
DEUTERONOMY 1-34

Lesson 11, Old Testament, Adult Religion Class, Tuesday, 8 Nov 2011

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OUTLINE

1. First Sermon: Historical Prologue (1:1 – 4:43)
 - a. Historical review (1:1 – 3:29)
 - b. Obey the Law (4:1 – 43)
2. Second Sermon: The Covenant (4:44 – 28:68)
 - a. Israel's relationship with the Lord (4:44 – 11:32)
 - i. Introduction (4:44-49)
 - ii. Ten Commandments (5:1-33)
 - iii. Commitment to God (6:1-25)
 - iv. No other gods (7:1-26)
 - v. Remember the Lord (8:1-20)
 - vi. Past rebellions (9:1 – 10:11)
 - vii. Love and obey the Lord (10:12 – 11:32)
 - b. Life in the Promised Land (12:1 – 28:68)
 - i. Worship instructions (12:1 – 16:17)
 - ii. Leadership (16:18 – 18:22)
 - iii. Society (19:1 – 23:14)
 - iv. Other laws (23:15 – 25:19)
 - v. Firstfruits and tithes (26:1-15)
 - vi. Blessings of obedience (26:16-19)
 - vii. Blessings and curses (27:1 – 28:68)
3. Third Sermon: A New Covenant (29:1 – 30:20)
4. Moses' Final Days (31:1 – 34:12)
 - a. New leadership (31:1-8)
 - b. Reading the Law (31:9-13)
 - c. The Song of Moses (31:14 – 32:47)
 - d. Directions (32:48-52)
 - e. Blessing (33:1-29)
 - f. Moses' departure (34:1-12)

INTRODUCTION

The book's title in English comes from the Greek, *Deuteronomion*, meaning 'second law' (two words combined: *deutero* meaning 'second' and *nomos*, meaning 'law') which Jerome turned into Latin *Deuteronomium*. The Hebrew name is the first two Hebrew words in the book: *ʿēleh hādēbārīm*, 'these are the words.' The concept of 'second law' comes from the thrust of the book which is a recitation of the Law to the second generation. Deuteronomy is a "pause in the narrative" (Alexander, 182) between the Exodus and approach to Palestine and the conquest of the land in Joshua, Judges, and Kings.

The book primarily consists of three sermons given by Moses to the people. The first was given on the first day of the eleventh month, forty years after the Exodus. The other two came over the next month or so. The concept is that Moses has brought the children of Israel as far as he could, since he was not allowed to cross the Jordan. Before this second

generation left him, however, he gathered everyone together for some final words, which were written down by scribes and became the book of Deuteronomy.

Though both give details about the Law, Deuteronomy differs from Leviticus in that the audience is the people, not the priests. Moses' prophetic vision covers Israel's past but also its future, even down to our day.

In both the New Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls, only Isaiah and Psalms are quoted more than Deuteronomy. There are at least 28 verses from Deuteronomy quoted in the New Testament (see "Quotations" in the Bible Dictionary).

Structurally, the book has many similarities to (though not a perfect model of) suzerain treaties of the ancient Near East when a ruler made a treaty with his vassals. The parts of the treaty were

typically as follows (with suggested chapters from Deuteronomy added):

1. Preamble (1:1-6)
2. Historical prologue (1-4)
3. Stipulations (5-26)
4. Witnesses (30-31)
5. Blessings and curses (27-28)
6. Oaths and ratification (29-32)

In the case of Deuteronomy, the Lord is the ruler making an alliance with his chosen people, Israel. This similarity to ancient texts helps argue for a more ancient origin of the book, in spite of some theories that have it not being written until the time of Hezekiah or Josiah, or perhaps later.

Moses' great concern in giving the sermons in Deuteronomy seemed to be a desire to help Israel continue to be faithful after they entered the Promised Land. Could they keep God in the forefront

of their lives? Moses was determined to do his part to make that happen. He did so by interpreting their experiences thus far and helping them remember all that the Lord has done for them.

Deuteronomy stands as a bridge between the other writings of Moses and the historical books (the 'former prophets,' as they are known to Jewish readers) of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. While it captures the essentials of the other books of the Pentateuch, it also foreshadows the themes and stories in the books that follow it. Those themes include: worship centralized in the house of the Lord; social justice, personal ethics and responsibility; *imitatio deo* (imitating God or trying to be like him); each generation is bound by the covenant (or needs to bind themselves); rulers need to read and obey the Law just like everyone else; and love and loyalty to God along with his love and loyalty to Israel.

FIRST SERMON: HISTORICAL PROLOGUE (1:1 – 4:43)

INTRODUCTION

Much of Deuteronomy is a retelling of events or information already recounted in Exodus, Leviticus, or Numbers, including these first three chapters. They focus on the information in Numbers that tells of Israel going from Sinai/Horeb to the initial conquests on the eastern side of the Jordan. An interesting characteristic is that Moses speaks to his audience as if they were there for these events, when in fact, most of them may not have been. But the oldest generation hearing his words at this time was

in the group of those under 20 years of age, who were not counted in the census in Numbers 1. Anyone over 20 at that time were told they would not see the Promised Land (Numbers 14:22-23) and would have died off during the 40-year wandering. Thus Moses could say "you" to this Deuteronomic audience because the elders of Deuteronomy were children, youth, or young adults at the time of the Exodus and did indeed witness it all.

COMMENTARY

Historical review (1:1 – 3:29)

The first verses give the physical location of the address, though our KJV has a mistranslation, called out in the footnote; it should read "on the other side of the Jordan" (JSB, 363). In other words, the editor of the book is in the Promised Land, looking back to the time when Moses and the children of Israel had not yet crossed over. Of course, the area where they

were was part of the inheritance of the tribe of Reuben, so technically they were already in land possessed by Israel, but the Jordan River is a key marker historically to the area under Israel's control (see Map 3 in the back of the LDS Bible). The other locations mentioned in the verse are for the most part unknown but appear to be on the trail that brought them to this point, which included battles

with “Sihon the king of the Amorites...and Og the king of Bashan” (see Numbers 21:21-35).

The speech itself begins in verse 6, reminding Moses’ listeners that when they were camped at Horeb (Mt. Sinai), the Lord told them to take their journey and outlines the boundaries of the land he has given them.

Verses 9-18 indicate the establishment of the leadership hierarchy and judges, which combines the account of Jethro giving his counsel to Moses (Exodus 18) and the leaders selected in Numbers 11:14-17. Jethro is not mentioned this time but the results are attributed to a revelation from the Lord, which is probably how Moses confirmed his father-in-law’s counsel before implementing it.

The story of the spies is retold in verses 22-46 (cf. Numbers 13) with some variations but the general outline is the same—the people murmured based on the spies’ negative assessment of their ability to conquer, so the Lord let no one from that generation of adults go into the land except Caleb and Joshua, but instead turned them back into the wilderness, so they “abode in Kadesh many days” (1:46).

Chapter 2 echoes Numbers 20-21 where the people finally begin to move north out of their forty-year stint in the wilderness. (Editorial insertions in verses 10-12 and 20-23 remind us of later redaction.) Moses recounts how he tried to pass peacefully through Moab but was rejected, so they had to go around.

Chapter 2 concludes and chapter 3 begins with the story of the conquests of Heshbon and Bashan, providing territory for Reuben, Gad, and part of Manasseh, and reminded those tribes of the promise they made to keep fighting beyond the Jordan to help with the remainder of the conquest. The chapter concludes with Moses asking to be let into the Promised Land and the Lord refusing (“speak no more unto me of this matter,” 3:26). The incident with the rock is not mentioned; this appears to be a later request by Moses to have the Lord reconsider. As a ‘consolation,’ the Lord invited Moses to go “the top of Pisgah” (3:27) and survey the land. The record of Moses doing this is in Deuteronomy 34:1-4 but there it is “the mountain of Nebo” he climbs, though also “to the top of Pisgah.” This makes sense because

the word *pisgah* means a ‘cleft’ or a ‘high place,’ and may not be the name of a mountain at all.

Obey the Law (4:1 - 43)

This exhortation concluding the first sermon is in chapter 4 and begins with a phrase translated either “hearken” or “hear” and used at least fourteen times in Deuteronomy, in many cases in the imperative as it is in 4:1: “Now therefore hearken, O Israel.” The Hebrew word used, *šəma*ֹ, means both to hear and to obey. JSB translates it “give heed” (JSB, 370).

The second verse is often used to counter those who cite Revelation 22:18-19 (don’t add to or take away from this book) as ‘proof’ that the Bible is all God wants us to have. Because Moses said something similar here (and also in 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; and Jeremiah 26:2), some Latter-day Saints use this to illustrate that both John and Moses were only speaking about their specific writings, not the (yet non-existent) Bible as a whole. The logic is correct but unnecessary, as no serious scholar of the New Testament believes John, Moses, or Jeremiah were saying anything else.

Moses took the people back to Mount Sinai where the Lord gave them the Law and appeared to them as fire and smoke. He reminded them not to have any other gods or images of gods, and stated again that he would not go with them into the land.

Moses prophesied that over time, the people would reject the Lord and “serve gods, the work of men’s hands” (4:28). For this reason, the people would be scattered among the nations. But he promised them that when this happened, if they were to “seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul” (4:29). In his mercy, God would not forsake them but would remember the covenant. As a reassurance of this, he asked them if God had ever done with other people as he had done with Israel, speaking to them, freeing them from another nation, giving them his Law. He concluded: “Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever” (4:40).

The postlude to the first sermon discussed the setting aside of three refuge cities in the eastern

areas of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, as already discussed in Numbers 35:9-15.

SECOND SERMON: THE COVENANT (4:44 – 28:68)

INTRODUCTION

The recitation of the Law in these chapters has some similarities to Exodus 20-23, though greatly expanded and in some cases overriding what was said earlier (see 12:13-14 and 15:12-18). In both cases, the Ten Commandments serves as the anchor text, the contents of which were recorded on the tablets by God himself. Yet the Ten differ in the two

accounts (less in the Hebrew than in the English, but still different), so in this version, Moses took the Ten Commandments he had received forty years prior and made them more applicable to his audience. He was also speaking on the Lord's behalf, reciting his words, letting him thus editorialize the need to obey "as the Lord they God commanded thee" (5:12).

COMMENTARY

ISRAEL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD (4:44 – 11:32)

Introduction (4:44-49)

These verses are a preamble or introduction to the second sermon, which is by far the longest of the three. It prepares us to receive "the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments" (4:45) which Moses was about to deliver and reminds us again of the location it was delivered.

Ten Commandments (5:1-33)

Calling Israel to *šēma*^c (often written "Shema"), Moses asked them to "learn", "keep", and "do" the words he said, meaning they should not only listen but put them to heart but observe and accomplish them. The laws he gave first are the Ten Commandments, already recited in Exodus 20 but here with some differences (see Appendix). The most significant difference is that the purpose for keeping the Sabbath in Exodus is that God kept it after creation, whereas in Deuteronomy, it is to remind Israel of God saving them from slavery in Egypt.

Moses reminded the people that they had the chance to commune directly with the Lord but they declined that opportunity, so Moses acted in their behalf in receiving the Law and sharing it with them. He concluded with the charge to "observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded

you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you" (5:32-33).

Commitment to God (6:1-25)

In the middle of a chapter advocating commitment to the Lord, verses 4-9 have come to be known as the *Shema*, which is the first word—Hear (or hearken).

"During the late Second Temple period [the time of Christ], this prayer rose to special prominence both in the synagogue liturgy and in individual piety, a position that it still maintains. Strikingly, Deuteronomy itself gives no indication that this passage is theologically important. Nor do any of the biblical passages that incorporate liturgical prayer refer to it (see Ezra 3.10-11; Neh. ch 9; 1 Chron. 16.7-36; 2 Chron. 5:11-14; 7.3); its formal recitation is not attested until late in the Second Temple period. The centrality of this text is likely the result of early rabbinic interpretation of the requirement to 'recite [these words] . . . when you lie down and when you get up' (vv. 6-7). This interpretation led to recitation of the Shema twice daily, in the morning and evening. A similar injunction to 'recite . . . these My words' is found at 11.18-19. Because of the double reference to 'these words,' the prayer was formally defined as including both paragraphs (6.4-

9; 11.13-21). A third paragraph was also added (Num. 15.37-41): the requirement to wear a garment whose fringes (*tzitzit*) provide a further context for reflection upon Torah and fulfilling its precepts.

“Modern readers regard the Shema as an assertion of monotheism, a view that is anachronistic. In the context of ancient Israelite religion, it served as a public proclamation of exclusive loyalty to YHWH as the sole Lord of Israel. Subsequently, as the *Shema* became incorporated into the synagogue liturgy, its recitation was also given legal significance. The prayer was regarded as a legally binding oath to carry out the requirements of the Torah. Through the liturgical recitation of the Shema the worshipper thus reenacts, twice daily, the original covenant ratification ceremony that, in the narrative of Deuteronomy, took place on the plains of Moab” (JSB, 379-380).

The references in verses 8 and 9 led to the practice of using the *tefillin* (called phylacteries in the NT) during prayer and the *mezuzot* on the doorpost (see footnotes in the LDS Bible).

The balance of chapter 6 is an admonition to stay true to the Lord, keep his commandments, and to remember that had had brought them “out of Egypt with a mighty hand” (6:21).

No other gods (7:1-26)

The Lord chose Israel “to be a special people unto himself” (7:6) not because they were somehow better than others but “because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers” (7:8). Because of that love and commitment, Israel should keep God’s commandments. Such obedience would bring even greater blessings, even “above all people” (7:14).

Remember the Lord (8:1-20)

Israel was led through the wilderness forty years that they might be humbled, tested, and that God might “know what was in thine heart” (8:2). Now he promised them a good land with water, food, and natural resources. Moses said, “Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God” (8:11) when prosperity followed. Don’t say, “My power and the might of

mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (8:17), but remember that it all came from the Lord.

Past rebellions (9:1 – 10:11)

Moses was clear with Israel that though they were about to inherit a land possessed by “nations greater and mightier than thyself” (9:1), they were to remember that it was not because of their own worthiness: “Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess the land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (9:5).

Lest they forget, Moses then reminded them of the things they (really, their parents) had done, including making the molten image and not believing that they could possess the land at Kadesh-Barnea. But the Lord mercifully replaced the tablets of the Law that Moses broke when he found them worshipping the calf (minus “the words of the everlasting covenant of the holy Priesthood,” according to the JST) and prepared them to enter the Promised Land.

Love and obey the Lord (10:12 – 11:32)

After reciting past sins, Moses counseled Israel to cleanse themselves of all uncleanness: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart” (10:16). The metaphor will later be picked up by Jeremiah (4:4) and Paul (Romans 2:29).

Verses 13-21 are the second paragraph of the *Shema*, also called by itself the *Vehayah* (after the first word, translated ‘And it shall come to pass’) promising rain, good crops, and food for animals. But if Israel served other gods, “then the Lord’s wrath be kindled against you” (11:17). To avoid that, they were counseled to “lay up these words in your heart and in your soul” (11:18), teach them to their children, and “write them upon the door posts” (11:20), just as the atoning blood was first written on their doorposts as a reminder of God’s power to save.

A future ceremony is called for that included a blessing and a curse, the former put on mount

Gerizim and the latter on mount Ebal. More details about this ceremony are given in Deuteronomy 27-

28, and Joshua later fulfilled this (Joshua 8).

LIFE IN THE PROMISED LAND (12:1 – 28:68)

Worship instructions (12:1 – 16:17)

The second part of the second sermon is the “legal corpus” (JSB, 391) of Deuteronomy that adds to and interprets the Law as already revealed in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. It begins with a reminder to fully destroy the inhabitants of the land. Then comes the first but not final notification that worship would be centralized once they entered the Promised Land: “But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come” (12:5).

Chapter 12 mostly discusses sacrifices and killing and eating animals when not near the designated sanctuary, closing with a final warning to not worship the gods of the land they were about to inhabit.

Chapter 13 continues the warnings about worshipping other gods, admonishing that even if a prophets whose signs or wonders come to pass, or a close family member tries to lure them away, that Israel should stay faithful to YHWH and “walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him” (13:4). The punishment for those who worship the false gods and attempt to lure Israel away was death.

Chapter 14 covers what is appropriate to eat and what is not, with the general rule that anything with a cloven hoof and that chews the cud is fine; anything with fins and scales in the water is good to eat; any clean fowl is acceptable. The KJV notes that Israelites were not to eat these things but “thou shalt give it unto the stranger,” implying that it was fine to feed unclean things unto non-Israelites that lived among them. The JST changes this verse by adding two “not”s: “thou shalt **not** give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest **not** sell it unto an alien” (14:21). They were to share with the Levites, the stranger, the orphan and the widow.

Chapter 15 revisits the Jubilee laws of release people from debt or bondage after seven years. Chapter 16 up to verse 17 is a reminder to keep the Passover celebration in the month of Abib to remember their time as slaves in Egypt, the Feast of Weeks seven weeks later, and the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall.

Leadership (16:18 – 18:22)

This section begins with a comment about “judges and officers” in each town who need to treat people equally and not take bribes which would “blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (16:19). Those worshipping other gods were to be stoned. Capital punishment was only to be used with “two witnesses, or three” (17:6). The method of stoning was that the witnesses were to throw the first stones, then everyone else.

Chapter 17 includes a section about the responsibilities of a king, who needed to be an Israelite, not a foreigner. He should not “multiply horses” (have a large standing army) nor send people to slavery or have many wives. He was to have and read a copy of the Law. This ideal image of a king makes him not the ultimate judge of the people but a divinely-appointed and obedient servant of the people.

Chapter 18 outlines how priests and Levites were to receive their support, since they have no tribal lands and are to be priesthood ministers of the other tribes. They were to have no substitutes for the priesthood, such as diviners or wizards.

In the middle of chapter 18 is a prophecy by Moses that is quoted in every other standard work of the Church. Deuteronomy 18:15-18 speaks of a “prophet” like Moses who will have God’s “words in his mouth” (15:18). Moses told the people to hearken to this prophet. Peter quoted this in Acts 3:22-23, speaking to the multitude at the temple and telling them it was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Nephi (1 Nephi 22:21) likewise affirms it applies to the Savior, as did Moroni speaking to Joseph Smith (Joseph Smith-History 1:40). D&C 28:2 alludes to

this scripture, applying it likewise to Joseph Smith. Most importantly, in 3 Nephi 20:23, the Savior applied it to himself.

This section concludes with counsel about how to tell a false prophet: “if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken” (18:22).

Society (19:1 - 23:14)

The next section covers a variety of topics related to how those in society should interact and deal with certain issues. Cities of refuge were appointed to give a temporary place for someone who accidentally murdered to go while the elders and judges determined what to do. If the killing was accidental, then the person could go free, but if it was determined that the murderer did “lie in wait” (19:11), he was to be delivered “into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die” (19:12). False witnesses were to receive the punishment the person would have received if he had been truly guilty.

The Lord would fight their battles, and reasons for soldiers to be excused from battle were outlined. Cities were not to be attacked who were willing to pay tribute but the command was issued to destroy specific people in the Promised Land.

Chapter 21 discusses what to do if someone was found murdered but the killer was not known, a procedure involving a heifer could be used to assure that the people of the city were not the murderers.

A law about marrying a woman captured in battle was also given in chapter 21, along with inheritance rules with multiple wives. Rebellious sons were to be stoned—meaning not just one who talks back to his parents but someone who violates the Lord’s commandments even after multiple discussions with father and mother. This section includes an important verse to the New Testament, especially the writings of Paul: “he that is hanged [on a tree] is accursed of God” (21:23). Paul used this to teach that though Jesus was hung on a tree (the wood cross) that he was accursed but not because of what he did; rather, he was “made a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13).

Men were counseled in chapter 22 to take care of each other—help another’s animals in trouble, for example, or make sure you have a “battlement” (22:8) or railing, on your roof to keep someone from accidentally falling off. If a man married a woman and accused her of not being a virgin, the process was outlined that her parents could establish that; if they could not, she was to be stoned. Likewise, a man sinning sexually was to die.

Various activities that would make a person unclean were discussed in chapter 23 but Israel was also counseled not to “abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother” as well as an Egyptian.

Other laws (23:15 - 25:19)

Many of the laws in this section are very specific and terse and include: run-away slaves were not to be forced to return to their masters (23:15-16); no interest charged on loans to fellow Israelites (23:19-20); you can eat grapes and wheat while in a neighbor’s crops but not carry any away (23:24-25); divorced couples cannot remarry later if the wife married someone else since the divorce (24:1-4); a half-millstone could not be used as security in a loan (because the person could no longer mill grain (24:6); parents shall not be put to death for their children’s mistakes (24:16); leave something in your harvested field for the stranger, orphan, or widow to take (24:19-22); how to give forty stripes (25:1-3); brothers are to marry their dead brother’s wife to raise up seed for him (25:5-10); use fair weights and measures (25:13-15).

Firstfruits and tithes (26:1-15)

Moses gave the people a special charge to perform after their arrive in their new land in conjunction with the Feast of Weeks, turning that occasion also into a remembrance of their freedom from slavery in Egypt. Additionally, the tithing used to support the priests and Levites and later the temple includes a statement of full tithe paying in 26:12-15, similar to our declaration of tithing status during tithing settlement in the Church today (though we are much less formal).

Blessings of obedience (26:16-19)

The summary of the laws in 26:16-19 is that God has given all these laws to Israel who must commit to “keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul” (26:16). The nature of the covenant is that Israel declares to follow the Lord and his commandments and the Lord in turn declares Israel to be “his peculiar people” (26:18), to make them “an holy people unto the Lord thy God” (26:19).

Blessings and curses (27:1 – 28:68)

To conclude this lengthy sermon, Moses gave more details to the ceremony requested in 11:29-32. Moses instructed the people to set up “great stones” (27:2) and plaster them so they could be written on with “all the words of this law” (27:3). The stones

were to be at Mount Ebal next to a stone altar for burnt offerings and peace offerings. Moses further instructed that half the tribes should stand on Mount Gerizim as a symbol of blessing coming from obedience and half on Mount Ebal to represent the curse of disobedience. A Levite would then speak the curses in 27:14-16, followed by a recitation of blessings in 28:1-14—prosperity, posterity, overcoming enemies, being a holy people “called by the name of the Lord” (28:10). Finally, in the bulk of the longest chapter in Deuteronomy, additional curses are outlined for a disobedient Israel—crops, children, destruction by enemies, disease, madness, and more. The ultimate punishment was to be scattered among the nations as slaves.

THIRD SERMON: A NEW COVENANT (29:1 – 30:20)

COMMENTARY

The third and final sermon is the shortest, filling only two chapters. Following a brief recap of their history again, Moses called on the people to stand together to “make this covenant and this oath” (29:14). He instructed that if they should break the covenant, that the land would be cursed so that others would come and see the desolation and say, “they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers” (29:25). He counseled them to remember both the blessings and the curses and obey the voice of the Lord so that even after being scattered, the Lord would “bring thee into the land

which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it” (30:5). If they served God, they would receive the blessings and their enemies the curses already outlined. The poetic conclusion of the sermon enjoins them to see that the Law set before them is not hidden, hard to find or understand, “but the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it” (30:14). The choice is there: “life and good, and death and evil” (30:15). Moses pled with the people: “therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (30:19).

MOSES’ FINAL DAYS (31:1 – 34:12)

INTRODUCTION

COMMENTARY

New leadership (31:1-8)

Moses was 120 years old—too old to “go out and come in” (31:2) anymore. God will lead them to victory under the leadership of Joshua, who had already been called and set apart for this purpose

(Numbers 27:18). Moses told the people to “Be strong and of a good courage” (31:6), a phrase that is used three times here at the end of Deuteronomy and again four times in the book of Joshua.

Reading the Law (31:9-13)

Moses commanded the priests and Levites that during the Feast of the Tabernacles once every seven years that they were to read the Law to the people, that the people might know the Law and little children would even “learn to fear the Lord” (31:13).

The Song of Moses (31:14 – 32:47)

Chapter 32 is the actual song (or, poem). Leading up to it, the Lord first warned Moses that it was time for him to leave, so he and Joshua presented themselves in the Tabernacle. The Lord appeared to them and said that one day Israel would go astray, causing the Lord to hide his face. So he gave Moses this poem to teach them, so when that happened, they would look back and read the poem and know of their sins. So Moses “wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the children of Israel” (31:22).

Writing all the words of the Law, he gave it to the Levites and told them to put it next to the Ark of the Covenant. Then he gathered the people to deliver the song.

The song/poem reminds them of God’s greatness and the corruption of mankind. He blessed them greatly, even though they worshipped other gods. Other nations might have their gods, but “their rock is not as our Rock” (32:31). There is no other god with the Lord; he controls life and death. God will avenge Israel of her enemies.

Moses’ concluding remarks were: “Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land” (32:46-47).

Directions (32:48-52)

In preparation for his separation from Israel, the Lord instructed Moses to get up into Mount Nebo. There he would have a terrific view of the land his people who inherit, even if he could not go in himself.

Blessing (33:1-29)

The circumstances are not stated, but this chapter records a final blessing Moses left on the tribes

before his departure. (Since it interrupts the story at the end of 32 and the beginning of 34, it was likely inserted later.) Like Jacob before him, he blessed them tribe by tribe, as if they were individual sons. The blessings are recorded in a chiasmic structure, with 2, 4, and 5 matching 29, 28, and 26, respectively.

Unlike Jacob’s blessings, Levi gets a very long blessing here, likely because Moses was of that tribe, but Joseph still gets the longest.

Moses’ departure (34:1-12)

Ascending the mountain, the Lord showed him the whole land, from Dan in the north to the sea in the west to Zoar in the south. The Lord told Moses this was the land promised to his fathers.

The KJV text records that “Moses the servant of the Lord died there” (32:5) and that the Lord “buried him in a valley in the land of Moab” (32:6). The JST clarifies that “**the Lord took him unto his fathers** in a valley in the land of Moab.” The phrase “took him unto his fathers” is unique to this verse in the scriptures, though it points to other concepts, such as Genesis 7:24/Moses 8:2 where Methusaleh was “not taken” like Enoch his father and Genesis 14:24 (JST) where we learn that “men having this faith, coming up unto this order of God, were translated and taken up into heaven.” The implication is that Moses, like Melchizedek and others of his day, became an inhabitant of the city of Enoch and went ‘unto their fathers.’ Moses’ translation is alluded to in D&C 84:25, received about the same time as the translation of Deuteronomy, where it says that God “took Moses out of their midst.” The Jewish historian Josephus gave an interesting non-scriptural account of Moses’ departure, explaining that he went with a group of men to a high mountain while Israel wept, then he dismissed all but Eleazar the high priest and Joshua:

...and as he was going to embrace Eleazar and Joshua, and was still discoursing with them, a cloud stood over him on the sudden, and he disappeared in a certain valley, although he [Joshua?] wrote in the holy books that he [Moses] died, which was done out of ear, lest they should venture to say that, because of his extraordinary

virtue, he went to God (Josephus, Antiquities, 3.8.49).

The brass plates of the Book of Mormon appear to have used similar language as the KJV in relation to Moses: “the saying went abroad in the church that he [Alma] was taken up by the Spirit, or *buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses* (Alma 45:19, italics added). But the Book of Mormon Saints clearly understood this reference to “burial” to mean something other than dying, because the writer goes on to say that they supposed that like Moses, the Lord “has also received Alma in the spirit, unto himself” (Alma 45:19). Thus the JST change in Deuteronomy 34 may not have been reflected in the language of the brass plates, but it certainly captures the meaning of the phrase as it was understood by those who read it anciently.

Like Elijah, Moses was translated for a specific role, to restore keys of authority to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration prior to the

resurrection (Matthew 17:3-4; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30-31). He also appeared in the Kirtland temple to give the same keys to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (D&C 110:11).

After Moses departure, “Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days” (34:8). Joshua took his leadership position, “and the children of Israel hearkened unto him” (34:9).

The redactor of Deuteronomy gives the highest praise to Moses in his concluding remarks: “And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel” (34:10-12).

APPENDIX

EXODUS 20 AND DEUTERONOMY 5 COMPARED

<i>Exodus 20</i>	<i>Deuteronomy 5</i>
2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.	6 I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.
3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.	7 Thou shalt have none other gods before me.
4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:	8 Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth:
5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;	9 Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,
6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.	10 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.
7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.	11 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.
8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy .	12 Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee .
9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:	13 Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work:
10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor	14 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor

thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:	thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.
11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.	15 And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.
12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.	16 Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee ; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.
13 Thou shalt not kill.	17 Thou shalt not kill.
14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.	18 Neither shalt thou commit adultery.
15 Thou shalt not steal.	19 Neither shalt thou steal.
16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.	20 Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour.
17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.	21 Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's.

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