere him and seek him, and to walk in his ways (5:28-33). He has always wanted just to be with us.

Love The Lord Our God (Deuteronomy 10:1-4)

As we look more deeply even at the Old Covenant, we can understand what it means to our God for us to love him with our hearts and our souls. Even as we read these words, they speak on a level deeper than human words can adequately describe. God understands that even the idea of having a 'relationship' with him, just 'knowing him', is difficult for us even to grasp.

It is always good for us to contemplate what it means to love our God with all our heart and with all our soul (6:1-5). This is more important to God than all burnt offerings and sacrifices and all knowledge and accomplishments and good works (Mark 12:28-34). All these things only have any meaning when they come from love for God.

He hopes for us to keep his words on our hearts; and indeed he wants us to let them write them on our hearts (6:6-9). He calls us to talk about his words, not just memorize them and repeat them, rather to meditate on them and to talk with one another about what they really mean, to consider what they mean beneath the surface (Psalm 119:96-97), to write them on the doorframes of our hearts.

Give thanks to the Lord, for his love and his majesty and his glory endure forever (Psalm 118:14-29). God has done many things to save us and redeem us and to show us his lavish grace. And though his cornerstone of grace seems foolishness in the eyes of this world's experts and authorities, his cornerstone of Jesus' cross is beautiful in our spiritual eyes.

- Mark Garner, April 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Seven: God Chose Us To Be Holy To Him (Deuteronomy 1-8)

The new land where our God has brought us is a spiritual land, where we could not have created anything with our own hands. Our God chose us to be holy to him, not because we earned it but rather because of his love for us. He does all this to search our hearts, to show us our need for his grace each moment of each day.

All Things Our Hands Could Not Have Made (Deuteronomy 1-2)

God led the Israelites out of the desert and took them into a new land that was full of things they had not built nor planted nor dug. He simply asks them to remember what he has done for them, and to follow his paths. The spiritual blessings our God has given us are things we could never have created or made or even thought of, for they are things that could only have come from him.

As God offers us his many blessings, instead of telling us to earn them, he just asks us not to forget our Lord (6:10-12). The Israelites were entering a land full of cities they had not built, full of wells of water they did not dig, and full of flourishing olive groves they had not planted (Ephesians 1:3, see also Deuteronomy 8:6-18). This was to remind them of their God who had carried them all the way, to show them they had not built any of this with their own hands.

God has also brought us into a spiritually flourishing city, his heavenly city, where we can draw living water from his wells of salvation. Our true new land is full of things we could never have made nor earned (Ephesians 1:4-6). All the things we need most of all could only come from our Heavenly Father above, just as only his mighty hand could have brought us out of slavery to sin.

Moses encourages the Israelites to ask themselves, what is the meaning of these stipulations and decrees? (6:13-25). They are the spiritual decrees God has given them to follow as he brought them out of Egypt and gave them the good new land (see Deuteronomy 7:6-9, below). Likewise, the teachings he gives us are to keep us close with our God, so he can make us holy to himself.

A Faithful God Who Keeps His Covenant Of Love (Overview Of Deuteronomy)

As Moses continues to tell Israel about God's decrees to follow in their new land, he also impresses on them that God has chosen them to belong to him, a holy people of his own. God redeemed us too, and he has made a covenant with each of us, to make us holy; and he is a faithful God who has kept his covenant for many thousands of generations.

As they cross the Jordan into the new land, God tells them to topple the idols they will see (7:1-5, see Deuteronomy 12:1-4). He does not want these in his presence, so he calls us also to let him topple the idols we too can carry in our hearts. He does not want our idols of self and this world's things in his presence, either.

For he has called us to be holy to our Lord (7:6-9). God alone can make us holy, yet in his grace he has chosen each of us by name (Isaiah 45:3). He has chosen us to be his treasured possession, and he pours out his love on us, calling us his own children (1 John 3:1-3). He treasures each of us just for who we are, for his own hands formed us and gave life to each of us.

He does not do this because any of us are better or stronger or more righteous, for we are none of these things. He does all this because our God loved us, and is he faithful (1 John 4:9-10). He sent his own Son to lay down his life for us, to make himself the perfect sacrifice for sins, to let us live through him. Jesus came to give us his true life, so we would not merely exist just in pursuit of this world's empty and perishable things.

Moses also gives the Israelites God's promise that he will bless them and us more than any other people (7:10-16). Like God's commandments, his promises too speak more deeply than they seem to on the surface. This promise cannot be interpreted literally, since there are many examples around us of faithful believers who are not blessed in earthly ways.

Instead, God assures us that we will learn to rejoice in what he gives us, while those who do not seek him will never appreciate what he has done for them by his grace, and they will not be able to enjoy his greatest gift of his own closeness. We will discuss this more fully later (see, for example, Deuteronomy 28).

Moses also reminds them not to be afraid of entering Canaan, for God is with them (7:17-26, see Deuteronomy 1:29-31). For us too, we cannot do anything he calls us to do with our own efforts nor our knowledge nor our will power, for our God can make his strength perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

□e Wants To □now What □s □n Our □earts (Deuteronomy 8:1-□)

God has always looked for what is in our hearts, to see whether we seek him from our hearts and will be willing to walk in his paths. God has carried us since the day we were born, and he gives us many □uiet reminders of our need for his grace every moment. This world's bread and its objects cannot satisfy our souls; our true life can only be found in the words that come from God.

Moses reminds the assembly of how God had led them through the vast desert for forty years (8:1-5). He had carried them each step of the way, and he has carried us too from birth, whether we have acknowledged him or not (Isaiah 46:3-5).

In the desert, he humbled the Israelites by showing how he could meet their needs, even when they doubted and complained. He made this clear by raining down manna from heaven (Psalm 78:22-25), to see what was in their hearts. Jesus, the Word who lived among us, taught us too that only the words from God's mouth can satisfy the true hunger in our souls (Matthew 4:1-4).

So he humbles us by sending his bread of life from heaven (John 6:46-51). Lasting meaning nor purpose nor true life cannot be found in this world's things of flesh or dust; only the Spirit gives true life. Jesus died on the cross to meet our deep need for his grace and his love, needs our hands nor minds nor our best intentions could ever have met, not for ourselves or for anyone else.

□ur God heals our waywardness and loves us freely (Hosea 14). He asks us just to take our humble words to him, asking him to forgive our sins. To simply acknowledge in our hearts that we need his grace (Hosea 6:6). He calls us just to walk with him, let him make our spirits flourish and have the true life he calls us to.

- Mark Garner, □pril 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Eight: Every Good Thing Comes From God (Deuteronomy 8:6-10:22)

Moses reminds the Israelites of God's call to them. They will receive many good things in the new land he is taking them into, things they did not make, and things they did not earn. So God simply asks them to remember him, not to forget that everything they have comes from him, so they will remember to walk humbly with him. His call to us today is the same.

From The Dreadful Wilderness Into A Land Of Abundance (Deuteronomy 8:6-20)

Moses reminds the assembly of all the dangers in the desert that God had led them through, and he tells them of the blessings they will have in Canaan. God has led us too through a spiritual desert full of dangers, and has brought us into his heavenly city full of spiritual treasure. When our spirits are satisfied, he gives us his simple reminder to remember him and walk with him.

Just as Canaan was a good land in earthly terms, God has led us into a good spiritual land, his heavenly city (8:6-14). As Canaan flowed with brooks and springs, Jesus makes his living water flow within us, his Spirit of truth, God's presence within us. As in Canaan bread would not be scarce; in Jesus we have the living bread of Jesus, his grace and his truth that satisfy our hearts.

Just as Canaan was abundant with fruit, God also produces the fruits of his Spirit within us (Galatians 5:22-23), and he can produce them in every season (Revelation 22:2). It is even better than digging copper or gold, to have God's teachings as a source of spiritual treasure of understanding and truth.

Moses also tells them that when they are satisfied, to recall how God led them through the vast and dreadful wilderness (8:15-20). This world is also a spiritually waterless land, where our parched spirits can only be refreshed by God's words of truth. It is full of venomous snakes too, like the 'yeast of the Pharisees' (attempts to earn our own salvation) and the 'yeast of Herod' (temptation by this world's things). Only God can protect us against these (Ephesians 6:11-13)

God knows our hearts, so he cautions us not to say to ourselves that we have earned what we have. It is human nature to think we deserve our earthly blessings, and to think that God's blessings are due to us by our own righteousness, yet God alone can save us and give us lasting meaning for our lives (Isaiah 57:12-13). Every truly good thing comes from above (James 1:16-17). Every lasting blessing can come only by God's grace.

Not By Their Righteousness, But Because God Redeemed Them (Overview Of Deut. 9)

God has reminded the Israelites many times that he alone has redeemed them, not by their own righteousness, but because he loved them. Likewise, they have seen many examples that he alone could protect them from enemies, both physical and spiritual, more powerful than themselves. As often as his people's hearts strayed, God always remembered they were his own.

We too should also understand and never forget that only God's own righteousness can justify us and save us (9:1-10). He reminds the Israelites that they had angered him (9:6-7), not just once, but many times (Deuteronomy 9:22-24). God says this neither to hurt us nor to burden us; rather

it just speaks the truth to us, that it is to God alone, not to us, goes the glory for all that we have and all that we do (Psalm 115:1-3). He loves us for who we are; every day is his day of favor.

Moses recounts the time when he came down from talking with God and found the golden idol the assembly had made. At this time Moses broke the tablets on which God had written the commandments of his covenant (9:11-22). The laws had been broken (9:15-17), but even then God remained faithful to his covenant (2 Timothy 2:13, and see below).

God himself redeems his people, because only his love for us could justify us and vindicate us (9:23-29). He forgives us and does not want to see anyone die (9:27-29), for he has made us his own inheritance, his scattered flock that he desires to gather and shepherd (Psalm 28:6-9).

Our God, Mighty & Compassionate (Overview Of Deuteronomy 10)

After describing how the Israelites had distressed God, Moses now reminds them that God forgave them and once more wrote his commandments on two new tablets. His call is always on a deeper level, not to obey him merely outwardly, rather to follow him from the heart. When we also stumble or fall, God asks us to turn our hearts back to him and listen to his voice.

In the aftermath of the incident with the 'golden calf,' God took two new tablets and wrote his commandments of the covenant on them again (10:1-11). The Lord wrote the same words he had written before (10:3-5), because his truths hadn't changed. The tablets of stone had no magical value in themselves as physical objects, but God's words themselves always stand.

Soon afterwards, God also set aside the tribe of Levi (10:8-9, see also Numbers 3) to attend to the ark of the covenant and other holy things. This tribe alone would have no earthly inheritance, for their inheritance would be God himself. In Jesus' New Covenant, we are all his priests, so we also have no earthly inheritance. Rather, we have a much better one, an imperishable inheritance, God himself (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Moses reminds the assembly once more that to God alone belongs everything in heaven and earth (10:12-22). And what does he ask of us (10:12-13)? His call is just to walk in his light, to acknowledge him for his blessings and for his grace that we always so badly need (1 John 1:7-9). He reminds us also of God's care for the weak (10:18-19, Psalm 138:6) for we will do well to remember that we are all weak, and we are all strangers in this world.

Our God does what pleases him; only our God is truly great (Psalm 135:1-7). It has pleased him to make us his own treasured possession. To him be the glory for not seeking the powerful nor the famous, but to seek hearts who want to walk with him and love him for who he is. Only God's enduring compassion for us could ever have vindicated us, so it is pleasant to give him all praise.

- Mark Garner, April 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Nine: The Place God Chooses For His Name To Dwell (Deut. 11-13)

Moses reminds the assembly of things in the past, and he describes what lies ahead of them in the land where God is leading them. His words remind us too, of what we have left behind and the good spiritual land where God has led us. And as Moses told the Israelites, he tells us also to worship only our living God, and to worship him where his Name will dwell - in our hearts.

A Land That Drinks Rain From Heaven (Overview Of Deuteronomy 11)

God did mighty things to lead the Israelites from Egypt, where they had toiled endlessly for nothing; and he carried them by his grace into Canaan. He again simply calls them to love him and remember what he has done for them. We too have been called out of a land of bondage where we toiled for nothing, and have come into his spiritual land that 'drinks rain from heaven.'

As we pause and reflect on the mighty things God has done for us, all that we can do in return is to love our God with all our hearts (11:1-15). The eyes of our hearts have seen the things he has done for us, the miracle and love of the cross of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:22-25). The message of the cross speaks to our hearts and souls, not to the flesh nor to worldly minds.

In the land of Egypt, the Israelites had to work the ground laboriously, and had nothing to show for it, yet now they would go into a new land that "drinks rain from heaven." As they had often longed to return to Egypt, God calls us too, not to go back to our hopeless efforts to earn his favor, but just come to him and accept his grace and the spiritual bounty he offers those who seek him (Isaiah 55:1-2).

Instead of trying to justify ourselves by our own works, God asks us too, to fix his Words in our hearts (11:16-25). He doesn't mean just to memorize the right answers; rather, simply to talk about his teachings, in the course of our daily lives, at home and on the road (Malachi 3:16-17).

In Deuteronomy, we are often reminded of the choice between blessing or a curse (11:26-32, see also Deuteronomy 30). This is not a threat, merely a statement of spiritual truth. When we seek God for himself, and accept his abundant grace, our spirits will live. Yet our spirits will die if we seek the things of this world, and they will die if we seek God by our own actions and abilities.

Worship God In The Place He Will Choose (Overview Of Deuteronomy 12)

God called the Israelites not to worship him in the ways the world worships their gods, as many gods as they want and in many ways. In their day, he would show them the place where his Name would dwell. Now in his New Covenant, he has chosen the place where he wants his Name to dwell - he wants to live in each of our hearts. This is where he wants us to worship him.

As God called Israel to wipe out the names of the idols of Canaan, today he asks us to erase their names in our hearts (12:1-3). As he asked them to break down the altars of the world's idols, this has a deeper meaning us today too. He does not want us to attack others; rather, to remove these false altars from our own hearts; for these are an endless hindrance to our relationship with our living God (Isaiah 46:1-2).

When the assembly crossed the Jordan, he would choose a place for his Name (12:4-14). In their day, he would show them where the tabernacle (and later, the temple) of his presence would dwell, the place where their sacrifices would be made. In his New Covenant, he has chosen the place for his dwelling - he wants to live with us, for us to be in him and he in us (John 14:23)

In the place he has chosen for his Name, he asks us to bring him everything (12:11), to give him everything in our hearts, to count everything else a loss for the sake of Christ (Philippians 3:7-8).

So as he explains more about worshiping God (12:15-32), he calls us too to take the consecrated things to God's presence (12:26-28). He asks them to do this so they will be mindful of what he has done. They were allowed to eat the meat of their sacrifices, but not the blood. God had graciously provided the meat for their physical bodies, and gave them the blood (their lives) to make atonement for their sins, to preserve their spiritual lives (Leviticus 17:11-12).

God graciously provides for us the things our souls so desperately need (John 6:53-58). Jesus is our living bread we can eat and not die, so we can consume his spiritual truths and his grace to sustain our spirits in the world's spiritual famine. Now we can 'drink' his blood, so that it flows through us to cleanse us of our impurities, to make our hearts a dwelling for his Father's Name.

Follow Only The Lord Our God (Overview Of Deuteronomy 13)

The Lord is God in heaven and earth; there is no other. No other 'god' can give us true life, none of the things in this world can give us meaning or living hope. God patiently allows us to see this world's false wonders and its false hopes, to find out whether we love him with all our heart and all our soul. God has called us to have no other gods in his presence.

Indeed, God always just wants to know whether we love him with all our hearts (13:1-11). We will often see the world's false wonders that will lead us astray if we look at them with the world's eyes (Revelation 13:11-14). The world will often induce us to worship one of their gods, by persuading us that it has produced the outward results it promised. Moses cautions us that God lets us hear these false truths, to test our hearts.

Outward results can never lead us to the true living God. We can only find the way by seeking spiritual truth, seeking the Way of Jesus, by asking whether something reflects Jesus and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). God's call is not merely to put him 'ahead' of all other gods; rather, his call is not to follow nor worship any other god at all.

None of these condemned things are to be found in our hands - nor in our hearts (13:12-18). The curse of clinging to the world's false gods, while we try to seek our living God, is not punishment; rather it hinders God from coming closer to us. God longs to have compassion on us (Deuteronomy 30:1-4), to give us his true and imperishable blessings, instead of giving us more of this world's useless objects and its empty pleasures.

So God's call to us is to recognize our shepherd's voice, and to follow him alone (John 10:1-18). Only Jesus and his grace can open the gates into God's holy presence, and only Jesus can show us what true life, eternal life, really means. For he alone could lay down his life to redeem us from spiritual death. Only God knew what we really needed, and only our Heavenly Father can give us what we really need. There is no other living God.

- Mark Garner, May 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Ten: The Deeper Truths Of God's Laws (Deuteronomy 14-16)

As we read the laws of the Old Covenant, at first they seem to focus only on our outward actions, and they often seem arbitrary or legalistic. Yet there is always a deeper truth beyond what they look like on the surface. Though they sometimes may benefit us in this world, they have a much more important reason behind them - they are meant to keep our hearts close with God.

Holy To Our God, His Treasured Possession (Overview Of Deuteronomy 14)

The old laws reminded the Israelites to think about God even in the things they did each day, to remind them to look above and remember that God wanted to make them holy. Following the law in itself could not do this, so God was not looking for mere outward obedience. He was always looking into their hearts to see whether they loved him and sought him with their hearts.

Of all the peoples on the face of the earth, God chooses the hearts who seek him as his treasured possession, to make us holy to him (14:1-2). As he cautions the Israelites not to mourn the dead in the ways the unbelievers did, he calls us too to let him make us holy by mourning as he himself mourns (Joel 2:12-13). Care about what God cares about, and show it in our hearts, not by dramatic outward deeds.

Each of the old laws was a reminder to look above in all we do, to see how we need God's grace each moment, and let him show us what he values and what pleases him.

God's call to Israel not to eat any detestable thing is not so much for physical health's sake, rather so that he could keep them clean and make them holy (14:3-21). He called them to look at their food not as a way to indulge their flesh, but rather to look above and realize that they relied on him to give them everything they needed.

Jesus told us that what comes from within is what can be detestable and can make us unclean (Matthew 15:1-3, 15:7-11). The efforts to use the laws as a way of trying to prove ourselves worthy of God's favor, instead makes us unclean. We can easily make ourselves unclean, yet only our God can cleanse us and purify us of sin and the world's uncleanness.

In his New Covenant, when it comes to food and some of our other daily habits, God tells us that everything is permissible; but not everything is beneficial (1 Cor. 6:12, 10:23-24). If we ask for rules as to what we can and cannot do, we have defeated his purpose. God wants us to look above in all we do, and ask him to help us consider how our actions affect our spirits and others'.

The practice of tithes and third-year tithes also has a deeper meaning (14:22-29). Two out of three years, the Israelites did not give up these tithes - rather, they had to eat them as a 'sacrifice' by taking them to the place God chose as a dwelling for his Name. So when we eat the 'tithes' God gave us, we should eat in reverence for our God, realizing that he alone gives good things that our own actions and abilities can never earn or deserve (Psalm 104:27-30).

The third-year tithes were brought to the storehouse, as a sacrifice to provide for the Levites and the needy. God calls to bring the full tithes to his storehouse where his Name dwells - to give everything to him in our hearts; it came from him and never really belonged to us (Malachi 3:10).

A Law Of Grace (Overview Of Deuteronomy 15)

The old laws often reminded the Israelites of their need for God's grace, in various ways. The laws in this chapter call them to practice God's grace themselves, not only for its own sake, but also to look deeper at God's heart. His call to us is to let him transform our hearts, so that we can learn what to rejoice in what God rejoices in.

The seventh year for cancelling debts shows us God's heart, his desire to be generous to all (15:1-11). And it is a call for us to seek him with a humble heart, to share the physical means he blesses us with, and especially to forgive as we have been forgiven (Matthew 6:12).

He asks us not to harbor the unclean thought of expecting to be repaid for what we do for others, either when we lend them material possessions or when we share God's grace with them. When we give without expecting a reward, he blesses us, yet in a deeper spiritual way, for by letting him soften our hearts we will see him more clearly, and come closer to him (Luke 8:36-38). This is not a 'reward' for us to take pride in; rather it is a gift, an outpouring of God's grace.

Likewise, the call to freeing servants (15:12-18) and the grace concerning firstborn animals (15:19-23) call us to look deeper. We too were slaves and God redeemed us, and he has called us to follow him as his servants, a far gentler calling (Romans 6:17-18).

Appear Before The Lord Your God (Overview Of Deuteronomy 16)

The old feasts (or festivals) called the Israelites to assemble before the Lord and bring their offerings, to acknowledge him for what he had done for them. We too are called to assemble before our God, to make an offering to him in proportion to him for what he has done for us - to come before him to offer him glory and praise not from our mouths, but from our hearts.

The Passover and its familiar practices are of course a call to us too (16:1-8). Our Passover Lamb Jesus laid down his life to bring us near God with his blood, and he also nourishes our souls (John 6:53-58), by his call to eat his flesh and drink his blood, to consume him, to allow God to make his fullness live in us.

The Feast Of Weeks called the Israelites to make a freewill offering in proportion to their spring harvest (16:9-12). Our festival of freewill offering is to continually offer Jesus a sacrifice of praise and glory for what he has done for us (Hebrews 13:15), an acknowledgment in our hearts that God has given us everything not because we deserved it, but by his unfailing love; a sacrifice that God finds more pleasing than burnt offerings (Psalm 69:30-33).

The Feast Of Tabernacles (16:13-17, see also Leviticus 23:39-43) called Israel to live for a week in temporary shelters, a reminder of where he led them from. We are living in temporary shelters too, and our souls long to be clothed with our eternal dwelling; this is God's new festival of tabernacles, for us to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:4-7).

So we appear before God every day, holding these spiritual feasts every moment. So we are called to come with a gift - and the only gift we can offer our God is the gift he wants: a heart who loves his mercy and just wants to walk with him humbly (Micah 6:6-8). As we read, God is impartial and gives his call to everyone who seeks him from the heart (16:18-22).

- Mark Garner, May 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Eleven: Grace, Cleanness, & Holiness (Overview Of Deuteronomy 17-26)

This week, we will make an overview of the next several chapters of Levitical laws. Each of them speaks beyond the literal level, for they tell us of God's desire to make his people clean so that he can make them holy to himself. And we often see that God has always been a God of grace. We will look closely at a handful of Scriptures in these chapters, and will just briefly cover the rest.

Crime & Grace (Deuteronomy 19)

The old laws sometimes call for seemingly harsh penalties for certain sins and crimes. This is a reminder of God's call to let him cleanse us, and it also reminds us of the blessings of Jesus' perfect sacrifice that brought reconciliation. Each of these laws also has spiritual parallels, and in each case we can see God's grace as well.

Deuteronomy 17 begins with conducting investigations of idolatry and civil crimes, reminding the Israelites to look at the matter carefully and show respect for God's words. The instructions about future kings remind us of how well God understands human hearts. They are given long before Israel asked for a king, and the instructions to the king (writing for himself a copy of the law, and not accumulate large amounts of money) are good reminders for anyone who seeks God.

Deuteronomy 18 begins with offerings for the Levites (see Deuteronomy 10 and 26:12-15 below). The 'detestable practices' include religious rites practiced by the Canaanites, which involve immorality or violence in addition to idolatry. Next, God promises to send future prophets, instead of occult rites, to his people in the future.

The cities of refuge and the instructions for witnesses remind us of God's grace and his desire to cleanse us, so that we can live in his presence (Deuteronomy 19). These towns were put in various locations, for those who had accidentally killed someone. If they lived in one of these cities, they were immune to any efforts to prosecute them or to take revenge of any kind. God seeks healing instead of causing more pain and shedding further innocent blood (Luke 23:33-34).

In cases of malicious death, though, God called them to purge the guilt of shedding innocent blood, to remain clean; to 'hand them over to the avenger of blood, usually a family member. Yet he also calls us now to hand over their spirits to him above for vengeance (Romans 12:19).

Cases were to be decided by two or three witnesses, so false witnesses might have less influence (note also Matthew 18:15-16). Yet Jesus also mentions it in a deeper context, of seeking God's Words and Jesus' living example as our two witnesses to God's truths (John 8:17-18).

The other laws in Deuteronomy 20, 21, and 22 include laws for unsolved murders. The town where it took place would make sacrifices to purge the guilt of shedding innocent blood - for God was not interested in punishment for punishment's sake, but rather to keep his people clean.

Sharing The Grace God Has Given Us (Readings In Deuteronomy 24)

We all need God's grace to sustain us every moment of each day, and everything we have is by God's grace. Just as God previously called Israel to observe the seventh year as a year for

cancelling debts, he also calls them to live by grace even day by day. For those who in need could just as easily be us, as each of us once walked in darkness too.

More miscellaneous laws follow in Deuteronomy 23:1-24:9, and chapter 25. Yet again, none of these was expected always to be enforced literally. While the law prohibited Moabites ever from joining the assembly (the community), just a few generations Ruth was welcomed. The law viewed her as a true daughter of God, because she made him her living God.

We all need God's grace, so he calls us to show others the grace they need (Deuteronomy 24:10-22). These laws also apply beyond the literal level. Just as we are called not to exploit those in debt or poverty, we are reminded to forgive the debts owed us (Matthew 18:21-22). As Israel was called to leave behind some sheaves and olives at the harvest - not to harvest too 'efficiently', we are called to be gentle with the spiritually struggling (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15).

God frequently reminds the Israelites that they had been slaves in Egypt, and he asks us to remember that we were slaves to sin. So he asks us to help out with one another's burdens and to remember that we need help too (Galatians 6:2-3).

A Basket Of Firstfruits (Deuteronomy 26)

God asked the Israelites to make an offering of firstfruits once they had entered the new land of Canaan, in memory of the past he had led them out of and the land he had brought them to. So too, he asks us to offer him a basket of firstfruits at the place he has made a dwelling for his Name. He continues to ask us to walk with him, seek him from the heart, just hold fast to him.

He calls us also to take a basket to the place where God's Name dwells, in our hearts (26:1-4). God has used our dry soil and has turned it into a spiritual harvest of grace and spiritual fruit (Isaiah 51:3-4). He calls us to offer him the firstfruits of what his good soil has produced, give him our hearts and souls, remembering that everything good comes from above (James 1:16-18).

At the offering of the firstfruits, they were asked to declare before the Lord what he had done for them (26:5-11). We too can always recall how God redeemed us by Jesus' blood and his grace (Ephesians 2:3-7). We have previously seen the third-year tithes for the Levites and the poor (26:12-15, see 14:28-29). We are permitted to use some of his blessings for physical purposes, yet we must give to the sacred portion to God, to give him what belongs to God (Luke 20:22-25). Our hearts and souls belong to God alone.

The Lord has declared (26:16-19) that he wants us to be his people, his treasured possession, to belong to him always (1 John 3:1-3). He wants to keep us clean so that we can live in his presence, and to sanctify us to make us his holy people. We cannot do this by ourselves, so he calls us just to walk with him, walk in the light of Jesus and he will keep us clean (1 John 1:7).

When we seek God with our heart, he can give us a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:24-28, 36:33-36). He gathers us, cleanses us, and sanctifies us. Only he can turn the wastelands in our hearts into a garden of Eden; so his call is to let him keep us close and bless us with his presence.

- Mark Garner, May 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Twelve: Blessings & Curses (Deuteronomy 27 & 28)

After having discussed many of the Levitical laws, Moses now reminds the assembly of the procedures God asked them to follow after they crossed into Canaan. He then encourages them to follow God's ways, and cautions them of the consequences of not following God. Like the laws themselves, these blessings and curses are deeper than they seem on the surface.

Mount Ebal & Mount Gerizim (Deuteronomy 27)

Moses told the Israelites that, after they had crossed the Jordan, they were to go to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim (in central Canaan). These procedures were intended to remind them of the Levitical laws themselves, and also to remind them of their implications. Even then, the greatest blessings and worst curses were connected with their relationship with God.

They were first to leave lasting stones on Mount Ebal (27:1-8). They were to write the words of the law on these stones, to take these words to their hearts, to internalize them (Jeremiah 15:16). After writing the laws, there were to coat them in order to preserve them, a reminder that God's words are lasting truths (Psalm 119:89).

Then they would go to the top of these mountains, six tribes on each one, to pronouncing the blessings and curses that depended on their faithfulness (27:9-26). The corresponding blessings are not recorded in Deuteronomy, though they were most likely parallel to the curses.

Some of the curses are pronounced on idolaters and others guilty of unclean acts, for these are in themselves a curse to carry (Isaiah 46:1-2).

Then blessing is pronounced for simple kindness, since this will keep our hearts soft (Psalm 112:4); while curses are given for the unkind, even those who perform basic acts of unkindness. Their actions curse them to walking in darkness (1 John 2:10-11).

Blessings Of Following God's Paths (Deuteronomy 28:1-14)

On the surface, these blessings promise material prosperity and other outward things. Yet it is impossible to reconcile a literal interpretation of them with Israel's own history, or in any other time. Moreover, an abundance of outward blessings can only satisfy the flesh, and that only for a very short time. So we will consider how they go deeper.

These blessings range from bountiful crops to a blessing on their kneading troughs (28:1-8). These blessings are deeper than outward results; rather, they speak of the contentment, the true peace that comes from knowing God. Instead of expecting worldly blessings, we are blessed when we come in and when we go out (Psalm 121:7-8). We receive the much greater blessing of God's presence near us (Psalm 73:28).

For if we walk with him, God will make us his holy people (28:9-14), his treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6), who carry his name (Revelation 14:1). And he makes his simple call, just to walk with him, to walk in the light, which will show us his truths (John 8:12). Then our God

will open the heavens and pour out every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3), imperishable blessings that will satisfy our souls instead of the perishable things of this world. Whether we have much or little in the world's eyes, we have God's grace, his love, his truths, peace with him.

Curses Of Not Following God's Ways (Deuteronomy 28:15-68)

It is noticeable how more detailed and more far-ranging the curses are, compared with the blessings. There are many ways to stray from God's paths, and many possible consequences. Yet here too, even as bad as the literal curses sound, there are many far worse things that can befall those who disregard God's ways.

The curses do sound bad enough just on the surface (28:15-63). Having cursed crops and even a cursed kneading trough would lead to despair. Yet the real curse is deeper, for it is even worse to have outward things but not to be satisfied by them (Ecclesiastes 6:2). Likewise, the many striking images of being cursed are not meant to be literal; rather, if we leave God's paths, then everything that looks good will become a curse, for we will always feel compelled to have more.

The spiritual blindness of following the world's ways is vividly depicted as: at midday we would grope about like a blind person (Isaiah 59:9-10), searching desperately for something with lasting meaning, and looking in all the wrong places.

For these curses, like the blessings, are inside; they go more deeply (28:64-68). To be able to know our God, who gives us a resting place for our souls, yet to be unable to see his resting place, is a sad curse (Isaiah 57:19-21). Likewise, seeking to use God only to get things of this world, instead of seeing his spiritual blessings, is like the curse of always wishing it were evening when it is morning, and vice versa (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Most of all, the curse of being sent back to Egypt is the saddest (2 Peter 2:21), being once more being put in chains by its futile teachings, being overcome by returning to the world's false hopes of appearances and outward results. Like the other curses, it pronounces itself by one's own decision to return to empty ways.

God explains all these somber truths so that we will see the life that comes only from walking with him. And our God gives us his reassuring reminder: when we hear his voice, just do not harden our hearts (Psalm 65:6-8).

We rejoice in God, not in the things of this world, for our God rides on the clouds (Psalm 68:1-10, 68:18, 68:32-35) just to come and be with us (Deuteronomy 33:26). He has abundant compassion for every soul, regardless of what the world thinks about them. He marches through the wilderness to seek his straying sheep, and refreshes the weary with his living water. And he ascends on high, taking many hearts captive.

- Mark Garner, May 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Thirteen: God's Covenant With Us (Deuteronomy 29:1-30:10)

The blessings and curses of the covenant have a deeper meaning than it seems on the surface. They do not refer so much to the material blessings in themselves, as to the closeness with God that following his paths will bring. Moreover, both the blessings and curses are not arbitrary acts by God; rather, both are the natural spiritual consequences of our choices.

A Covenant With Those Here Today & Those Who Are Not (Deuteronomy 29)

Moses reminds the assembly that God has shown them many things to show them who he is, so that they will understand the covenant he is making with them. Yet we can only see what God has done for us if we look above, and let him open our spiritual eyes and ears. This was even so in the days of Moses, and especially for us today.

Moses often reminds the Israelites of the things God has done, so that they might take to heart that the Lord is their living God (29:1-8). The simple intellectual knowledge of the things God has done cannot in itself draw us nearer to God, because the things God has done speak to our souls and tell us of the spiritual things we really need.

Like the Israelites, we have seen great signs and great wonders, through Jesus (Luke 23:44-49). God has torn away that curtain that separated us from his presence, and we have seen God's true glory in the cross, Jesus' perfect humility and his great compassion, what he was willing to endure for our sake.

The cross baffles the human mind, because we can't understand it with logic nor by philosophy. So God gives us a mind that understands (Romans 12:2) so that we will not conform to the world's patterns of thinking. We are not saved by our human knowledge nor efforts, but through what Paul calls the 'foolishness' of the cross. Our God calls us to look beyond the appearances of the world, and let him open the eyes of our hearts (Ephesians 1:18).

Moses assured the people that they were standing there to enter into a covenant with God (29:9-29), just as God will make his covenant with anyone in any time or place who seeks him from the heart. God's covenant is not a mere legal agreement. Rather, it is a living covenant, a covenant that takes life in us, for he makes us a covenant with the people (Isaiah 42:6-7) that encourages them too to come out of the darkness.

Once more we also see the patient reminder, to make sure that our heart does not turn away, not to seek the things of this world nor to worship their idols, which Deuteronomy and Hebrews both call a bitter root (Hebrews 12:15-17). Just as Esau exchanged spiritual blessings for a mere bowl of soup; pursuing appearances or possessions or distinctions can leave our spirits a "burning waste of salt and sulfur - nothing planted, nothing sprouting."

God shares with us these secret things, his deep spiritual truths, so that we may know him and walk in his paths.

A Covenant Full Of Grace (Deuteronomy 30:1-10)

Even as God describes the 'curses' that might fall on the Israelites, he reassures them that the covenant is full of grace. At any time, no matter how far their hearts have drifted from him, his call is the same. When they seek him with their hearts and souls, they will find him. God patiently reminds us of this too, that he simply asks us to love him and walk with him.

Just as he promised Israel that he would gather them back from the nations where he dispersed them, he gathers us too from all the nations (30:1-5). Not only does he call us from the world's nations, but also from wherever our hearts may have strayed.

Whether we have been led astray by the world's possessions or accomplishments, or whether we have stumbled on the stumbling stone of grace by trying to justify ourselves by our own righteousness, he will restore us from spiritual captivity (Isaiah 45:2-3) even from the most distant lands (Ephesians 2:13), redeeming us from all of our straying with his grace and the blood of Jesus.

We again see what matters to God, in his promise that he will circumcise our hearts (30:6-10). We cannot cleanse ourselves nor sanctify ourselves, but when we open our hearts to God he will purify them, so that we will love him with our hearts and souls (Ezekiel 36:24-28), and he will again delight in us (Isaiah 57:15), because he wants to make us holy to himself, his treasured possession.

Psalm 107 tells us the stories of the redeemed (Psalm 107:1-22), those who went astray into spiritual death, and God delivered them back to life when they called out to him. He delivered them from the deserts of emptiness, the chains of sin and spiritual darkness, futile efforts to earn God's favor, ambitions for earthly possessions and achievements.

God lifted them up and blessed them with his presence. And all we can do in return is give our hearts to our God, and give thanks to the Lord our God for his unfailing love and his abundant grace.

- Mark Garner, June 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Fourteen: God Is Our Life (Deuteronomy 30:11-31:13)

Deuteronomy has often spoken of life or death, peace or destruction. Moses now puts this to the assembly in these terms, reminding them that the choice is theirs. Each of them can choose between following God and following their own paths. We are called to make this choice for ourselves too. Neither Moses nor Joshua nor anyone else can make this decision for us.

What God Is Asking Us Today (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

Moses assures the Israelites that God is asking them not to do something too difficult. God did not ask them to devise the ways to seek him, nor did he expect them to figure out what he wanted. He brought his words near, in order to bring his presence near. For us he has done the same thing, bringing us near by sending his living Word Jesus.

God's words are not beyond our reach, because he cares for us and wants us to be with him (30:11-14). We do not have to ascend into heaven to find his words (Ephesians 4:8-10), because he has spoke his written words and sent his Living Word to fill the universe with the good news of his grace. Nor do we have to cross the sea or perform any impressive deeds. We are too weak and blind to find his path, so God brought us near by the blood of Jesus (Ephesians 2:13)

His Word is very near, and our God can be found when anyone reaches out for him and seeks him from the heart, for he is always patiently waiting (Acts 17:27). He has always been ready to put his words of truth in our hearts, so we may believe and be saved (Romans 10:6-13). He calls us simply to acknowledge in our hearts that he is our living God, there is no other; and to accept that we need his grace to redeem us.

Choose Life, That You May Live (Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

Not only has God made his paths clear, he also tells them, and us, of the consequences of the choices he has set before us. God understands that the choice is not easy for human minds to make, because the wrong path may look better to our physical eyes. Our God is a compassionate God who will always be waiting for us to choose him and choose true life.

He sets before us these same choices (30:15-18). He reminds not to choose based on the world's appearances, but on the things our spirits really need. His caution is always not to let the world's empty things and thinking to lead our hearts to harden and turn away, for this leads only to spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1-3). If we continue to look above and walk in his ways of grace and truths, our hearts and spirits and souls will live (Ephesians 2:4-6).

God's reassuring call to us is not about obedience for obedience's sake, rather simply to stay near him, hold fast to God (30:19-20). Listen to his voice, and choose life, for those who listen and believe him have crossed over from death to life (John 5:24-25). God keeps reminding us that he simply wants us to seek him and love the Lord our God with all our hearts (Deuteronomy 6:4-6).

True life cannot be found in this world's objects nor its philosophies nor its achievements nor its pleasures, for all of these are empty and futile. Nor can we find life for our spirits in our own actions nor our abilities nor our own learning; rather, his call is to look above and see our God, who is all our life (Colossians 3:1-4).

The Next Steps On The Path (Deuteronomy 31:1-13)

The time has now come for Moses to leave this earth. He reassures Joshua that God will be with him and will not leave him. He reminds him and the Israelites too, to walk in God's ways and to listen carefully to God's words. God has given them his words to follow, so that his presence may be near each step of the way.

His path will lead us through this world's storms, so he calls us too not to be afraid, not to let them discourage us (31:1-8). Our God has chosen us too, and he will not leave us (Isaiah 41:9-10). Jesus cautioned us that we will indeed face trouble in this world, but he has overcome the world to bring us the true eternal life of walking with him and with our God (John 16:33)

Moses leaves the people with a final reminder, to read the whole law before them, at least every seven years (31:9-13), so they can listen to it and learn from it how to follow their God's paths, for the words of God are living and active (Hebrews 4:12).

God's Words bring us light and life, showing us the Way that human minds could never have found nor devised (Psalm 119:33-40, 119:89-96, 119:129-131). His words show us what is real and imperishable, they show us what is truly good for us, and they remind us what is true and right. His spiritual precepts speak eternal truths, truths that transcend time and place, for they speak God's deep thoughts to our souls that comfort our hearts.

- Mark Garner, June 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Fifteen: God Found Us In The Desert (Deuteronomy 31:14-32:47)

Moses faithfully leaves more thoughts for the Israelites to remember in future times. His 'song' tells them of God's relationship with them and it also tells us of the depths of God's heart. We see his longing to show compassion to them and to us, his patience when we stray, his reluctance to discipline us, his eagerness to keep us near.

God Is Our Rock, Whose Ways Are Just (Deuteronomy 31:14-32:9)

Moses reminds the Israelites once more of their tendency to turn their hearts away from God's paths. Then he writes down his 'song' along with the law, describing them as God's 'witnesses' should they turn from God. Moses reminds them of God's faithful ways and the ways his words of truth bless those who follow them.

Moses says that these writings will be God's 'witnesses' against those who turn away from God's words (overview of 31:14-31:29). They will remind them that God must turn his face away from them when their hearts have become hardened (Isaiah 59:1-2), not because God himself has left them, but because they have chosen to leave him. The law and Moses' 'song' will remind them of God's faithfulness and his patient reminder to follow him, not to reject him (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

The song describes God's words as showers on tender plants, giving them the spiritual nourishment we always need (31:30-32:9). His teachings give us life, falling like gentle rain showers falling on new grass (Isaiah 55:10-11), which he eagerly pours out on us. God is a trustworthy living Rock, whose words are perfect and who shows us the path we couldn't have found on our own, to rescue us from spiritual peril and be a sure foundation (Psalm 40:1-3)

Moses reminds the assembly too, that God's ways are gracious and faithful, even when we forget what he has done, for he always gives us the grace we need to strengthen us and keep us near (Isaiah 45:4-5). God has chosen his own portion, his own 'inheritance,' his own people. Of all the things in this world, God has chosen those whose hearts seek him to be his own holy people, his special possession (1 Peter 2:9).

A Look Into God's Heart (Deuteronomy 32:10-27)

Starting with the metaphor of God finding his people in a desert, these images illustrate the different aspects of God's heart. Some of these images may at first seem confusing or paradoxical, yet above all they show God's personal interest in us, his constant desire for us to know him for who he is.

These images vividly describe God's compassion for those who let him carry us (32:10-14). He finds us helpless when we had strayed off to a barren land, carries us home, and watches over us as the 'apple of his eye' (Luke 15:4-5). Moses describes how our God nourishes us with honey that comes as from the rock, for indeed he nourishes us with his spiritual truths, his words too deep for us to have imagined, and that are sweeter than honey to our spirits (Psalm 19:8-10).

This song also speaks of God's sorrow over human unfaithfulness (32:15-21). He understands how easy it is for us to pursue unknown 'gods' that offer false hopes. God is saddened when they choose these false gods instead of him, so his response is ironic and reveals even more of God's heart, his hopes to make them 'envious' by his blessings to those who hadn't known him.

This Scripture is quoted in Romans 10:19-20, and Paul goes on to describe God's further compassion and grace by the way this will make them 'envious' of the spiritual blessings he will give to the Gentiles, in hopes they too will turn to him (Romans 11:11-12).

The images go on to describe the combination of discipline and protection God gives to his people (32:22-27). He reluctantly must often show them his 'compassionate wrath,' his refining fire (Jeremiah 9:7). Yet he does not punish for punishment's sake; rather he refines us and does not strike us down, lest the Adversary misunderstand what he has done.

Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock (Deuteronomy 32:28-47)

Our living God is our Rock, all our strength, who is always near. No other 'rock' can be compared with God. This world's false gods offer only empty hopes and meaningless promises. Moreover, God himself is full of life, not a distant arbiter who doesn't care whether we live or not. He is near, hoping we will turn our hearts to him.

Moses again describes God's heart, his yearning that only if they would understand (32:28-43). His constant desire is to keep us close, as he keeps patiently calling us to look above to him. In spite of outward appearances, he will never abandon us. God keeps in reserve (in his 'vaults') to take vengeance on our spiritual enemies, by triumphing over them by the cross of Jesus (Colossians 2:13-15).

For on the cross, with our Lamb's perfect sacrifice, the flashing sword of his truth has taken spiritual vengeance (1 Corinthians 15:54-57), when Jesus swallowed up spiritual death in victory that brought us the true life of living in God's holy presence.

All of these words God has spoken are not just idle words, nor are they mere words to be the right answers to academic questions (32:44-47). God once more reminds us to take his words to heart, let them take root so we may live by them, for they are our life.

Our God is a Rock who gives our souls rest (Psalm 62:1-12). We can always put our trust in him, and he is always ready for us to pour out our hearts to him. This world's appearances and its false glitter and its shifting shadows are all illusions. What is true and certain is our God's grace and his unfailing love to those who seek him with our hearts.

- Mark Garner, June 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Sixteen: God Rides Across The Heavens To Help Us (Deut. 32:48-33:29)

In Moses' final address to the assembly, he pronounces a series of blessings for the tribes, and leaves them some images of their God's care and compassion for them. God came to us too as the dawn, a light out of darkness, and gives us instruction that could only come from him. And he did indeed ride across the heavens to descend to this earth to redeem us.

The Lord Came From Sinai (Deuteronomy 32:48-33:5)

After receiving God's promise, that he could see Canaan from Mount Nebo, Moses begins his last discourse to the Israelites. The images at the beginning depict God's majesty and his desire to come near his people, and his desire to teach them his ways. Moses uses the name Jeshurun, 'the upright one,' as a metaphor for Israel, the nation God had raised up.

God reminds Moses that he will see the land from a distance (32:48-52), though he, like Aaron and Miriam, will not enter it. We have seen this in Deuteronomy 3:21-29, and next time we will see the description of Moses' final hours on this earth.

God has raised us up as his people, too (33:1-5). He dawned upon us when Jesus came into this world's thick darkness (Isaiah 9:2) to give us the hope of things above. He came too with myriads of his holy ones, to give us a glimpse of his spiritual realms we can see when we let him open the eyes of our hearts (Hebrews 12:22-24). We have come to God's heavenly city, and to Jesus who brought us his New Covenant by shedding his blood for us.

God once instructed the assembly through Moses, and today he gives us instruction at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39-42). His truths that are full of the Spirit and life, that Jesus came to share with us, are a blessing no one can take away from us, the one thing we always need.

Blessings For The Tribes (Deuteronomy 33:6-25)

Though Moses pronounces these blessings tribe by tribe, and a few of the details in these blessings did have special significance to one or another of the tribes, many of these blessings are also among the spiritual things wants to give us too. We will only read a few excerpts of these verses, to get a general idea of what they say to us.

Moses begins with blessings for the tribe of Levi and others (33:6-11). God would use the Levites to teach his spiritual precepts to the other tribes, to help them understand what God meant by holiness and cleanness and uncleanness (Leviticus 10:10-11). This was to allow God to live near his people, and today he teaches us these same precepts, for now he wants to live in us and have us live in him.

Like the tribes of Israel, we are the ones the Lord loves (33:12-25). For today God has called the nations to come to him, and let him bless everyone who opens their hearts with precious dew and the deep waters (33:17) of his well of salvation (Revelation 22:17). His Spirit lives in us so he may bless us with the fruitfulness of the everlasting hills (33:15), the imperishable fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

And our God offers us treasures hidden in the sand (33:19), treasures waiting for us in the hills (Deuteronomy 8:9), the treasures of his deep truths that neither our human minds nor our efforts could ever have found on our own (Isaiah 45:3).

There Is No One Like God (Deuteronomy 33:26-29)

These final images of our God describe him in several ways. His majesty and his care for his scattered flock, his desire to be near us. The safety only God can give our souls, the life only he can bring to our spirits. Our God's vastness and the depths of his compassion for us are greater than human words could express.

God's majesty, compassion, and his care are described in these images of 'the God of Jeshurun,' the God of his people whom he had lifted up (33:26-29). Jesus came to this earth on the clouds of heaven to come and call us to his heavenly city (Daniel 7:13-14), to redeem us from the futility of this world's ways.

And he is our refuge, who holds us up with his everlasting arms (Psalm 5:11-12). God surrounds us with his presence, with his favor as a shield to protect our souls. So he makes our souls secure and safe, giving us an anchor for our souls (Hebrews 6:19) and to give us a living hope of the true life he has called us to.

We are a people saved by the Lord, those he has called from darkness to light, to whom he has shown mercy, and made us his special possession (1 Peter 2:9-10).

So we praise the Lord from our souls, our inner being (Psalm 103). We praise him for the many spiritual benefits he gives us, for he lifted us up from the pit to give us new life. He renews our spirits with his water of life and removes our sins, and he has compassion on us, because he knows we are weak. His love for those who seek him from the heart is from everlasting to everlasting.

- Mark Garner, July 2015

THERE IS NO ONE LIKE OUR GOD: STUDIES IN DEUTERONOMY

Notes For Week Seventeen: Our Spiritual Journey (Deuteronomy 34)

Moses now walks to the top of Mount Nebo, to look at the land of Canaan before he passes away. The reasons why Moses was not permitted to cross over into Canaan have never been entirely clear, yet he had already crossed over from spiritual death to the life of walking with God. Neither his journey nor the Israelites' journey was about merely reaching a physical land.

A View From The Mountain (Deuteronomy 34)

God now fulfills his promise, that Moses could see Canaan from Mount Nebo. He walks with God for the final hours of his earthly life, just as he had done for so many years. Even in all his troubled times, Moses had already found his true home, his home with God himself. Viewing Canaan at God's side was only the smallest foretaste of being in God's presence forever.

God shows Moses the land as far as the sea (34:1-4), to give him a sense of what the physical land was like, and a small sense of God's vastness too. It was a comforting view of an earthly land full of fields and groves and streams, yet it is only the tiniest glimpse of God's true blessings for those who seek him from the heart.

Just a brief view from above can give us too a sense of how high and deep God's love, his righteousness, and his faithfulness for us really are (Psalm 36:5-6). Moses had already crossed over, not across the physical river Jordan, but rather across from death to the real life of walking with God (John 5:24).

In his last moments, Moses is with God alone, and our faithful God gives Moses a special burial (34:5-8). No one knew where his grave was, and Moses finally came to understand that entering Canaan physically might have given him a few small moments of peace, yet many more times of trouble, turmoil and spiritual distress lay ahead, so this was an act of God's grace (Isaiah 57:1-2).

For indeed, God had carried him each step by his grace, as he does for everyone on earth from the day we are born (Isaiah 46:3-4).

Moses' earthly responsibilities will now be assumed by Joshua (34:9-12). Joshua was filled with the same Spirit of wisdom (1 Corinthians 10:3-4). Each of us has been offered the same Spirit and the same living water, available freely to everyone who loves God with all their heart. As we read in Paul's honest perspective of life on earth, it is better to be with Christ; so while we too live here in the desert, we continue to walk in faith (Philippians 1:21-26).

Our Spiritual Walk (Retrospect Of Deuteronomy)

The real journey of Israel was never about simply entering a mere physical land. It takes only eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea (Deuteronomy 1:2), but our spiritual walk is not about going from one physical place to another. God's call is to love the Lord, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For he is our life; there is no other.

Has anything so great as this ever happened? Just as our Heavenly Father spoke from the fire to his people, so Jesus came to live among us to bring true life, to redeem our souls (Deuteronomy 4:32-33, 1 Peter 1:8-9). He calls us to be his holy people, and chose us to be his treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6-9). And he makes an everlasting covenant of peace with each of us (Isaiah 54:9-10).

His call to us is not too difficult, because he has brought his words near, and in his New Covenant he writes them on our hearts (Deuteronomy 30:11-14, Romans 10:6-9). His simple call is just to look above and choose his path of life, because Jesus has come to be our light in this darkness. (Deuteronomy 30:19-20, John 1:4-5)

He found us too in the desert, the spiritual wasteland of this world's emptiness (Deuteronomy 32:10-11). And he rides across the heavens to be with us, for indeed who on earth is so blessed as to be saved by our living God.

He is the Lord, there is no other (Isaiah 45:2-8, 45:18-25). He walks with us, and gives us hidden treasures, spiritual blessings of grace and hope and his eternal teachings. He gives us his grace even when we don't acknowledge him, and he patiently reminds us that in our God alone are salvation and strength, for we are his blind, weak sheep.

He just asks us to acknowledge in our hearts that he is our living God; there is no other (Deuteronomy 4:39).

- Mark Garner, July 2015