



## Summary of Deuteronomy

### Introduction

The Israelites are in Trans-Jordan and are ready to cross over to inherit the land God had promised to them through their ancestor Abraham. In a series of speeches to the whole congregation, Moses provides a review of the past forty years, recounts much of the Levitical Laws, he warns the people of what will happen to them if they do not follow the statutes of God, teaches the nation a song of praise and gives a farewell speech. The chapter concludes with the death of Moses.

### Chapter One

The forty years of wandering in the wilderness was coming to an end for the Israelites and they were encamped east of the River Jordan. It would soon be time for them to cross into the Promised Land and Moses now embarks on a series of speeches to the people to prepare them for what lay ahead.

Moses provides a summary statement of the key events that had occurred from the time they had departed Mount Horeb to proceed to the Holy Land. He describes the reason for appointing leaders to remove some of the burden from Moses in making judgements between the people. He then gives an account of the twelve spies entering the land, the negative report by ten of them and the consequences for the people's refusal to trust God and enter the land of Canaan anyway. When the Israelites knew they were wrong they then tried to enter the land but were defeated by the Amorites for God had already decreed that all the adults born in Egypt, except for Joshua and Caleb, would perish in the wilderness.

### Chapter Two

Moses continues his sermon on the journey in the wilderness. God instructed them to go through the land he had given to Jacob's twin brother Esau. Since that people were from the same family as the Israelites, God told them they were to purchase what they needed from the people in the land and they were not to fight

against them - they would not win for God would be against them. He then gave them a similar command as they came to the land of Moab, for they were descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham.

The story recounts that those who were adults when they left Egypt had died during the wandering years, indeed God had sought them out to ensure they would die. He then gave them a similar command not to attack the people of Ammon for they too were descended from Lot but he would give them King Sihon and the Amorite peoples. Moses offered peace terms to King Sihon but he refused and came out against Israel and was defeated. Thus Israel destroyed all the land of the Amorites, their properties, killed all of the people but they took the livestock as spoil.

### **Chapter Three**

Moses continues the account with a military defeat of another Amorite king, King Og of Bashan. The land contained sixty fortified towns but Israel overcame them all, killing the king and all the people in the process. This land in the Transjordan would become the possession of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and for the half tribe of Manasseh. This demonstration of God's power was a reminder to Joshua of what God would also do for them when they went in to take possession of Canaan.

Moses came before God following this battle and requested that he be allowed to cross the Jordan so that he could continue to witness the power and might of God. The Lord rebuked him for this request but directed him to go to the top of Pisgah to view the land that the Israelites would possess. It would be Joshua that would have the privilege of taking the people across the river.

### **Chapter Four**

Moses reminds the people that God gave them the law at Horeb and that they are to remain obedient to them as they were given without human alteration. They are especially to remain faithful to God, not make any images as idols, and not worship pagan gods as the people did at Peor and were punished for it. The main purpose for them to observe God's laws is that the other nations would see them as a wise people and would be drawn to God through them.

Moses also warns the people that if they are disobedient they will be punished; indeed they will be exiled from the land. However, God will never forsake them or forget the covenant he has made with his people. What they have witnessed of their God choosing them as a people and the mighty miracles they had witnessed should always remind them that there is no other God or force in all creation to match him.

Moses then set up three cities of refuge in Transjordan where people could flee if they were unintentionally killed a fellow Israelite and a close relative of the deceased was seeking retribution against the perpetrator.

The chapter ends with a summary statement ending the first address and leading into Moses' second.

### Chapter Five

Speaking to all the people, Moses reminds them that the Sinai covenant that God made is not historic but with them, the current generation. He then goes on to repeat the Ten Commandments God had audibly given to the people. These, the Lord wrote on two stone tablets.

The experience of seeing the glory of God and hearing his voice scared the people and so they pleaded with Moses to be the only person to go before God to hear the rest of the law because they feared another personal encounter with God would kill them all. The Lord agreed and wished that the people would truly fear him sufficiently to always follow his statutes.

### Chapter Six

Israel is commanded to keep all the laws and statutes of God but above all it is the fact that God is to be loved above all things with heart, soul and might. This and the other laws are to be discussed openly with children so that they will grow up with the law of God in their hearts.

The Lord has given the people the free gift of a land that they had not helped to build. Moses warns the people that if they do not obey God when they are in the land, they will not only lose it but they too will perish. Again, they are to teach their children that it was God who, with mighty deeds, brought the people out of Egyptian slavery into the Promised Land.

### Chapter Seven

The people are being prepared to enter the Promised Land and are instructed that God will sweep away seven nations before them but it is up to the Israelites to see they are totally destroyed, especially their articles of pagan worship. In addition, Israel is warned they must not form alliances with the other nations nor must any of them intermarry. This is because they are God's chosen people, not because of anything they have done but because it was his will to release them from Egyptian slavery and bring them to this land.

If the people remain faithful to God then he will bless them immensely. The land will be blessed, as will their livestock and he will keep them free from sickness and disease.

They are also not to fear the nations they are about to take on in battle. God has already demonstrated his awesome power in Egypt and in their battles east of Jordan. He will do the same to the seven nations in Canaan but he will do it slowly, at a pace the people can manage to keep up with.

### **Chapter Eight**

The people are reminded that they were tested and chastised by God for the past forty years so that they would learn to trust him because, at the same time, he had met all their needs. They are called to remember this as they move into the rich and prosperous land the Lord is giving to them.

They are also warned that, when they become comfortable in the land, they are not to think they have succeeded by their own abilities but they are to remember it was God that gave it all to them. They are not to worship other gods or else the Lord will see them perish in the same way as the nations that will perish before them.

### **Chapter Nine**

The people are again encouraged that, although the opposing nations are strong and live in fortified towns, it is God who will go before them and victory is assured. They are also reminded that it is not because of their righteousness but the other nations' wickedness that the nations are being driven out.

The Israelites are also reminded of the times they opposed God. Even while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the laws they rebelled against God and built an idol in the form of a golden calf. Moses recounts how he had to intercede for them with God to avoid the entire nation being destroyed for their sins.

### **Chapter Ten**

Moses recounts how God had instructed him to carve out replacement stone tablets and an ark to contain them, and to return to the mountain to have the Ten Commandments re-written. Moses again stayed on the mountain for forty days and nights, praying so that God would forgive his people.

The story then turns to the next stage of their journey during which Moses brother Aaron, the high priest of Israel, died. Levi was to carry the ark and to minister before the Lord and therefore would receive no allotment of land.

Moses concludes the chapter with a summary of the law and an exhortation to the people of just how they are to act in order to maintain their special status as God's chosen people.

## **Chapter Eleven**

Moses commands the people that it is they who are to remember what God has done for them and not leave it to the next generation. He reminds them of just some of the things God has done in Egypt and since, including an example of those who died for their disobedience.

The land they are about to take is much more beautiful and fruitful than Egypt and God will keep it so provided the people obey his commandments. They are warned that giving into the temptation to worship the gods of the other nations will lead God to withdraw his care of the land.

The people are to know the Word of God and produce reminders to wear and see. They are to teach their children the commandments of God and ensure they keep them as well. If they do, the Lord will drive out the mighty nations that currently occupy the land from the southern borders to the Euphrates.

Moses completes the chapter by declaring a blessing on those who keep the commandments and a curse on those who do not. These blessings and curses are to be read aloud to the people from Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal respectively once they have taken the land.

## **Chapter Twelve**

The people are commanded to completely destroy all the religious shrines, objects and places of worship used by the nations they are to displace in the land. They are also warned not to even worship God in this way but are to do so according to his statutes in a place he shall designate. They are also warned about going their own way once they are in the land.

The people may make occasional voluntary offerings to God and eat them in their home town but the offerings prescribed under the law they must bring to the place that the Lord will determine. They are to slaughter their animals in a way that the blood is poured out onto the ground. Blood must not be eaten in the meat for the life of the animal is in the blood.

The chapter concludes with a further warning against apostasy by following the pagan worship of the other nations.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

Three scenarios (vv.1-5, vv.6-11, and vv.12-18) are addressed in which people are encouraged to worship other gods. The first warning is against false prophets who will try to entice the people away from God as a test to their obedience. Such people are to be put to death.

There is a further instruction against close friends and relatives, including a parent, spouse or child who tries to tempt a person into pagan practices. No mercy is to be shown to such a person, who is also to be put to death.

The chapter concludes with condemnation of whole towns who turn away from God. After a full investigation, the people are to be put to death, the whole town destroyed by fire and never rebuilt.

### **Chapter Fourteen**

After a brief statement warning the people not to follow certain pagan practices, Moses then outlines the various foods that the people may and may not eat. Finally, he deals with the tithes and offerings the people are to make.

### **Chapter Fifteen**

Debts are to be repaid by each seventh year the Sabbatical Year, else they become void within the community. However, the people are called upon to still lend to their poor neighbours even as the Sabbatical Year approaches, knowing that the debt will likely become void and unpaid. This does not apply to foreigners and other nations, who will be indebted to the people of God, providing Israel obeys God. Likewise, if anyone has bought a Hebrew servant, they may have them for six years but in the seventh year they are to release them as free people.

Each firstborn calf and lamb is to be offered to God and can be eaten by the family in God's presence at the location of his choosing. However, if the animals have any defects they cannot be offered in sacrifice to God but may still be eaten.

### **Chapter Sixteen**

The main focus of this chapter is to provide a summary of three of the great festivals that are to be compulsory for all men to attend. The first is the Passover, celebrating how God brought the people out of Egyptian slavery; the second is the Festival of Weeks, which is to thank God for the harvest; and the third is the Festival of Booths, which recalls how God sustained the people during the wilderness years.

The chapter concludes with the command to appoint judges and officials to provide civil government over the towns, with the final few verses starting a section outlining forbidden forms of worship.

### **Chapter Seventeen**

Moses continues to summarise the forbidden forms of worship. Of particular interest are the facts that anyone committing such offences against God needs to be investigated fairly and only convicted on the evidence of at least two reliable witnesses. If they are found to be guilty they are to be put to death.

Where cases are too complex for a local judge to rule in, then the case is to be taken to the place where the central administration has been set up so that the main judge and the Levitical priests may decide the case. Their judgement will be binding and any punishment they pronounce must be carried out.

The section concludes indicating that God knew the people would one day decide on a king. When they do so then he must be a man from their own people, someone who does not seek power and wealth for himself, and a man who will rule justly according to the statutes of God's law and Word.

### **Chapter Eighteen**

The first part of this chapter deals with the rights of the Levitical priests who shall have no land inheritance but may have allocated portions of the Lord's offerings to sustain them as they minister before the Lord.

The people are warned that they must never participate in magic nor should they make human sacrifices as both are abhorrent to God.

The chapter concludes with a promise that God will provide the Messiah, a prophet whom everyone must heed. In addition, there is a warning against those who either prophesy in the name of false Gods or who will claim to be speaking the words of God but are not.

### **Chapter Nineteen**

Having already set apart three cities of refuge in the Transjordan (Deuteronomy Chapter 4), the order is now given that the same should happen in the Promised Land once it is settled. The purpose of such cities is to allow a place of refuge for one who commits an accidental killing. It is a place where he or she would be safe from the victim's avenger of blood. When the land is fully expanded then a further three cities will be added. Those who commit murder will, however, be put to death.

A simple statement prohibiting the movement of another's land boundaries is added to ensure that no one tries to steal land from a neighbour.

There shall be no conviction of a crime based on a single testimony. It requires at least two or three reliable witnesses in order to obtain a conviction. If a person proves to be a malicious false witness then they shall be punished in the same way as the person against whom they are testifying would have been punished had they indeed been guilty.

### **Chapter Twenty**

Whereas the OT usually describes war through narrative, this chapter legislates what ought to happen in warfare. This law limits the conduct of warfare and

occurs in a section that could be headed 'You shall not murder,' devoted to ensuring no unnecessary loss of life. The concern is to minimise casualties in war. This law also distinguishes between enemy cities outside the boundaries of the Promised Land (vv.10-15) and those within the boundaries (vv.16-18). Even the latter case, however, need not result in total annihilation.

These laws on warfare, especially vv.16-18, create an ethical dilemma for Christians. However, three things should be considered:

1. The limits and restraint of these laws.
2. Their context in securing the Promised Land.
3. The priority of offering terms of peace to cities before attacking them.

In the NT, the Christian inheritance is a heavenly land: <<**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**>> (1 Peter 1:3-5), not an earthly one, and the language of warfare is used spiritually, as confirmed in Ephesians 6:10-17.

### Chapter Twenty One

The chapter commences by dealing with the situation where a person is killed in open country by persons unknown. The elders of the nearest town to the body are to kill a heifer at the site where the body was discovered and declare they are guiltless of this crime. The ceremony is to be blessed by Levites.

It then sets out the procedure for taking a captive female as a wife. After a month of mourning for being taken from her parents, she may become the wife of her captor. However, if he is dissatisfied with her as a wife he must set her free and not keep or sell her as a slave.

If a man has two wives and each bear him a son, the inheritance of the first born son are set as being by age and not by any preferential love for either wife. The firstborn son receives a double portion of the man's property and wealth when the father dies.

Because children are commanded to respect their parents then the punishment for gross disobedience is death. The judgement is to be made by the elders of the town, with the parents bearing witness against their own son. If he is found guilty of the charge, then the men folk of the town will stone him to death.

Anyone who is executed for their crime is to be hung on a tree as a warning to others. However, the corpse is not to be left on the tree overnight.

## **Chapter Twenty Two**

Moses completes a summary of miscellaneous laws, which had commenced at the end of the previous chapter. The chapter concludes with a number of laws relating to proof of a bride's virginity and sexual infidelity.

## **Chapter Twenty Three**

Men with damaged or missing genitals are not permitted into God's assembly. Neither are those born outside of wedlock. This is to be applied to the tenth generation. Ammonites and Moabites are also excluded from the assembly for ten generations because they opposed God's people's passage through into the Promised Land. Edomites are to be abhorred for all time by Israel but not so the Egyptians, who gave sanctuary to Israel for more than four hundred years. In fact, third generation Egyptians who are born in Israel are to be permitted into the assembly of God.

## **Chapter Twenty Four**

If a man divorces his wife and she remarries, then is either divorced or widowed, then her first husband may not marry her again. The rest of the chapter is taken up with a brief summary of miscellaneous laws.

## **Chapter Twenty Five**

The laws in this section relate to things such as the administration of justice, provision for widows, and honesty in business.

The miscellaneous law summaries conclude with a regulation dealing with a dispute between two parties and the punishment that may be incurred by the one in the wrong.

The law for Levirate marriages is specified, which deals with the requirement for a man to take his brother's childless widow as his wife with the first son being accepted as belonging to the dead man so that his name will continue. The law also specifies the punishment for those men who refuse to accept their responsibility to their dead brother's widow.

The chapter concludes with a series of short commands.

## **Chapter Twenty Six**

Moses concludes his second major address to the Israelites by instructing when to bring the first fruits offering and their tithes to the Lord and the purpose for them doing so, remembering that it was God who established their nation and brought them into the Promised Land. They are to understand that by doing so, they agree to obey the Lord and all his commands and statutes.

## **Chapter Twenty Seven**

Moses commences his third and final major speech to the elders and the people. He starts by instructing them to build an altar on Mount Ebal when they enter the Promised Land on which to make burnt-offerings in thanksgiving to God. They are also to erect stone pillars covered with plaster inscribing the written law on them.

He then instructs the people to gather with six tribes on Mount Ebal and the other six on Mount Gerizim. The Levites on Mount Ebal then loudly proclaim twelve curses that will fall upon the nation if they disobey God.

## **Chapter Twenty Eight**

The focus shifts from the specific sins that warrant curses to the content of the curses, preceded by a shorter list of blessings. The blessings of vv.1-14 are the converse of the curses in vv.15-68. The greater length devoted to the curses (54 verses compared to 14 verses for blessings) is suggestive of Israel's future.

## **Chapter Twenty Nine**

Moses speaks to the people and reminds them of what the Lord has already done for them in bringing them through the wilderness, defeating their many enemies on the way. However, they are reminded that they had already strayed from God and are warned of the devastating effects that will befall both the nation and the land if they and the generations to come do not comply with the covenant they had entered into with the Lord.

## **Chapter Thirty**

In this chapter is a plain intimation of the mercy God has in store for Israel in the latter days. This passage refers to the prophetic warnings of the last two chapters, which have been mainly fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and in their dispersion to the present day; and there can be no doubt that the prophetic promise contained in these verses yet remain to come to pass. The promises of God will be fulfilled for those who choose to obey.

## **Chapter Thirty One**

Moses already knew that he would not be the one to lead the people into the Promised Land but he still wanted to encourage them so he reiterated that it would be the Lord who would go before them and who would ensure they would be victorious in battle, just as he had been in the lands they had already conquered. He also informed them that it would be Joshua who would lead them and he commissioned Joshua in the sight of all the people.

Moses then wrote down the entire law and gave it to the priests to keep in the Ark of the Covenant. He also gave instruction that it was to be read every seventh year to the whole gathered nation during the Festival of Booths.

God summoned Moses and Joshua to the tent of meeting to commission Joshua as leader. However, before doing so, God stated that he knew that the people would soon forsake him and turn to other gods, bringing disaster upon themselves by doing so. Therefore, God instructed Moses to write a song that, along with the book of the law, would be learned by the people and that would act as a witness against them because they would forsake God rather than God forsaking them.

### Chapter Thirty Two

The chapter commences with the full song of Moses, which he teaches to the entire nation and instructs them to teach it to their children so that they too may obey God's Law.

God then instructs Moses to ascend Mount Nebo so that he may view the Promised Land, a land he is forbidden to enter. It will be on that mountain that Moses shall die.

### Chapter Thirty Three

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There is no mention of Simeon in the list of tribes, perhaps because the tribe was going to be dispersed: <<***Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel***>> (Genesis 49:7), being absorbed by Judah. The blessings are bracketed by statements praising God's uniqueness (vv.1-5 and vv.26-29).

### Chapter Thirty Four

Moses dies and is buried on Mount Nebo, overlooking the Promised Land.