

Deuteronomy

1

Summary: Moses addresses all Israel east of the Jordan, recounting the journey from Horeb to Kadesh — the appointment of leaders, the sending of spies, and Israel's refusal to enter the land.

What Makes This Remarkable: The book's Hebrew title Devarim ('Words') comes from the opening phrase elleh ha-devarim. This is Moses's voice — the only book where the lawgiver speaks in sustained first person. The word be'er (v. 5), meaning 'to explain or make clear,' signals that Deuteronomy is not new legislation but Moses interpreting the Law for a new generation that did not stand at Sinai.

Translation Friction: We rendered eikhah (v. 12) as 'how' — the same word that opens the book of Lamentations. Moses asks 'how can I alone bear your burden?' with a word that will later ask 'how desolate the city sits.' The resonance is deliberate but untranslatable without a note. The verb be'er ('explain') appears only here and in 27:8 and Habakkuk 2:2.

Connections: The spy narrative retells Numbers 13-14 from Moses's perspective, with key differences in emphasis. The phrase 'the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son' (v. 31) is echoed in Isaiah 63:9 and Hosea 11:3. The Horeb-to-Kadesh journey becomes a paradigm for Israel's pattern of promise, rebellion, and consequence.

¹These are the words that Moses spoke to all of Israel on the east side of the Jordan — in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazereth, and Di-zahab. ²(It is an eleven-day journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by way of Mount Seir.) ³In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses addressed the Israelites with everything the LORD had commanded him to tell them, ⁴after he had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled from Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who ruled from Ashtaroth at Edrei. ⁵On the east side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this Law, saying: ⁶The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb: 'You have stayed at this mountain long enough.' ⁷Break camp, set out, and go to the hill country of the Amorites and to all the neighboring regions — the Arabah, the hill country, the western foothills, the Negev, and the coastal plain — the land of the Canaanites, and on to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates. ⁸Look — I have placed the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors — to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — to give to them and to their descendants after them. ⁹I said to you at that time: 'I cannot carry the burden of you by myself.' ¹⁰The LORD your God has made you numerous, and today you are as many as the stars in the sky. ¹¹(May the LORD, the God of your ancestors,

increase you a thousand times over and bless you just as He promised you!) ¹²How can I carry by myself your troubles, your burdens, and your disputes? ¹³Choose for yourselves wise, discerning, and experienced men from each of your tribes, and I will appoint them as your leaders. ¹⁴You answered me and said, 'What you have proposed is a good plan to carry out.' ¹⁵So I selected the leaders of your tribes — wise and experienced men — and appointed them as heads over you: commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officials for your tribes. ¹⁶I instructed your judges at that time: 'Hear the cases among your fellow Israelites and judge fairly between a person and his brother or the resident foreigner among him.' ¹⁷Show no partiality in judgment. Give the small and the great an equal hearing. Do not be intimidated by anyone, because judgment belongs to God. Any case too difficult for you, bring to me and I will hear it. ¹⁸At that time I gave you instructions regarding everything you were to do. ¹⁹We set out from Horeb and traveled through that entire vast and terrifying wilderness that you saw for yourselves, along the route to the Amorite hill country, just as the LORD our God had directed us, and we arrived at Kadesh-barnea. ²⁰I said to you, 'You have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving to us.' ²¹Look — the LORD your God has placed the land before you. Go up and take possession of it, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid, and do not lose heart. ²²Then all of you approached me and said, 'Let us send men ahead of us to scout out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we should take and the cities we will encounter.' ²³The plan seemed good to me, so I selected twelve men from among you, one from each tribe. ²⁴They set out and went up into the hill country, reaching the Wadi of Eshcol, and explored it. ²⁵They took some of the produce of the land in their hands and brought it down to us. They gave us their report and said, 'The land that the LORD our God is giving us is good.' ²⁶But you refused to go up. You rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. ²⁷You grumbled in your tents and said, 'The LORD hates us! That is why He brought us out of Egypt — to hand us over to the Amorites so they could destroy us.' ²⁸'Where can we possibly go? Our own brothers have made our hearts melt, reporting: "The people are bigger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with fortifications reaching to the sky. We even saw the descendants of the Anakim there.'" ²⁹I told you, 'Do not be terrified of them. Do not be afraid of them.' ³⁰The LORD your God, who goes before you — He Himself will fight for you, exactly as He did for you in Egypt right before your eyes, ³¹and in the wilderness, where you saw how the LORD your God carried you as a father carries his child through the entire journey you traveled, until you reached this place. ³²Yet despite all this, you did not trust the LORD your God — ³³who went ahead of you on the road, scouting out camping places for you — in fire by night to light your path, and in a cloud by day. ³⁴The LORD heard your words and was angry. He took an oath, saying: ³⁵'Not a single person of this evil generation will see the good land that I swore to give to your ancestors — ³⁶except Caleb son of Jephunneh. He will see it, and I will give the land he walked on to him and to his descendants, because he followed the LORD wholeheartedly.' ³⁷The LORD was also angry with me because of you, saying, 'You too will not enter there.' ³⁸Joshua son of Nun, who serves before you — he will enter there. Strengthen him, because he is the one who will lead Israel to inherit it. ³⁹As for your little ones, whom you claimed would become plunder, and your children who today cannot yet tell good from evil — they are the ones who will enter there. I will give it to them, and they will take possession of it. ⁴⁰But as for you — turn around and head back into the wilderness, toward the Sea of Reeds. ⁴¹You responded and said to me, 'We have sinned against the LORD. We will go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us.' So each of you strapped on your weapons of war and thought it easy to march up into the hill country. ⁴²But the LORD said to me, 'Tell them: Do not go up. Do not fight — because I am not with you. Otherwise you will be defeated by your enemies.' ⁴³I told you this, but you refused to listen. You rebelled against the LORD's command, and arrogantly you marched up into the hill country. ⁴⁴The Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you and chased you as a swarm of bees does, crushing you in Seir all the way to Hormah. ⁴⁵You came back and wept before the LORD, but the LORD would not listen to your cries or pay attention to you. ⁴⁶So you remained at Kadesh for a long time — all those many days that you stayed there.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *elleh ha-devarim* ('these are the words') opens Deuteronomy as a formal speech act — *devarim* encompasses words, matters, and events. Moses is positioned *be'ever ha-yarden* ('on the far side of the Jordan') looking toward the promised land he will never enter. The location *mul Suph* ('opposite Suph') is debated: it may refer to the Yam Suph (Sea of Reeds) region or a specific locale near Moab. The cluster of place names — Paran,

Tophel, Laban, Haterot, Di-zahav — likely marks stages of Israel's wilderness journey, reminding the audience of the long road that brought them here.

2. This parenthetical note creates sharp dramatic irony: the *achad asar yom* ('eleven-day journey') from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea that should have been a brief march stretched into forty years because of Israel's rebellion. The contrast between the short distance and the long detour frames the entire book's message about the consequences of disobedience.
3. The precise dating — *arba'im shanah* ('fortieth year'), *ashte-asar chodesh* ('eleventh month'), *echad la-chodesh* ('first of the month') — places this speech near the very end of the wilderness period and of Moses's life. The phrase *k'kol asher tsivah YHWH oto* ('according to everything the LORD had commanded him') establishes that Moses speaks not on his own authority but as the faithful mediator of divine instruction.
4. The verb *hakoto* ('his striking/defeating') from the root *nakah* places these victories as the immediate backdrop to Moses's speech. Sihon in Heshbon and Og in Ashtaroth/Edrei represent the two Transjordanian powers whose defeat opened the east bank of the Jordan for Israelite settlement. Ashtaroth may derive from the name of the goddess Ashtoreth, suggesting a former cultic center.
5. The verb *ho'il* ('undertook, resolved, began') signals Moses's deliberate decision to expound the instruction before his death. The verb *be'er* ('to make clear, to explain, to engrave') implies not mere repetition but clarification and commentary — Moses is interpreting and applying the Torah for a new generation. This frames Deuteronomy as authorized exposition of Sinai legislation, not simply a restatement.
6. The phrase *rav lakhem shevet* ('enough for you to dwell') uses *rav* ('much, enough, sufficient') as a divine directive to end the Horeb encampment. The command signals transition: the purpose of Sinai — receiving the covenant — is complete, and the people must now move toward the land where they will live it out. Moses uses 'our God' (*Eloheinu*) to include himself in the community being addressed.
7. God's command uses three imperatives — *penu* ('turn'), *us'u* ('travel'), *uvo'u* ('go in') — conveying urgency. The geographical catalog describes the entire promised land through its ecological zones: *aravah* (rift valley), *har* (hill country), *shfelah* (western foothills/lowlands), *negev* (southern desert), and *chof ha-yam* (seacoast). This comprehensive survey — from the Amorite hills to the Euphrates — represents the maximum extent of the divine land grant.
8. The imperative *re'eh* ('look, see') calls for attentive recognition of what God has done. The verb *natati* ('I have given') uses the perfect tense — the gift is already accomplished from God's perspective even though Israel has not yet entered. The command *reshu* ('take possession') from *yarash* implies displacing current inhabitants. The patriarchal oath — to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — anchors the land promise in covenant history, reinforcing that this is not mere conquest but covenant fulfillment.
9. The verb *se'et* ('to carry, to bear') from *nasa* conveys the weight of leadership — the same verb used of carrying a physical load. Moses's admission *lo ukhal levadi* ('I am unable alone') echoes the crisis of Numbers 11:14 and anticipates the delegation structure that follows. The phrasing reflects both honest vulnerability and practical wisdom about governance.
10. The verb *hirbah* ('multiplied, made numerous') from *ravah* directly fulfills the patriarchal promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:5, 22:17). The simile *k'kokhvei ha-shamayim la-rov* ('like the stars of heaven in abundance') is a covenant marker — what was once a promise to a childless man is now a visible reality. Moses presents the very problem of governance (too many people) as evidence of divine faithfulness.
11. This parenthetical blessing — *yosef aleikhem kakhem elef pe'amim* ('may He add upon you like you a thousand times') — interrupts Moses's complaint about the people's numbers with a spontaneous prayer for even more growth. The jussive *vivarekh* ('and may He bless') expresses Moses's genuine desire for Israel's flourishing even as he acknowledges the burden of their size. The interjection reveals Moses's pastoral heart.
12. The exclamatory *eikhah* ('how?!') expresses overwhelmed frustration — the same word that opens the book of Lamentations. Three nouns escalate the problem: *torchakhem* ('your troublesomeness/difficulty'), *masa'akhem* ('your load/burden'), and *rivkhem* ('your quarrels/legal disputes'). Together they describe the full weight of communal leadership: dealing with difficult people, bearing responsibility, and adjudicating conflicts.
13. The imperative *havu lakhem* ('select for yourselves') places responsibility on the people to identify qualified candidates. Three qualifications are listed: *chakhamim* ('wise' — possessing practical wisdom), *nevonim* ('discerning' — having intellectual clarity and insight), and *vidu'im* ('known/recognized' — carrying public reputation and trust). Moses retains the authority to formally install them (*va'asimem* — 'I will set them') but shares the selection process.
14. The people's unanimous response — *tov ha-davar asher dibarta la'asot* ('good is the thing you have spoken to do') — contrasts sharply with their later refusal at Kadesh-barnea. When leadership structure serves their interests, they agree readily; when faith is demanded, they rebel. Moses may be drawing this contrast deliberately for his audience.
15. The tiered leadership structure — *sarei alafim* ('chiefs of thousands'), *sarei me'ot* ('chiefs of hundreds'), *sarei chamishim* ('chiefs of fifties'), *sarei asarot* ('chiefs of tens') — creates a decimal administrative system. The *shotrim* ('officials, officers') served as administrators and record-keepers. Notably, Moses mentions only *chakhamim* and *vidu'im* ('wise and known') here, omitting *nevonim* ('discerning') from verse 13 — perhaps indicating that perfect candidates were unavailable.
16. The infinitive absolute *shamo'a* ('hearing' — hear thoroughly) demands careful, complete attention to testimony. The command *ushfatem tsedek* ('judge righteously/justly') makes justice an active obligation, not a passive ideal. The inclusion of the ger ('resident foreigner, immigrant') alongside 'his brother' is remarkable — equal justice extends beyond ethnic Israel to those dwelling among them. This establishes a foundational principle of Israelite jurisprudence.

17. The phrase *lo takiru fanim* ('do not recognize faces') is the Hebrew idiom for showing partiality — literally, not being swayed by recognizing who stands before you. The parallel *ka-qaton ka-gadol tishma'un* ('the small like the great you shall hear') demands equal access regardless of social status. The theological foundation *ha-mishpat l'Elohim hu* ('the judgment is God's') transforms every judicial act into a divine function — judges act as God's representatives, which is why they must be fearless (*lo taguru* — 'do not shrink back').
18. The summary statement *va'atsaveh etkhem* ('I commanded you') with *et kol ha-devarim* ('all the things') emphasizes comprehensive instruction. Moses transitions from the appointment of judges to the narrative of the journey to Kadesh-barnea. The phrase *asher ta'asun* ('which you shall do') stresses that the commands require concrete action, not merely intellectual assent.
19. The wilderness is characterized as *ha-gadol v'ha-nora* ('the great and the terrifying') — *nora* from the root *yare'* ('to fear') emphasizes genuine danger. Moses reminds them *asher re'item* ('which you saw') — they are eyewitnesses to God's protection through this deadly landscape. The arrival at Kadesh-barnea sets the stage for the critical failure: the spy mission and subsequent refusal to enter the land.
20. The participle *noten* ('is giving') presents the land grant as an ongoing, present-tense action — God is in the process of giving, and all Israel needs to do is receive. Moses's announcement *ba'tem* ('you have arrived') marks a moment of opportunity: the land is within reach, the divine gift is active, and the only question is whether Israel will respond in faith.
21. Two prohibitions close the verse: *al tira* ('do not fear') and *al techat* ('do not be shattered/dismayed'). The verb *tachat* from *chatat* means to be broken, shattered, or dismayed — stronger than ordinary fear, it describes a collapse of resolve. Together they address both emotional fear and psychological defeat. The shift from plural address (v. 20) to singular (*re'eh, lefanekha*) personalizes the command — each individual must choose courage.
22. The verb *va-tiqrevun* ('you drew near') with *kullekhem* ('all of you') emphasizes unanimous initiative — this was the people's idea, not God's command (contrast Numbers 13:1-2 where the LORD initiates). The verb *yachperu* ('let them dig out, search, explore') from *chaphar* implies thorough investigation. Moses's retelling places responsibility squarely on the people for initiating the spy mission, shifting the emphasis from the Numbers account.
23. The idiom *va-yitav be'ainai* ('it was good in my eyes') indicates Moses's approval of the plan. His willingness to send spies was not itself sinful — reconnaissance is sound military practice. The problem would emerge not from scouting but from the people's response to the report. The number *shnem asar* ('twelve') — one per tribe — ensures representative participation and collective accountability.
24. The spies reached *nachal Eshkol* ('Wadi/Valley of Eshkol') — *eshkol* means 'cluster,' named for the famous grape cluster they found there (Numbers 13:23-24). The verb *vayeraglu* ('they spied it out') from *ragal* ('foot') literally means 'they footed through it' — walking the land to assess it firsthand. The report is initially positive, making the subsequent rebellion all the more tragic.
25. The physical evidence — *mi-pri ha-arets* ('from the fruit of the land') — confirmed the land's agricultural abundance. The spies' verdict *tovah ha-arets* ('good is the land') echoes God's own assessment. Moses's abbreviated retelling omits the frightening details of the majority report (Numbers 13:28-33) and focuses on the bottom-line conclusion: the land is good, the gift is real, and the refusal was inexcusable.
26. The verb *avitem* ('you were willing') negated — *lo avitem* ('you were not willing') — emphasizes willful refusal, not inability. The verb *va-tamru* ('you rebelled') from *marah* ('to be bitter, to rebel') describes not mere disobedience but defiant opposition to *pi YHWH* ('the mouth of the LORD') — His spoken command. The rebellion is framed as personal affront to God Himself.
27. The verb *va-teragnu* ('you grumbled, complained') from *ragan* describes sullen, resentful muttering — the complaint happens *be'ohaleikhem* ('in your tents'), privately and bitterly. The accusation *be-sin'at YHWH otanu* ('because of the LORD's hatred of us') is a shocking inversion of reality — they reinterpret the greatest act of divine love (the Exodus) as evidence of divine malice. This is the deepest form of unbelief: not doubting God's power but questioning His goodness.
28. The question *anah anachnu olim* ('where are we going up?') expresses hopelessness. The verb *hemassu* ('they melted') from *masas* describes the dissolving of courage — their brothers (*acheinu*) caused their hearts to liquify with fear. The hyperbolic *uvetsurot ba-shamayim* ('fortified to the heavens') conveys perceived impregnability. The *benei Anaqim* ('sons of Anak') were legendary giant warriors whose reputation was meant to terrify — and it worked.
29. Two verbs of fear are negated: *lo ta'artsun* ('do not be terrified/shattered') from *arats* ('to tremble, be in dread') and *lo tire'un* ('do not fear') from *yare'*. The first describes existential dread — being psychologically overwhelmed; the second is ordinary fear. Moses counters both levels of their panic with direct prohibitions, addressing the root emotion driving the rebellion.
30. The participle *ha-holekh lifneikhem* ('the one going before you') presents God as an advance guard. The emphatic pronoun *hu* ('He Himself') underscores that the battle is God's, not theirs. The appeal to historical experience — *k'chol asher asah itkhem be-Mitsrayim* ('according to all He did with you in Egypt') *le'eineikhem* ('before your eyes') — makes their fear irrational: they have personally witnessed God's military intervention.
31. The simile *ka'asher yisa ish et beno* ('as a man carries his son') is one of the most tender images of God in the Hebrew Bible. The verb *nasa* ('carry, bear, lift') — the same word Moses used for his own burden in verse 9 — transfers the image to God. What Moses cannot bear alone, God has been doing all along. The father-son metaphor portrays God's protection as instinctive, constant, and deeply personal.
32. The participle *ma'aminim* ('believing, trusting') from the root *aman* ('to be firm, reliable, faithful') appears in the negative: *einkhem ma'aminim* ('you are not trusting'). This is the central indictment. After Egypt's plagues, the sea crossing, manna, and the wilderness journey — *uva-davar ha-zeh* ('even in this matter') — they still lacked the faith to enter. Trust (*emunah*) in Deuteronomy is not intellectual belief but confident reliance on

God's proven character.

33. God's guidance is described through three functions: He goes lifneikhem ('before you') as scout, He searches out (latur) camping sites (maqom la-chanotekhem — 'a place for your encamping'), and He provides navigation through the pillar of fire (ba-esh lailah — 'in fire by night') and cloud (uv-anan yomam — 'in a cloud by day'). The verb latur ('to scout, explore') is the same verb used for the spies' mission — ironically, God was already doing the reconnaissance they demanded.
34. The sequence — va-yishma ('He heard'), va-yiqtsaf ('He became angry'), va-yishava ('He swore') — progresses from perception to emotion to irrevocable decree. The verb qatsaf ('to be angry, furious') describes intense divine wrath provoked by the rebellion. That God seals His response with an oath (shava) means the judgment is permanent and cannot be appealed — the wilderness generation has forfeited the land.
35. The oath formula im yir'eh ish ('if a man shall see' — meaning 'surely no man shall see') is a self-imprecation: God stakes His own name that the ha-dor ha-ra ha-zeh ('this evil generation') will be excluded. The contrast between ha-arets ha-tovah ('the good land') and ha-dor ha-ra ('the evil generation') is deliberate — the land is good but the generation is corrupt, and corruption cannot inherit the good gift.
36. Caleb is the sole exception (zulati — 'except') from the condemned generation. The phrase mile acharei YHWH ('filled up after the LORD' — followed fully, wholeheartedly) uses male' ('to fill') to describe complete, undivided commitment. The land asher darakh bah ('which he trod upon') refers specifically to the territory Caleb scouted, later identified as Hebron. His reward is the very land he had the faith to believe God could give.
37. The verb hit'anaf ('was angry') from anaf is a strong term for divine wrath. Moses claims the anger was biglalkhem ('on your account, because of you') — connecting his own exclusion from the land to the people's rebellion. This anticipates the fuller explanation in Deuteronomy 3:26 and 4:21. The phrase gam attah ('you too, even you') is poignant: not even the mediator is exempt from the consequences of communal failure.
38. Joshua is described as ha-omed lefanekha ('the one standing/serving before you') — indicating his role as Moses's attendant and apprentice. The imperative chazzeq ('strengthen, encourage') from chazaq anticipates the threefold commissioning of Joshua in chapter 31. The verb yanchilennah ('he will cause [Israel] to inherit it') from nachal ('to inherit, to receive as a possession') assigns Joshua the role of land-distributor, completing what Moses began.
39. The divine reversal is striking: the tapkhem ('your little ones') whom the parents said la-vaz yihyeh ('would become plunder') are precisely the ones who will inherit the land. Their children asher lo yade'u ha-yom tov va-ra ('who do not yet know good and evil') are innocent of the parents' guilt. The irony is deliberate — the generation that claimed to fear for their children's safety condemned only themselves; the children will thrive.
40. The command penu lakhem ('turn yourselves') reverses the original command of verse 7 (penu... us'u — 'turn and travel' toward the land). Instead of advancing into the promised land, they must retreat ha-midbarah ('toward the wilderness'). The direction — derekh Yam Suf ('by the way of the Sea of Reeds') — sends them back the way they came, undoing the Exodus journey. The reversal is both geographical and spiritual.
41. The confession chatanu ('we have sinned') appears genuine but proves superficial — they immediately revert to self-will. The verb va-tahinu ('you thought it easy, you were presumptuous') from hun means to treat lightly, to consider trivial. Having first feared the Amorites excessively, they now swing to reckless overconfidence. Both extremes share the same root: ignoring God's actual word. They strap on klei milchamto ('his weapons of war') without divine authorization.
42. The prohibition is double: lo ta'alu ('do not go up') and lo tilachamu ('do not fight'). The reason is devastating: ki einenni be-qirbekhem ('because I am not in your midst'). Without the divine presence, military action is suicidal. The passive tinnagefu ('you will be struck, defeated') before their enemies reverses the promise of verse 30 — without God fighting for them, they will be the ones struck down.
43. The verb va-tazidu ('you acted presumptuously, arrogantly') from zud/zid means to boil over, to act with insolent boldness. This is not courage but reckless defiance — they disobeyed both the original command to enter (v. 26) and the subsequent command not to enter (v. 42). The pattern of double rebellion — refusing to go when told to go, then going when told not to go — exposes their fundamental problem: they obey their own will, not God's.
44. The simile ka'asher ta'asenah ha-devorim ('as bees do') portrays the Amorite attack as swarming, relentless, and painful — bees pursue aggressors far beyond their hive. The verb va-yaktu ('they struck/crushed') from katal describes severe military defeat. The rout extended be-Se'ir ad Chormah ('in Seir as far as Hormah') — ironically, Chormah derives from cherem ('devoted destruction'), previewing the conquest vocabulary. The place of their defeat would later become a place of their victory.
45. The sequence — va-tashuvu ('you returned'), va-tivku ('you wept') lifnei YHWH ('before the LORD') — describes repentant posture, but God's response is silence: lo shama ('He did not listen') and lo he'ezin ('He did not give ear'). Two synonyms for hearing are negated to emphasize complete divine refusal. Their tears came too late — after presumptuous action, not before. Consequences for disobedience cannot always be reversed by remorse.
46. The concluding phrase yamim rabbim ('many days') with ka-yamim asher yeshavtem ('according to the days you stayed') is deliberately vague about the exact duration — likely encompassing the bulk of the thirty-eight years of wilderness wandering. The repetitive phrasing conveys the monotony of waiting: Kadesh became the staging ground for decades of purposeless delay, the consequence of a single moment of faithless refusal.

2

Summary: Moses recounts the wilderness wandering — Israel's long circuit around Edom and Moab, God's provision during forty years, and the defeat of King Sihon of Heshbon.

What Makes This Remarkable: God commands Israel to respect three nations' territorial rights: Esau's Seir, Moab, and Ammon — all of them Israel's relatives through Abraham and Lot. The theological principle is that God grants land to nations other than Israel. The parenthetical notes about the Emim, Rephaim, and Zamzummim (vv. 10-12, 20-23) are ancient editorial glosses preserving pre-Israelite ethnographic memory.

Translation Friction: The verb hiqshah (v. 30), describing God hardening Sihon's spirit, uses the same root as Pharaoh's hardening in Exodus. We rendered it 'made stubborn' to preserve the theological parallel. The phrase lo avah (v. 30, 'was not willing') creates a double causation: Sihon chose and God confirmed, the same tension as the Exodus hardening.

Connections: The Sihon victory is cited in Judges 11:19-22, Nehemiah 9:22, and Psalms 135:11; 136:19. The command not to provoke Edom, Moab, or Ammon recurs in Judges 11:15-18, where Jephthah appeals to this history. The forty years of provision (v. 7) anticipates the explicit reflection in 8:2-4.

¹So we turned back and headed into the wilderness toward the Sea of Reeds, just as the LORD had told me, and we circled the region of Mount Seir for a long time. ²Then the LORD said to me: ³'You have been circling this mountain long enough. Turn northward.' ⁴Instruct the people as follows: You are about to pass through the territory of your relatives, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, so be very careful — ⁵'Do not provoke them, because I will not give you any of their land — not even a footprint's width — for I have given Mount Seir to Esau as his inheritance.' ⁶'Buy food from them with silver so you can eat, and also purchase water from them with silver so you can drink.' ⁷'For the LORD your God has blessed you in everything your hands have done. He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness. For forty years now the LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing.' ⁸So we passed by our relatives, the descendants of Esau who live in Seir, leaving the Arabah road from Elath and Ezion-geber. We turned and traveled along the wilderness road of Moab. ⁹The LORD said to me, 'Do not harass Moab or engage them in battle, because I will not give you any of their land as a possession. I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as their inheritance.' ¹⁰The Emim had formerly lived there — a people as large, numerous, and tall as the Anakim. ¹¹They too were considered Rephaim, like the Anakim, but the Moabites called them Emim. ¹²The Horites had formerly lived in Seir, but the descendants of Esau dispossessed them, destroying them and settling in their place — just as Israel did with the land of their possession that the LORD gave them. ¹³'Now get up and cross the Wadi Zered.' So we crossed the Wadi Zered. ¹⁴The time from when we left Kadesh-barnea until we crossed the Wadi Zered was thirty-eight years — until the entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp, just as the LORD had sworn would happen to them. ¹⁵Indeed, the hand of the LORD was against them, working to eliminate them from the camp until they were all gone. ¹⁶When the last of the fighting men had finally died out from among the people, ¹⁷the LORD spoke to me, saying: ¹⁸'Today you are crossing the border of Moab at Ar.' ¹⁹'When you approach the territory of the Ammonites, do not harass them and do not provoke them, because I will not give you any of the Ammonites' land as a possession — I have given it to the descendants of Lot as their inheritance.' ²⁰(That region too was considered Rephaim territory. Rephaim had formerly lived there, and the Ammonites called them Zamzummim — ²¹a people as large, numerous, and tall as the Anakim. But the LORD destroyed them before the Ammonites, who dispossessed them and settled in their place — ²²just as He did for the descendants of Esau who live in Seir, when He destroyed the Horites before them so they could dispossess them and settle in their place — as it remains to this day. ²³And the Avvim, who had lived in settlements as far as Gaza — the Caphtorites, who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and settled in their place.) ²⁴'Get moving! Set out and cross the Arnon Gorge. Look — I have handed Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land over to you. Begin the conquest! Engage him in battle.' ²⁵'Starting today I will begin placing dread and fear of you

upon the peoples under all the heavens. When they hear reports about you, they will tremble and writhe in anguish before you.' ²⁶I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon with a peace proposal, saying: ²⁷'Let me pass through your land. I will stay on the road — strictly on the road. I will not turn right or left.' ²⁸'Sell me food for silver so I can eat, and provide me water for silver so I can drink. Just let me pass through on foot —' ²⁹'just as the descendants of Esau living in Seir and the Moabites living in Ar allowed me to do — until I cross the Jordan into the land that the LORD our God is giving us.' ³⁰But Sihon king of Heshbon refused to let us pass through, because the LORD your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart unyielding, in order to hand him over to you — as has now happened. ³¹The LORD said to me, 'Look — I have already begun handing Sihon and his land over to you. Start taking possession so you may inherit his land.' ³²Sihon marched out against us with his entire army to fight at Jahaz. ³³The LORD our God handed him over to us. We struck down him, his sons, and all his forces. ³⁴We captured all his cities at that time and devoted every city to destruction — the men, the women, and the children. We left no survivor. ³⁵Only the livestock we took as plunder for ourselves, along with the spoil from the cities we had captured. ³⁶From Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge, including the city in the gorge itself, all the way to Gilead — not a single city was too fortified for us. The LORD our God gave us everything. ³⁷But the territory of the Ammonites you did not approach — neither the banks of the Jabbok River, nor the cities in the highlands, nor anywhere else the LORD our God had forbidden us.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verbs *va-nefen* ('we turned') and *va-nissa* ('we set out') echo the divine command of 1:40. The phrase *va-nassov et har Se'ir yamim rabbim* ('we circled Mount Seir many days') compresses decades of aimless wandering into a single clause. The *yamim rabbim* ('many days') parallels the same phrase in 1:46 — the extended circling represents the consequence of their refusal to enter the land directly.
2. The messenger formula *va-yomer YHWH elai lemor* ('the LORD said to me, saying') marks a new divine instruction, transitioning from aimless wandering to directed movement. God breaks the long silence of the wilderness years with a fresh command — the period of judgment is ending.
3. The phrase *rav lakhem sov* ('enough for you circling') echoes the identical construction in 1:6 (*rav lakhem shevet* — 'enough for you dwelling'). In both cases God declares that a period of stagnation is over. The command *penu lakhem tsafonah* ('turn yourselves northward') redirects Israel toward the promised land — north through Transjordan. The divine initiative breaks the cycle of purposeless wandering.
4. The Edomites are called *acheikhem benei Esav* ('your brothers, the children of Esau') — the kinship language is significant. Despite the hostile history between Jacob and Esau, God recognizes their fraternal bond. The warning *v'yir'u mikkem* ('they will fear you') acknowledges Israel's military strength, but the command *v'nishmartem me'od* ('guard yourselves very carefully') warns against exploiting that advantage. Restraint, not conquest, is required.
5. The prohibition *al titgaru vam* ('do not provoke/engage them') from *garah* means to stir up conflict. The measure *ad midrakh kaf ragel* ('as far as the treading of the sole of a foot' — not even a footprint's width) emphasizes the absoluteness of the restriction. God's grant of *har Se'ir* to Esau (*yerushah l'Esav* — 'an inheritance to Esau') parallels Israel's own land grant — God is sovereign over all nations' territories, not just Israel's. This theological principle shapes the entire chapter.
6. The instruction to buy (*tishberu* — 'you shall purchase grain/food') from the Edomites rather than take by force establishes a commerce-not-conquest protocol. Even water — a critical resource in the wilderness — must be purchased (*tikhru* — 'you shall buy/dig') with *kesev* ('silver, money'). This demonstrates that Israel's military power was to be restrained by divine command, and their passage through Edom was to be peaceful and economically fair.
7. God's provision is comprehensive: *berakekha be-khol ma'aseh yadekha* ('He blessed you in every work of your hands'). The verb *yada* ('He knew/was attentive to') *lekhtekha* ('your walking') implies intimate, watchful care — not distant observation but personal attention. The summary *lo chasarta davar* ('you lacked nothing') after *arba'im shanah* ('forty years') in the *midbar ha-gadol* ('great wilderness') is remarkable: complete provision in complete desolation. This abundance is why they can afford to pay for Edomite food and water.
8. The route takes Israel *me'Eilat u-me'Etsyon Gaver* ('from Elath and from Ezion-geber') — both towns at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba — then northward via the wilderness road of Moab. The continued use of *acheinu* ('our brothers/relatives') for the Edomites maintains the kinship language. The transition from Edomite to Moabite territory sets up the next set of divine restrictions on Israel's passage.
9. Two prohibitions: *al tatsar* ('do not harass/distress') from *tsarah* and *al titgar* ('do not engage/provoke') from *garah*. Moab is protected as *benei Lot* ('children of Lot') — Abraham's nephew, making the Moabites distant relatives of Israel. The city of Ar (the capital region of Moab) was divinely allocated to Lot's line just as Canaan was allocated to Abraham's. God's land-distribution extends beyond the Abrahamic covenant to include other peoples in His sovereign plan.
10. This parenthetical antiquarian note explains that the *Emim* (*ha-Emim* — possibly meaning 'the fearsome ones' or 'the terrors') were the previous inhabitants of Moab. They are compared to the *Anaqim* in being *gadol v'ram* ('great, numerous, and tall'). The subtext is reassuring: if the

Moabites could displace giant inhabitants, then Israel can certainly overcome the Canaanites with God's help.

11. The Repha'im ('shades' or 'healers') is the broader category for pre-Israelite giant peoples. The verb *yechashev* ('they were reckoned/considered') indicates a classificatory system — different nations used different names for the same population. The Moabites' local term *Emim* coexisted with the more widely known *Repha'im* designation. This ethnographic note demonstrates Moses's awareness of regional naming conventions.
12. The *Chorim* ('Horites' — cave-dwellers or Hurrians) were the original inhabitants of Seir. The verb *yirashu* ('they dispossessed') is the same verb used for Israel's conquest — the parallel is explicit. The phrase *ka'asher asah Yisra'el* ('just as Israel did') refers proleptically to Israel's future conquest of Canaan, or retrospectively to the Transjordanian conquests. The point: God empowered Esau to displace the Horites just as He empowers Israel to displace the Canaanites.
13. The *Nachal Zered* ('Wadi Zered') marks the boundary between Edomite and Moabite territory. The abrupt command-and-compliance structure — *qumu v'ivru* ('rise and cross'), *va-na'avur* ('and we crossed') — contrasts sharply with the rebellion narratives of chapter 1. This new generation obeys immediately. The wadi crossing functions as a geographical marker of transition from the old era of wandering to the new era of purposeful advance.
14. The precise count — *shloshim u-shmoneh shanah* ('thirty-eight years') — combined with the eleven-day journey of 1:2 accounts for the full forty years. The phrase *ad tom kol ha-dor anshei ha-milchamah* ('until the completion of the entire generation of men of war') specifies that the military-age males who refused to fight at Kadesh had to die before Israel could advance. The oath fulfillment (*ka'asher nishba YHWH* — 'as the LORD swore') closes the circle on the judgment of 1:34-35.
15. The phrase *yad YHWH hayetah bam* ('the hand of the LORD was against them') describes active divine judgment, not merely natural attrition. The verb *le-humam* ('to confound, to destroy, to throw into panic') from *hamam* suggests God used disruption and turmoil — perhaps disease, conflict, or other calamities — to ensure the doomed generation perished within the wilderness. The repetition *ad tummam* ('until their completion') echoes the finality of divine judgment.
16. The phrase *tammu kol anshei ha-milchamah lamut* ('all the men of war finished dying') marks the end of the judgment era. The verb *tammu* ('they were finished, completed, consumed') from *tamam* conveys total completion — not one survived from the condemned generation. This verse is the hinge point of the narrative: the old generation's sentence is fully served, and the new generation can now move forward.
17. The speech formula *va-yedabber YHWH elai* ('the LORD spoke to me') resumes after the narrative parenthesis of verses 10-16. God speaks directly to Moses again, marking a new phase of the journey. The connection to verse 16 is immediate: the moment the last condemned man dies, God's word comes with new instructions.
18. The word *ha-yom* ('today') signals urgency and immediacy — the long waiting is over. Crossing *gevu Mo'av* ('the border of Moab') at Ar means passing through the Moabite capital region. The participle *over* ('crossing') in the present tense conveys that the action is already underway — God announces what He is already bringing about.
19. The Ammonites receive the same protection as Moab and Edom — *al tetsurem* ('do not besiege/harass them') and *al titgar bam* ('do not provoke them'). Like the Moabites, the Ammonites are *benei Lot* ('children of Lot'), making them distant relatives through Abraham's family. The threefold restriction — Edom (v. 5), Moab (v. 9), Ammon (v. 19) — establishes that God's land-distribution plan is comprehensive and respects the territorial rights of related peoples.
20. Another antiquarian note: the Ammonite territory was also *erets Repha'im* ('land of the Rephaim'). The Ammonites' local name for these people — *Zamzummim* — may derive from *zamam* ('to plan, to devise') or may be onomatopoeic, suggesting murmuring or buzzing speech. Each nation had its own designation for the same pre-Israelite giant population: *Emim* (Moab), *Horites* (Edom), *Zamzummim* (Ammon), *Anakim* (Canaan).
21. The repeated formula — *gadol v'rav v'ram ka-Anaqim* ('great, numerous, and tall like the Anakim') — and the pattern of divine destruction (*va-yashmidem YHWH* — 'the LORD destroyed them') followed by dispossession (*va-yirashu* — 'they dispossessed') drives home the lesson: giants are not invincible when God fights for a people. The implicit argument is that Israel's fear of the Anakim at Kadesh was groundless.
22. The phrase *ad ha-yom ha-zeh* ('to this day') anchors the ancient precedent in the audience's present experience — the Edomites still occupy Seir, confirming that God's land allocations endure. The repetitive pattern (God destroys previous inhabitants, new nation takes their place) establishes a theological template: land transfer is divinely managed, not humanly achieved. What God did for Esau, He will do for Israel.
23. This parenthetical note adds a fourth example of population displacement. The *Avvim* (a pre-Philistine people living *ba-chatserim* — 'in settlements/villages' near Gaza) were destroyed by the *Kaphtorim* ('Caphtorites'), generally identified as the Philistines originating from *Kaphtor* (Crete or a broader Aegean region). This example involves non-Israelite, non-Abrahamic peoples — demonstrating that God orchestrates population movements universally, not only for covenant peoples.
24. Three imperatives open the command: *qumu* ('rise'), *se'u* ('travel'), *v'ivru* ('cross'). The *Nachal Arnon* ('Arnon Gorge') is the boundary between Moab and Amorite territory — crossing it enters the combat zone. Unlike the prohibitions regarding Edom, Moab, and Ammon, God now commands engagement: *hachel rash* ('begin possessing') and *hitgar bo milchamah* ('engage him in battle'). The perfect tense *natati* ('I have given') again declares the outcome settled before the battle begins.
25. God promises to project *pachdekha v'yir'atekha* ('your dread and your fear') upon *ha-amim tachat kol ha-shamayim* ('the peoples under all the heavens'). Two fear responses describe the reaction: *ragzu* ('they will tremble/quake') and *chalu* ('they will writhe in pain/anguish') — the second verb is used for birth pangs, suggesting overwhelming, involuntary terror. The phrase *ha-yom ha-zeh achel* ('this day I begin') marks the inauguration of Israel's fearsome reputation among the nations.

- 26.** Despite the divine guarantee of victory, Moses first extends *divrei shalom* ('words of peace') — a diplomatic overture offering the possibility of peaceful passage. The *midbar Qedemot* ('wilderness of Kedemoth') is in Moabite border territory. This approach follows the protocol of Deuteronomy 20:10, which requires offering peace terms before attacking. Moses demonstrates that Israel is not a reckless aggressor but follows divine rules of engagement.
- 27.** The repeated *ba-derekh ba-derekh* ('on the road, on the road') is emphatic — strict adherence to the highway with no deviation. The pledge *lo asur yamin u-semol* ('I will not turn right or left') guarantees Israel will not encroach on Sihon's territory. The request mirrors the earlier passage through Edom, but Sihon's response will differ dramatically from Edom's cautious tolerance.
- 28.** The offer is purely commercial: *okhel ba-kesef tashbireni* ('food for silver you shall sell me') and *mayim ba-kesef titten li* ('water for silver you shall give me'). Israel proposes paying fair market value for provisions — no plundering, no foraging, no resource extraction. The final clause *raq ev'rah be-raglai* ('only let me pass through on my feet') emphasizes the minimal, non-threatening nature of the request.
- 29.** Moses cites precedent: the Edomites (*benei Esav* — 'children of Esau') and Moabites permitted peaceful passage and trade. The reference to crossing *ha-Yarden* ('the Jordan') to reach the land *YHWH Eloheinu noten lanu* ('the LORD our God is giving us') clarifies Israel's ultimate destination — they are not interested in Sihon's territory *per se* but simply need transit rights. However, God's larger plan will unfold differently.
- 30.** The divine hardening — *hiqshah YHWH et rucho* ('the LORD hardened his spirit') and *immets et levavo* ('made obstinate his heart') — recalls the hardening of Pharaoh. The verbs *qashah* ('to be hard, stiff') and *amats* ('to be strong, firm, obstinate') together describe complete inflexibility. The purpose clause *lema'an titto be-yadekha* ('in order to give him into your hand') reveals that Sihon's refusal was divinely orchestrated to create the conditions for Israel's first Transjordanian conquest.
- 31.** The verb *hachiloti* ('I have begun') from *chahal* indicates the process is already underway from God's perspective. The double command — *hachel rash lareshet* ('begin possessing to possess') — uses both the imperative and infinitive of *yarash* to emphasize urgency and totality. God's initiative precedes human action: He has already begun; Israel must now participate in what God is accomplishing.
- 32.** Sihon initiates the battle — *va-yetse liqratenu* ('he came out to meet us') *hu v'khol ammo* ('he and all his people') — giving Israel the legal and moral justification for the war: they offered peace (vv. 26-29), he refused (v. 30), and then he attacked. The battle at *Yahtzah* ('Jahaz') — a site east of the Dead Sea — becomes the first engagement in Israel's conquest. Sihon's full mobilization (*kol ammo* — 'all his people') leads to total defeat.
- 33.** The verb *va-yittenhu* ('He gave him') from *natan* places God as the primary agent of victory — *YHWH Eloheinu* ('the LORD our God') delivers, then Israel acts. The verb *va-nakk* ('we struck') from *nakah* describes the military defeat. The inclusion of *banav* ('his sons') indicates the end of Sihon's dynasty — no heir survived to reclaim the throne or rally a resistance.
- 34.** The verb *va-nacharim* ('we devoted to destruction') from *charam* is the key term for total warfare in the Hebrew Bible — the *cherem* ('ban, devotion to destruction'). This practice dedicated everything to God by destroying it completely. The phrase *lo hish'arnu sarid* ('we did not leave a survivor') indicates total destruction. The *cherem* was specific to certain divinely commanded military operations and is not presented as a general model for warfare.
- 35.** The exception *raq ha-behemah* ('only the livestock') indicates that the *cherem* (ban of total destruction) applied to the human population but not to animals and movable property. The *shlal ha-arim* ('spoil of the cities') — material goods, supplies, valuables — was available as *bazaznu lanu* ('we plundered for ourselves'). This distinction between devoted persons and permitted plunder follows the warfare regulations that will be codified later in Deuteronomy.
- 36.** The geographical sweep — *me-Aro'er* ('from Aroer') on the *sfat nachal Arnon* ('rim of the Arnon Gorge') to *ha-Gil'ad* ('Gilead') — describes the full extent of conquered territory. The assessment *lo hayetah qiryah asher sagvah mimmenu* ('there was not a city that was too high/fortified for us') directly answers the fearful complaint of 1:28 about cities *betsurot ba-shamayim* ('fortified to the heavens'). What seemed impossible through human eyes proved achievable through divine power.
- 37.** The chapter's final verse returns to the theme of divinely mandated restraint: *raq el erets benei Ammon lo qaravta* ('only the land of the Ammonites you did not approach'). Israel's obedience was selective in the right way — they conquered where God commanded and refrained where God prohibited. The mention of *nachal Yabboq* ('the Jabbok River') and *arei ha-har* ('cities of the highlands') specifies the off-limits zones. The closing phrase *v'khol asher tsivah YHWH Eloheinu* ('everything the LORD our God commanded') frames Israel's entire conduct as covenant obedience.

3

Summary: Moses recounts the defeat of Og king of Bashan, the allotment of Transjordan to Reuben, Gad, and half-Manasseh, and his own plea to enter the land — denied by God.

What Makes This Remarkable: Og's iron bed (v. 11) — nine cubits long, four wide — is a detail preserved not for military history but as evidence of the Rephaim's legendary stature. Moses's prayer va-etchannan (v. 23, 'I pleaded') gives the next Torah portion its name and reveals a Moses we rarely see: not the commanding lawgiver but a man begging God to reverse His decree. God's refusal is final and unexplained beyond the reference to Israel's provocation.

Translation Friction: The word eres (v. 11), traditionally 'bed,' could also mean 'coffin' or 'sarcophagus' — if so, Og's iron eres is a funerary monument, not furniture. We rendered it 'bed' following the traditional understanding but noted the ambiguity. God's command rav-lakh (v. 26, 'enough for you') is blunt — two words that end Moses's last hope.

Connections: Og's Bashan territory becomes a symbol of extraordinary fertility (Psalm 22:12, Ezekiel 39:18, Amos 4:1). Moses's denied entry is revisited in 32:48-52 and fulfilled in 34:1-4. The Transjordan settlement conditions (v. 18-20) are executed in Joshua 1:12-18 and tested in Joshua 22.

¹Then we turned and advanced along the road to Bashan. Og king of Bashan marched out against us with his entire army to fight at Edrei. ²The LORD said to me, 'Do not be afraid of him, because I have handed him over to you, along with his entire army and his land. Do to him what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled from Heshbon.' ³So the LORD our God also handed Og king of Bashan and his entire army over to us. We struck them down until no survivor remained. ⁴We captured all his cities at that time. There was not a single city we failed to take from them — sixty cities in all, the entire region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. ⁵All these were fortified cities with high walls, double gates, and crossbars — in addition to a great number of unwalled settlements. ⁶We devoted them to destruction, just as we had done to Sihon king of Heshbon — devoting every city to total destruction: men, women, and children. ⁷But all the livestock and the goods from the cities we took as plunder for ourselves. ⁸At that time we seized the territory from the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan — from the Arnon Gorge all the way to Mount Hermon. ⁹(The Sidonians call Hermon 'Sirion,' while the Amorites call it 'Senir.')

¹⁰All the cities of the plateau, all of Gilead, and all of Bashan as far as Salecah and Edrei — the cities of Og's kingdom in Bashan. ¹¹Only Og king of Bashan was left from the remnant of the Rephaim. His bed was made of iron — it can still be seen in Rabbah of the Ammonites. It is nine cubits long and four cubits wide, measured by a standard cubit. ¹²This is the land we took possession of at that time: from Aroer on the Arnon Gorge, including half the hill country of Gilead with its cities, I gave to the Reubenites and the Gadites. ¹³The rest of Gilead and all of Bashan — Og's kingdom — I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh: the entire district of Argob. (All that part of Bashan used to be called the land of the Rephaim.) ¹⁴Jair, a descendant of Manasseh, took the entire district of Argob up to the border of the Geshurites and Maacathites, and named those settlements after himself — Havvoth-jair — as they are called to this day. ¹⁵To Machir I gave Gilead. ¹⁶To the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave the territory from Gilead down to the Arnon Gorge — the middle of the gorge serving as the boundary — and up to the Jabbok River, which forms the Ammonite border. ¹⁷also the Arabah with the Jordan as the border, from Kinnereth down to the Sea of the Arabah — the Salt Sea — below the slopes of Pisgah on the east. ¹⁸I gave you orders at that time: 'The LORD your God has given you this land as your possession. But all your fighting men must cross over, armed for battle, ahead of your fellow Israelites.' ¹⁹'Only your wives, your children, and your livestock — I know you have large herds — will remain in the cities I have given you, ²⁰until the LORD grants rest to your brothers as He has to you, and they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them across the Jordan. Then each of you may return to the inheritance I have assigned you.' ²¹I also charged Joshua at that time: 'Your own eyes have seen everything that the LORD your God did to these two kings. The LORD will do the same to all the kingdoms you cross into.' ²²'Do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God — He is the one fighting for you.' ²³I pleaded with the LORD at that time: ²⁴'Lor

d GOD, You have only begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your powerful hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can match Your deeds and Your mighty acts? ²⁵Please, let me cross over and see the good land across the Jordan — that beautiful hill country and Lebanon.' ²⁶But the LORD was furious with me on your account and would not listen to me. The LORD said to me, 'Enough! Do not speak to me about this matter again.' ²⁷'Go up to the summit of Pisgah and look out to the west, the north, the south, and the east. Take it all in with your eyes, because you will not cross this Jordan.' ²⁸'Commission Joshua. Encourage him and strengthen him, because he is the one who will cross over ahead of this people, and he will distribute to them the land that you will only see.' ²⁹So we remained in the valley opposite Beth-peor.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verbs *va-nefen va-na'al* ('we turned and went up') indicate the northward advance from Sihon's conquered territory into Bashan. Like Sihon (2:32), Og initiates combat — *va-yetse liqratenu* ('he came out to meet us') *hu v'khol ammo* ('he and all his people'). Edrei, Og's second capital (along with Ashtaroth, 1:4), was the site of this decisive engagement. The full mobilization of *kol ammo* again signals total defeat.
2. The reassurance *al tira oto* ('do not fear him') suggests that Og's reputation inspired genuine terror — his legendary size (v. 11) made him a formidable opponent. The perfect tense *natati* ('I have given') once again declares the outcome settled before battle. The instruction *v'asita lo* ('do to him') *ka'asher asita le-Sichon* ('as you did to Sihon') prescribes the same total warfare applied to the first Amorite king. The Sihon precedent becomes the template.
3. The word *gam* ('also') links this victory to the Sihon campaign — a second divine triumph. The phrase *ad bilti hish'ir lo sarid* ('until there was not left to him a survivor') describes total military annihilation. The emphatic YHWH *Eloheinu* ('the LORD our God') as subject of *va-yitten* ('He gave') keeps the theological focus: victories belong to God, Israel is the instrument.
4. The count *shishim ir* ('sixty cities') emphasizes the scale of the conquest — this was a substantial kingdom, not a small tribal area. The phrase *kol chevel Argov* ('the entire region/district of Argob') designates a specific administrative district within Bashan. The double negative *lo hayetah qiryah asher lo laqachnu* ('there was not a city that we did not take') underscores the comprehensiveness of the victory — every fortified position fell.
5. The description — *arim betsurot chomah gevohah* ('fortified cities with high walls'), *delatayim u-veriach* ('double doors/gates and a crossbar') — details serious military architecture. These were not easy targets; their capture testifies to divine assistance. The additional *arei ha-perazi* ('unwalled/open cities') *harbeh me'od* ('very many') indicates that the rural countryside was also taken. The contrast recalls the fearful report about 'cities fortified to heaven' (1:28) — God overcame exactly what Israel feared.
6. The *cherem* (ban of destruction) is applied identically to Og's kingdom as to Sihon's (2:34). The verb *va-nacharim otam* ('we devoted them to destruction') followed by the infinitive absolute *hacharim kol ir* ('devoting every city') intensifies the totality. The categories *metim*, *ha-nashim*, *v'ha-taf* ('men, women, and children') indicate complete destruction of the population. As with Sihon, the *cherem* was understood as divinely commanded warfare specific to these Amorite kingdoms.
7. As in the Sihon campaign (2:35), the *behemah* ('livestock') and *shlal ha-arim* ('spoil of the cities') were exempt from the *cherem* and available as *bazonu lanu* ('we plundered for ourselves'). The material wealth of Og's sixty fortified cities represented substantial resources for the Israelite tribes who would settle in this region.
8. The summary statement encompasses the full extent of Transjordanian conquest: *mi-yad shnei malkhei ha-Emori* ('from the hand of the two kings of the Amorites') — Sihon and Og. The territory stretches *mi-nachal Arnon* ('from the Arnon Gorge') in the south *ad har Chermon* ('to Mount Hermon') in the far north — a vast expanse covering modern-day southern Jordan to the Golan Heights. The phrase *be'ever ha-Yarden* ('on the far side of the Jordan') positions this as the eastern portion of God's land grant.
9. This parenthetical geographic note preserves three names for the same mountain: Chermon (Hebrew), Siryon (Sidonian/Phoenician), and Senir (Amorite). The multiple designations reflect the mountain's prominence as a landmark visible to many peoples. The Sidonian name Siryon may relate to *shiryon* ('coat of armor/breastplate'), perhaps from the mountain's snow-capped appearance. Such multi-lingual place references demonstrate Moses's geographical awareness.
10. Three geographical zones summarize the conquest: *ha-mishor* ('the plateau/tableland' — the high plain east of the Dead Sea), *ha-Gil'ad* ('Gilead' — the central Transjordanian hill country), and *ha-Bashan* ('Bashan' — the fertile northern region). The boundary markers *Salkhah* (in the far northeast) and *Edrei* (Og's southern capital) define the kingdom's extent. The entire territory is identified as *arei mamlekhet Og* ('cities of the kingdom of Og').
11. Og is identified as the last survivor (*nish'ar mi-yeter ha-Repha'im* — 'remaining from the remnant of the Rephaim') of the ancient giant race. His *arso* ('bed/couch' — possibly a sarcophagus or ceremonial bed) of *barzel* ('iron') measured *tesha ammot* ('nine cubits') by *arba ammot* ('four cubits') — approximately 13.5 by 6 feet using the standard *ammah* ('cubit') of about 18 inches. The bed is located *be-Rabbat benei Ammon* ('in Rabbah of the Ammonites' — modern Amman, Jordan) — an archaeological exhibit verifiable by Moses's audience. The iron bed, in an age when iron was rare, signals Og's wealth and power.

12. Moses now transitions from conquest narrative to land distribution. The southern portion — me-Aro'er on the nachal Arnon to chatsi har ha-Gil'ad ('half the hill country of Gilead') — was allocated to the La-Re'uveni v'la-Gadi ('Reubenites and Gadites'). These two tribes had requested Transjordanian territory because of their large herds (Numbers 32). Moses's role as land-distributor (natati — 'I gave') foreshadows the book of Joshua.
13. The northern and larger portion — yeter ha-Gil'ad v'khol ha-Bashan ('the rest of Gilead and all of Bashan') — went to chatsi shevet ha-Menasheh ('the half-tribe of Manasseh'). The parenthetical note that Bashan was formerly called erets Repha'im ('land of the Rephaim') connects to the giant traditions of chapter 2. The chevel ha-Argov ('district of Argob') with its sixty cities (v. 4) represents a substantial inheritance for the Manassites.
14. Ya'ir ben Menasheh is credited with personally securing the chevel Argov ('district of Argob'). The boundaries extend ad gevu ha-Geshuri v'ha-Ma'akhati ('to the border of the Geshurites and Maacathites') — two Aramean peoples who retained their territories within the region. Naming the settlements chavot Ya'ir ('villages/camps of Jair') after himself established his permanent claim. The phrase ad ha-yom ha-zeh ('to this day') confirms the name persisted into the narrator's time.
15. Makhir, the eldest son (or clan) of Manasseh, received ha-Gil'ad ('Gilead') — the central Transjordanian hill country. The brevity of the allocation (natati — 'I gave') contrasts with the longer descriptions of other grants, perhaps because Machir's claim was well-established and undisputed. Machir's clan was known for its military prowess, making them suitable guardians of this frontier territory.
16. The Reubenite and Gadite allocation is defined by water boundaries: from the Gil'ad in the north to nachal Arnon in the south, with tokh ha-nachal u-gevu ('the middle of the gorge and its border') as the precise southern limit, and nachal Yabboq ('the Jabbok River') as the northern boundary. The Jabbok also served as gevu benei Ammon ('the border of the Ammonites'), respecting the restriction of 2:19.
17. The western boundary is the Aravah v'ha-Yarden ('the Arabah valley and the Jordan River') stretching mi-Kinneret ('from Kinnereth' — the Sea of Galilee) southward to Yam ha-Aravah, Yam ha-Melach ('the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea' — the Dead Sea). The reference point ashdot ha-Pisgah ('the slopes/watershed of Pisgah') eastward locates the territory relative to the mountain where Moses will later view the promised land. This geographical detail links the land distribution to Moses's personal exclusion.
18. The condition attached to the eastern tribes' inheritance: chalutsim ta'avru lifnei acheikhem ('as armed troops you shall cross over before your brothers'). The word chalutsim ('armed, equipped for battle') from chalats ('to strip for action, to arm') means ready for combat. The eastern tribes cannot simply settle — they must first help the western tribes conquer their portion. The phrase kol benei chayil ('all capable warriors') specifies military-age men. Brotherhood (acheikhem — 'your brothers') demands solidarity.
19. The exemption extends to nesheikhem ('your wives'), tapkhem ('your children'), and miqnekhem ('your livestock'). Moses's parenthetical acknowledgment yada'ti ki miqneh rav lakhem ('I know that you have much livestock') recalls the original reason these tribes requested Transjordanian territory (Numbers 32:1). The concession is practical: non-combatants stay in the secured cities (be'areikhem asher natati lakhem — 'in your cities which I have given you') while warriors cross over.
20. The duration of service is ad asher yaniach YHWH la-acheikhem ('until the LORD gives rest to your brothers') — the key term menuachah/yaniach ('rest') in Deuteronomy means secure settlement in the land, free from military threat. The parallel kakhem ('like you') establishes equity: you have rest, so fight until they do too. Only after the western tribes are settled may the eastern troops return ish li-yrushatoh ('each man to his inheritance'). Mutual obligation defines Israelite solidarity.
21. Moses's charge to Joshua appeals to firsthand experience: einakha ha-ro'ot ('your eyes — the seeing ones') — Joshua saw the defeats of Sihon and Og personally. The promise ken ya'aseh YHWH ('thus the LORD will do') to kol ha-mamlakhot ('all the kingdoms') extrapolates from two victories to universal application. What God did to two Amorite kings, He will do to all Canaanite kingdoms. Joshua's faith is to be grounded in observed evidence, not abstract hope.
22. The prohibition lo tira'um ('do not fear them') is grounded in the declaration YHWH Eloheikhem hu ha-nilcham lakhem ('the LORD your God — He is the one fighting for you'). The emphatic pronoun hu ('He') and the participle ha-nilcham ('the one fighting') present God as an ongoing, active warrior on Israel's behalf. This theological affirmation — that God Himself is the real combatant — is the foundation of all Deuteronomic warfare theology.
23. The verb va-etchannan ('I pleaded, implored') from chanan ('to be gracious, to show favor') is a hitpael form — literally 'I made myself an object seeking grace.' This is one of the most emotionally raw moments in Deuteronomy: Moses, the great leader who guided Israel through forty years, begs for entry into the promised land. The verb's root is the same as 'grace' — Moses appeals not to his merit but to God's undeserved favor.
24. Moses addresses God with the double divine name Adonai YHWH ('Lord GOD') — a formal, intensely personal address. His argument is theological: attah hachilota le-har'ot ('You have begun to show') — if God has only started revealing His power, then surely there is more to see! The rhetorical question mi El ba-shamayim uva-arets ('who is a god in heaven or earth') who could match God's deeds (k'ma'asekha — 'like Your works') and power (k'gevurotekha — 'like Your mighty acts') is not merely praise but a plea: a God this great should surely let Moses see the land.
25. The particle na ('please, I beg you') attached to ev'rah ('let me cross') transforms the request from demand to desperate plea. Moses's desire is simply to see: v'er'eh ('and let me see') ha-arets ha-tovah ('the good land'). His longing focuses on two features: ha-har ha-tov ha-zeh ('that good/beautiful mountain' — likely referring to the temple mount or the central highlands) and ha-Levanon ('Lebanon' — famous for its cedars). The prayer reveals that for Moses, the land is not merely territory but the culmination of his life's purpose.

26. The verb *va-yit'abber* ('He was furious, crossed over in anger') from *avar* in the *hitpael* is one of the strongest expressions of divine anger in the Hebrew Bible — God's wrath boiled over. The cause: *lema'ankhem* ('on your account/because of you') — Moses attributes his punishment to the people's provocations. God's response *rav lakh* ('enough for you') echoes the *rav lakhem* ('enough for you') of 1:6 and 2:3, but here it terminates discussion rather than beginning action. The prohibition *al tosef dabber* ('do not continue speaking') shuts the door with finality.
27. God offers Moses a consolation: *aleh rosh ha-Pisgah* ('go up to the top of Pisgah') and see the land from every direction — *yamah* ('westward'), *tsafonah* ('northward'), *teimanah* ('southward'), *mizrachah* ('eastward'). The command *ur'eh be'einekha* ('see with your eyes') grants visual access to what is physically denied. The final clause *ki lo ta'avor et ha-Yarden ha-zeh* ('because you will not cross this Jordan') is both tender and absolute — God grants the sight while confirming the prohibition.
28. Three imperatives define Moses's final duty regarding Joshua: *tsav* ('commission/charge'), *chazzeqehu* ('strengthen him'), and *ammetsuhu* ('fortify/encourage him'). The verbs *chazaq* and *amats* form a standard pair for bolstering courage (see Joshua 1:6-9). The poignant contrast: *hu ya'avor* ('he will cross over') while Moses will not; *hu yanchil otam* ('he will cause them to inherit') *ha-arets asher tir'eh* ('the land that you will see'). Moses's legacy is the one who prepared the successor, not the one who completed the mission.
29. The chapter closes with Israel encamped *ba-gai mul Beit Pe'or* ('in the valley opposite Beth-peor'). Beth-peor ('house/temple of Peor') was a Moabite cultic site associated with the disastrous apostasy of Numbers 25, when Israelite men joined in Baal-peor worship. The location is both geographically specific and theologically charged — Moses delivers his final speeches within sight of a place that represents Israel's vulnerability to idolatry. The *pe* paragraph marker signals a major section break.

4

Summary: Moses urges Israel to obey God's statutes, warning against idolatry by recalling Sinai — where they heard God's voice but saw no form. He designates three cities of refuge east of the Jordan.

*What Makes This Remarkable: The theological core is verse 12: 'You heard the sound of words but saw no form — only a voice.' God's self-revelation at Sinai was auditory, not visual. This grounds the second commandment: because God has no visible form, any image is a lie about God's nature. The word *temunah* ('form, likeness') is the key — Israel cannot make what they never saw.*

*Translation Friction: The phrase *aseret ha-devarim* (v. 13, 'the Ten Words') is Deuteronomy's name for the Decalogue — *devarim* encompasses 'words, matters, things.' We rendered it 'the Ten Words' in the notes to preserve the Hebrew concept, though 'Ten Commandments' is the familiar English. The verb *davaq* (v. 4, 'held fast') describes intimate covenant attachment — the same verb used for marriage in Genesis 2:24.*

*Connections: The warning against worshipping sun, moon, and stars (v. 19) distinguishes Israel from every surrounding culture. The promise that Israel will seek God in exile and find Him (vv. 29-31) anticipates Jeremiah 29:13. The phrase 'jealous God' (*El qanna*, v. 24) echoes Exodus 20:5 and recurs in Nahum 1:2.*

1Now then, Israel, listen to the decrees and the laws that I am teaching you to follow, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. 2Do not add anything to what I am commanding you, and do not take anything away from it. Keep the commandments of the LORD your God exactly as I am giving them to you. 3Your own eyes saw what the LORD did at Baal-peor — the LORD your God destroyed from among you every person who followed Baal-peor. 4But you who held fast to the LORD your God — all of you are alive today. 5See — I have taught you decrees and laws just as the LORD my God commanded me, so you can follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of. 6Guard them and put them into practice, because this is your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of the nations. When they hear about all these decrees, they will say, 'Truly, this great nation is a wise and discerning people.' 7For what great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us whenever we call on Him? 8And what great nation has decrees and laws as just as this entire the Law that I am setting before you today? 9Only be on guard, and watch yourself carefully, so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen and so that they do not slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to your grandchildren — 10Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people before me so I can let them hear my words. They will learn to revere me all the days they live on the earth, and they will teach their children as well.' 11You approached and stood at the base of the mountain while the mountain blazed with fire reaching to the heart of the sky — darkness, cloud,

and dense gloom. ¹²The LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form — only a voice. ¹³He declared His covenant to you, which He commanded you to carry out — the Ten Words — and He wrote them on two stone tablets. ¹⁴At that same time the LORD commissioned me to teach you the decrees and laws for you to practice in the land you are about to cross into and possess. ¹⁵Guard yourselves very carefully — since you saw no form of any kind on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire — ¹⁶so that you do not corrupt yourselves by making an idol in the shape of any figure — a representation of male or female, ¹⁷or of any animal on the earth, or of any winged bird that flies through the sky, ¹⁸or of anything that crawls on the ground, or of any fish in the waters below the surface of the earth. ¹⁹And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon, and the stars — the entire heavenly host — do not let yourself be lured into bowing down to them and serving them. The LORD your God has assigned these to all the peoples under the entire sky, ²⁰but you the LORD took and brought out of the iron-smelting furnace — out of Egypt — to be His own people, His treasured inheritance, as you are today. ²¹Now the LORD was angry with me because of you, and He swore that I would not cross the Jordan or enter the good land that the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance. ²²I am going to die in this land. I will not cross the Jordan. But you will cross over, and you will possess that good land. ²³Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that He made with you, and not to make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything that the LORD your God has prohibited. ²⁴For the LORD your God is a consuming fire — a jealous God. ²⁵When you have children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, if you become corrupt and make an idol in the form of anything, doing what is evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and provoking Him — ²⁶I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today: you will quickly and completely perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live long there — you will be utterly annihilated. ²⁷The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a small number of you will survive among the nations where the LORD drives you. ²⁸There you will serve gods made by human hands — wood and stone — that cannot see, cannot hear, cannot eat, and cannot smell. ²⁹But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him when you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. ³⁰When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. ³¹(For the LORD your God is a compassionate God.) He will not abandon you or destroy you, and He will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that He swore to them. ³²Search through all of history, from the first days before your time — from the very day God created humanity on the earth — and search from one end of the sky to the other. Has anything this great ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? ³³Has any people ever heard the voice of God speaking from the middle of fire, as you have heard, and survived? ³⁴Has any god ever attempted to go and take one nation for himself out of another nation — by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a powerful hand, by an outstretched arm, and by acts of great terror — the way the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? ³⁵You were shown these things so that you would know: the LORD — He is God. There is no other besides Him. ³⁶From heaven He let you hear His voice to discipline you. On earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of that fire. ³⁷Because He loved your ancestors, He chose their descendants after them and brought you out of Egypt by His presence, with His great power, ³⁸in order to drive out nations greater and more powerful than you from before you, to bring you in, and to give you their land as an inheritance — as it is today. ³⁹Know today and take it to heart: the LORD — He is God in the heavens above and on the earth below. There is no other. ⁴⁰Keep His decrees and His commandments that I am giving you today, so that it will go well for you and for your children after you, and so that you will live long on the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time. ⁴¹Then Moses set apart three cities east of the Jordan, toward the sunrise, ⁴²so that anyone who killed another person unintentionally, without prior hostility, could flee to one of these cities and save his life. ⁴³These were: Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites; Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites. ⁴⁴This is the Law that Moses placed before the Israelites. ⁴⁵These are the decrees, the statutes, and the laws that Moses proclaimed to the Israelites after they came out of Egypt, ⁴⁶on the east side of the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled from Heshbon — the one Moses and the Israelites defeated after coming out of Egypt. ⁴⁷They took possession of his land and the land of Og king of Bashan — the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan, toward the sunrise — ⁴⁸from Aroer on the edge of the Arnon Gorge all the way to Mount Sion (that is,

Hermon), ⁴⁹including the entire Arabah east of the Jordan, down to the Sea of the Arabah, below the slopes of Pisgah.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The transitional v'attah Yisra'el ('and now, Israel') shifts from historical review (chapters 1-3) to direct exhortation. The command shema ('listen/hear') introduces the central Deuteronomic demand: attentive obedience. Two categories of instruction are named: chuqqim ('decrees, statutes' — fixed prescriptions) and mishpatim ('laws, judgments' — case-based rulings). The purpose clause lema'an tichyu ('so that you may live') connects obedience directly to survival — Torah observance is not abstract duty but the pathway to life itself.
2. The double prohibition — lo tosifu ('do not add') and lo tigre'u ('do not subtract/diminish') — establishes the principle of textual integrity for divine instruction. The ha-davar ('the word/matter') is treated as a fixed, complete revelation that must be preserved without human modification. This principle protects the Torah from both expansionist innovation and reductive neglect. The purpose is lishemor et mitsvot YHWH ('to keep the commandments of the LORD') — faithful preservation enables faithful practice.
3. Moses appeals again to eyewitness experience: eineikhem ha-ro'ot ('your eyes — the seeing ones'). The Ba'al Pe'or incident (Numbers 25) involved Israelite men engaging in sexual immorality and idol worship with Moabite women — a recent catastrophe that killed 24,000. The verb hishmido ('He destroyed him') from shamad is used for total annihilation. The selective destruction — kol ha-ish asher halakh acharei Ba'al Pe'or ('every man who followed Baal-peor') — reinforces the thesis: disobedience brings death.
4. The verb ha-deveqim ('the ones clinging/holding fast') from davaq describes intimate, tenacious attachment — the same verb used for a husband's bond to his wife in Genesis 2:24. The contrast is stark: those who followed Baal-peor are dead; those who clung to God (ba-YHWH Eloheikhem — 'to the LORD your God') are chayyim kullekhem ha-yom ('alive, all of you, today'). Loyalty to God is literally the difference between life and death.
5. Moses presents himself as an authorized teacher: limmadeti etkhem ('I have taught you') — the root lamad ('to teach/learn') establishes Moses's pedagogical role. His authority derives from divine commission: ka'asher tsivvani YHWH Elohai ('as the LORD my God commanded me'). The purpose is la'asot ken be-qerev ha-arets ('to do so in the midst of the land') — the Torah is designed for life in the land, not for wilderness existence. The laws will govern a settled agricultural society.
6. Torah observance becomes Israel's international reputation: hi chokmatkhem u-vinatkhem le'einei ha-ammim ('it is your wisdom and your discernment in the eyes of the peoples'). The nations' expected response — raq am chakham v'navon ha-goi ha-gadol ha-zeh ('surely a wise and discerning people, this great nation') — presents Torah observance not as a burden but as an advertisement for divine wisdom. Other nations will recognize the superiority of Israel's legal and moral code by observing its effects.
7. The rhetorical question mi goi gadol ('what great nation?') expects the answer 'none.' Israel's uniqueness is not military power or cultural sophistication but divine proximity: asher lo Elohim qerovim elav ('that has a god near to it'). The participle qerovim ('near, close') describes God's accessibility — be-khol qor'enu elav ('in all our calling upon Him'). Other nations had distant, manipulable deities; Israel's God is relationally present and responsive to prayer.
8. A second rhetorical question parallels verse 7: if the first boasts divine proximity, this one boasts legal excellence. The adjective tsaddiqim ('righteous, just') applied to the chuqqim and mishpatim declares Israel's laws morally superior to all other legal codes. The phrase k'khol ha-Torah ha-zot ('like this entire Torah') treats the Torah as a unified, comprehensive body of instruction. The claim is bold: no nation's laws match the justice of God's revealed instructions.
9. The double imperative — hishamer lekha u-shemor nafshekha me'od ('guard yourself and keep your soul very carefully') — conveys extreme vigilance. The danger is forgetting: pen tishkach ('lest you forget') the events your eyes witnessed, and pen yasuru mi-levavekha ('lest they depart from your heart'). Memory is not passive recall but active heart-engagement. The antidote to forgetting is intergenerational teaching: v'hoda'tam le-vanekha v'livnei vanekha ('make them known to your children and grandchildren'). Faith survives through transmission.
10. The Horeb theophany is the foundational memory: yom asher amadta lifnei YHWH ('the day you stood before the LORD'). God's purpose in the assembly (haqhel li et ha-am — 'gather for me the people') was auditory revelation: v'ashmi'em et devarai ('I will make them hear my words'). The goal is le-yir'ah oti ('to fear/revere me') — yir'ah encompasses awe, reverence, and obedient respect. The chain continues: v'et beneihem yelammedun ('and their children they will teach'). Revelation, reverence, and repetition form a cycle of faithfulness.
11. The scene combines opposing elements: fire (bo'er ba-esh — 'burning with fire') reaching ad lev ha-shamayim ('to the heart/middle of the heavens'), surrounded by choshekh anan va-arafel ('darkness, cloud, and thick gloom'). The arafel ('dense darkness, thick gloom') is God's shroud — He reveals Himself in speech but conceals Himself visually. The people stood tachat ha-har ('under/at the base of the mountain'), looking up at the terrifying display of divine presence.
12. This verse is theologically pivotal: mi-tokh ha-esh ('from the midst of the fire') God spoke, and Israel heard qol devarim ('a sound/voice of words'). The crucial observation: u-temunah einkhem ro'im ('but a form/image you were not seeing') zulati qol ('except a voice'). God is heard but not seen — He communicates through language, not through visual representation. This auditory-only revelation becomes the theological foundation for the prohibition against images (vv. 15-19): since God showed no form, no form can represent Him.
13. The covenant (berito — 'His covenant') is identified with aseret ha-devarim ('the Ten Words' — traditionally 'the Ten Commandments'). The term devarim ('words') rather than mitsvot ('commandments') is significant — these are covenant stipulations expressed as direct divine speech, not merely legal rules. God both spoke and wrote: va-yikhtevem al shnei luchot avanim ('He wrote them on two tablets of stone'). The dual tablets likely

represent two copies of the covenant document — one for each covenant partner — following ancient Near Eastern treaty conventions.

14. Moses distinguishes between God's direct revelation (the Ten Words on stone) and his own teaching role: v'oti tsivah ('and me He commanded') le-lammed etkhem ('to teach you'). The chuqqim u-mishpatim ('decrees and laws') expand and apply the covenant principles of the Decalogue. The teaching is land-oriented: la'asotkhem otam ba-arets ('for you to do them in the land') asher attem overim shamamah le-rishtah ('that you are crossing over there to possess'). Torah is the instruction manual for life in the promised land.
15. The warning v'nishmartem me'od le-nafshotekhem ('guard yourselves very carefully for your souls/lives') introduces the anti-idolatry section with life-or-death urgency. The theological argument is precise: ki lo re'item kol temunah ('because you did not see any form') on b'yom dibber YHWH ('the day the LORD spoke'). Since God's self-revelation at Sinai was exclusively auditory, any visual representation is not merely inadequate but fundamentally contrary to how God chose to reveal Himself.
16. The verb tashchitun ('you corrupt/destroy yourselves') from shachat frames idolatry as self-destruction, not merely disobedience. The object is pesel temunat kol samel ('a carved image, the form of any figure/symbol'). The samel may refer to a cultic image or symbol. The first category prohibited is tavnit zakhar o neqevah ('the pattern/form of male or female') — human-shaped idols, whether male gods or female goddesses. This begins a comprehensive catalog of prohibited image-making.
17. The catalog expands from human forms to tavnit kol behemah ('the form of any animal') and tavnit kol tsippor kanaf ('the form of any winged bird'). Animal worship was widespread in the ancient Near East — Egyptian religion prominently featured animal deities (Apis bull, Horus falcon, Bastet cat). The comprehensiveness (kol — 'any/every') leaves no loophole: no creature from any realm can serve as a representation of the invisible God.
18. The final two categories complete the four-domain sweep of creation (echoing Genesis 1): kol romes ba-adamah ('anything crawling on the ground' — reptiles, insects) and kol dagah asher ba-mayim mitachat la-arets ('any fish in the waters beneath the earth'). The ancient cosmology envisioned waters below the earth's surface. The four categories — human, animal, bird, ground-crawler/fish — mirror the creation order and declare that nothing in the created realm can image the Creator.
19. Astral worship is addressed separately from animal/human idolatry. The danger is seduction by beauty: u-fen tissa einekha ('lest you lift your eyes') to the sky and v'niddachta ('be driven/lured away'). The verbs hishtachavita ('bow down') and avadtam ('serve them') describe the full posture and practice of worship. The remarkable phrase asher chalaq YHWH Elohekha otam le-khol ha-ammim ('which the LORD your God has allotted to all peoples') suggests God permitted celestial worship for other nations but reserved exclusive worship of Himself for Israel.
20. The metaphor kur ha-barzel ('iron furnace/smelting furnace') depicts Egypt as an industrial forge — the heat and suffering of slavery refined Israel as metal is refined in fire. The Exodus was God's act of extraction: laqach ('He took') and va-yotsi ('He brought out'). The purpose: lihyot lo le-am nachalah ('to become for Him a people of inheritance'). The term nachalah ('inheritance, patrimony') applied to Israel means God claims them as His own personal possession — not merely subjects but treasured heritage.
21. Moses returns to his personal exclusion: YHWH hit'anaf bi ('the LORD was enraged at me') al divreikhem ('because of your words/deeds'). The sworn prohibition is double: le-vilti ovri et ha-Yarden ('that I would not cross the Jordan') and le-vilti vo el ha-arets ha-tovah ('that I would not enter the good land'). Moses's emphasis on nachalah ('inheritance') highlights the poignancy — the land he is giving as inheritance to Israel was denied to him as a personal reality. His loss is their gain.
22. Moses's declaration anokhi met ba-arets ha-zot ('I am dying in this land') states his fate with stark simplicity. The contrast is painful: einenni over ('I am not crossing') but v'attem overim ('but you are crossing') vi-rishtem ('and you will possess'). The pronouns carry all the emotion — I/you, not crossing/crossing, dying here/inheriting there. Moses accepts his fate and redirects the people's attention from his loss to their promise.
23. The warning hishameru lakhem ('guard yourselves') returns with intensified urgency. Forgetting the covenant (pen tishkechu et berit YHWH — 'lest you forget the covenant of the LORD') leads directly to idolatry. The phrase asher karat immakhem ('which He cut with you') uses the standard covenant-making verb (karat — 'to cut'), evoking the solemnity of the Sinai ceremony. The sequence — forgetting the covenant, then making a pesel ('idol') — reveals Moses's understanding: idolatry is not the cause but the symptom of covenant amnesia.
24. Two divine metaphors close this warning section. First: esh oklah ('a consuming fire') — fire that devours everything in its path, recalling the burning mountain of verse 11. Second: El qanna ('a jealous/zealous God') — qanna describes the fierce possessiveness of exclusive covenant love. God's jealousy is not petty insecurity but the righteous intolerance of a faithful spouse toward infidelity. Together, these images warn: the God who revealed Himself in fire will respond to idolatry with consuming judgment.
25. Moses projects into the future: ki toled banim u-vnei vanim ('when you bear children and grandchildren') v'noshantem ba-arets ('and you have grown old/long-settled in the land'). The verb noshantem from yashan ('to be old, to sleep') suggests complacency through prolonged comfort. The warning sequence — v'hishchatem ('you will become corrupt'), va'asitem pesel ('you will make an idol'), va'asitem ha-ra ('you will do evil') le-hakh'iso ('to provoke Him') — reads as prophecy, not merely possibility. Moses foresees that prosperity will breed forgetfulness.
26. The solemn invocation ha'idoti vakhem ha-yom et ha-shamayim v'et ha-arets ('I call as witness against you today the heavens and the earth') follows ancient Near Eastern treaty conventions where cosmic forces witnessed covenant agreements. The infinitive absolute avod to'vedun ('perishing you will perish') and hishamed tishamedun ('being destroyed you will be destroyed') double the verbs for emphasis. The consequence of idolatry is exile — removal me'al ha-arets ('from the land'). The warning is conditional but presented with prophetic certainty.
27. The verb hefits ('He will scatter') from puts describes forced dispersion — exile among the nations. The phrase nish'artem metei mispar ('you will remain few in number') — literally 'men of number/able to be counted' — depicts a remnant so small it can be tallied, contrasting sharply with the

'stars of heaven' metaphor of 1:10. The verb yenaheg ('He will lead/drive') from nahag suggests God actively herding them into exile, as a shepherd drives livestock.

28. The punishment fits the crime with bitter irony: Israel wanted idols, so in exile va'avadtem sham elohim ('you will serve gods there') — ma'aseh yedei adam ('the work of human hands'). The fourfold negation — lo yir'un ('they cannot see'), lo yishme'un ('they cannot hear'), lo yokhlun ('they cannot eat'), lo yerichun ('they cannot smell') — exposes the absurdity of idol worship: the gods of exile are senseless objects of ets va-even ('wood and stone'). The living God who speaks, sees, and acts is replaced by mute material.
29. The tone shifts dramatically from judgment to hope: u-viqqashtem mi-sham ('you will seek from there') — even from the depths of exile, seeking is possible. The promise u-matsata ('you will find') is unconditional in its assurance — God remains findable. The condition is wholeness: ki tidreshenu be-khol levavekha u-ve-khol nafshekha ('when you seek Him with all your heart and all your soul'). The word pair lev ('heart' — the seat of will and intellect) and nefesh ('soul/life' — the totality of one's being) demands complete, undivided commitment.
30. The temporal phrase be-acharit ha-yamim ('in the latter days/end of days') looks far into the future, beyond exile to ultimate restoration. The word tsar ('distress, trouble') describes the crushing pressure of exile. Moses presents the return not as a possibility but a certainty: v'shavta ad YHWH ('you will return to the LORD') v'shamata be-qolo ('you will listen to His voice'). The suffering of exile will accomplish what prosperity could not — genuine repentance. The verb shuv ('return') is the central term for repentance in the Hebrew Bible.
31. After the severe warnings, Moses grounds hope in God's character: El rachum ('a compassionate/merciful God'). The root racham relates to rechem ('womb') — divine compassion is maternal, instinctive, and tender. Three negatives guarantee restoration: lo yarfekha ('He will not let you go/abandon you'), lo yashchitekha ('He will not destroy you'), v'lo yishkach et berit avotekha ('He will not forget the covenant of your ancestors'). God's covenant memory outlasts human faithlessness. What Israel forgets (v. 23), God remembers.
32. Moses issues a research challenge: she'al na le-yamim rishonim ('ask now about the former days') — investigate all of human history le-min ha-yom asher bara Elohim adam ('from the day God created man'). The spatial scope matches the temporal: u-le-miqtsah ha-shamayim v'ad qetsah ha-shamayim ('from one end of the heavens to the other'). The rhetorical question ha-nihyah ka-davar ha-gadol ha-zeh ('has anything like this great thing happened?') leads to the unprecedented claim of the next verse.
33. The question ha-shama am qol Elohim medabber mi-toch ha-esh ('has a people heard the voice of God speaking from fire') highlights the unique terror and privilege of Sinai. The verb va-yechi ('and lived/survived') underscores that direct encounter with the divine voice should have been lethal — the people's survival is itself miraculous. The phrase ka'asher shamata attah ('as you yourself heard') makes each listener personally accountable: you heard it; you survived it; now respond to it.
34. The Exodus is presented as historically unprecedented: ha-nissah Elohim lavo laqachat lo goi mi-qerev goi ('has God attempted to come to take for Himself a nation from the midst of a nation'). Seven instruments of deliverance are listed: massot ('trials'), otot ('signs'), moftim ('wonders'), milchamah ('war'), yad chazaqah ('mighty hand'), zero'a netuyah ('outstretched arm'), and mora'im gedolim ('great terrors'). The climactic seven-fold list recalls the plagues and exodus events. No other deity in human history performed such a national-scale rescue — this is Moses's central apologetic argument.
35. The purpose of Israel's unique historical experience is knowledge: attah hor'eta lada'at ('you were shown in order to know'). The declaration YHWH hu ha-Elohim ('the LORD — He is the God') is an exclusivist monotheistic claim. The phrase ein od milvado ('there is none else besides Him') goes beyond henotheism (worshiping one god while acknowledging others' existence) to absolute monotheism — no other deity exists. This is one of the strongest monotheistic statements in the Hebrew Bible.
36. Revelation came from two directions simultaneously: min ha-shamayim ('from heaven') God's voice descended, and al ha-arets ('on earth') His fire appeared. The purpose is le-yassrekha ('to discipline/instruct you') — yasar means both to correct and to train, combining correction with education. The auditory emphasis continues: et qolo ('His voice'), u-devarav shamata ('His words you heard') mi-toch ha-esh ('from the midst of the fire'). Heaven and earth converge in the Sinai event.
37. The motivation for election is love: ki ahav et avotekha ('because He loved your ancestors'). This is unmerited affection — God chose Abraham's line not for their merit but because of His love. The verb va-yivchar ('He chose') from bachar is the central election verb — divine selection for covenant relationship. God's involvement is personal: be-fanav ('by His presence/face') with be-kocho ha-gadol ('by His great power'). Love and power combine in the Exodus — it is both intimate and mighty.
38. The purpose chain continues: le-horish goyim gedolim va-atsumim mimmekha ('to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you'). The phrase mimmekha ('than you') honestly acknowledges Israel's relative weakness — the nations being displaced are gedolim va-atsumim ('greater and mightier'). Israel's conquest depends entirely on divine power, not military superiority. The gift is nachalah ('inheritance') — permanent, generational, and irrevocable — ka-yom ha-zeh ('as this day') confirming present fulfillment.
39. The verse demands both intellectual and emotional engagement: v'yadata ha-yom ('know today') and va-hashevota el levavekha ('bring it back to your heart'). The knowledge is cosmically comprehensive: YHWH hu ha-Elohim ba-shamayim mi-ma'al v'al ha-arets mi-tachat ('the LORD is God in heaven above and on earth below'). The concluding ein od ('there is no other') — even shorter than 4:35's ein od milvado — is the most compressed monotheistic declaration possible. Two words in Hebrew encompass all of theology.
40. Moses's first address concludes with the promise of dual blessing: asher yitav lekha u-levanekha acharekha ('that it may go well for you and for your children after you') and u-lema'an ta'arikh yamim ('that you may prolong your days'). Obedience yields both quality of life (yitav — 'it will be good') and quantity (ta'arikh yamim — 'you will lengthen days'). The final phrase kol ha-yamim ('all the days' — forever) extends the promise indefinitely.

The pe paragraph marker signals the end of Moses's first major speech (chapters 1-4:40).

41. The narrative shifts from speech to action: az yavdil Mosheh ('then Moses set apart/separated') shalosh arim ('three cities'). The verb hivdil from badal ('to separate, to distinguish') is the same verb used for God's separating acts in creation (Genesis 1:4-7). The phrase mizrechah shamesh ('toward the sunrise' — eastward) locates these cities in Transjordan. This section (vv. 41-43) forms a brief narrative interlude between Moses's first and second addresses.
42. The cities of refuge serve a specific legal function: protecting the rotse'ach ('manslayer, one who kills') who kills bi-vli da'at ('without knowledge/unintentionally'). The qualifier v'hu lo sone lo mi-tmol shilshom ('and he was not hating him from yesterday-three days ago' — without prior hostility) distinguishes accidental killing from premeditated murder. The purpose is va-chai ('and he shall live') — the manslayer's life is preserved from the blood-avenger by finding sanctuary in these cities. This represents a sophisticated distinction between intentional and unintentional homicide.
43. Three cities are named, one per Transjordanian tribe: Betser ba-midbar ('Bezer in the wilderness') on the mishor ('plateau') for Reuben; Ra'mot ba-Gil'ad ('Ramoth in Gilead') for Gad; and Golan ba-Bashan ('Golan in Bashan') for Manasseh. The distribution ensures geographical accessibility — each tribe has a refuge city within reasonable distance. Golan gives its name to the modern Golan Heights. The three cities correspond to the three tribal territories described in 3:12-17.
44. The transitional heading v'zot ha-Torah ('and this is the Torah/instruction') introduces Moses's second address (chapters 5-26 or 5-28). The verb sam ('placed, set') lifnei benei Yisra'el ('before the children of Israel') implies both presentation and availability — the Torah is not hidden or esoteric but publicly accessible. This verse may serve as a superscription for everything that follows, or as a bridge connecting the historical prologue to the legal core of Deuteronomy.
45. Three categories of instruction are named: ha-edot ('the testimonies/decrees' — instructions that testify to God's will), ha-chuqqim ('the statutes' — prescribed regulations), and ha-mishpatim ('the laws/judgments' — case-law rulings). The timing reference be-tsetam mi-Mitsrayim ('when they came out of Egypt') connects all subsequent legislation to the Exodus event — the laws flow from and depend upon the liberation. The three-term formula is a comprehensive designation for the entirety of God's revealed instruction.
46. The geographical setting is restated: be'ever ha-Yarden ('east of the Jordan'), ba-gai mul Beit Pe'or ('in the valley opposite Beth-peor'), be-erets Sichon melek ha-Emori ('in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites'). The note that Moses and the Israelites defeated (hikkah — 'struck') Sihon after coming out of Egypt connects the setting to the conquest narrative of chapter 2. The mention of Beth-peor again (see 3:29) keeps the warning about apostasy within sight of the audience.
47. The summary references the dual conquest: et artso ('his land' — Sihon's) v'et erets Og melek ha-Bashan ('and the land of Og king of Bashan'). The phrase shnei malkhei ha-Emori ('the two kings of the Amorites') treats them as a pair — the complete Transjordanian Amorite power structure. The direction marker mizrach shamesh ('east of the sun/sunrise') locates both territories east of the Jordan, forming the context for Moses's second address.
48. The territory is defined by its full north-south extent: me-Aro'er al sfat nachal Arnon ('from Aroer on the lip of the Arnon Gorge') in the south to har Si'on hu Chermon ('Mount Sion, which is Hermon') in the far north. The name Si'on here (distinct from Zion in Jerusalem) is yet another name for Mount Hermon, adding to the three names listed in 3:9 (Hermon, Sirion, Senir). The mountain's multiple names reflect its prominence as a regional landmark visible to many peoples.
49. The final geographical note includes kol ha-Aravah ever ha-Yarden mizrachah ('the entire Arabah east of the Jordan') extending to Yam ha-Aravah ('the Sea of the Arabah' — the Dead Sea) below ashdot ha-Pisgah ('the slopes/watersheds of Pisgah'). The pe paragraph marker ends this section definitively. Mount Pisgah appears for the final time as the place where Moses will view the land he cannot enter (3:27) — a bittersweet closing note that looks back to Moses's plea and forward to his death.

5

Summary: *Moses restates the Ten Commandments to the generation that will enter the land, framing them as a covenant made 'not with our fathers but with us — we who are alive here today.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The Sabbath commandment differs from Exodus 20: there it is grounded in creation ('for in six days the LORD made...'), here in liberation ('remember that you were a slave in Egypt'). Same command, different motivation. Deuteronomy's version makes the Sabbath a social justice institution — you rest so your servants can rest, because you know what slavery feels like.*

Translation Friction: *Moses's claim that the covenant was made 'with us, the living, here today' (v. 3) when most of them were children or unborn at Sinai is a theological statement, not a historical error. Each generation stands at Sinai. We rendered the emphatic anachnu elleh poh hayyom ('we ourselves, these here today') to preserve the force of Moses's actualization.*

Connections: The Decalogue parallel in Exodus 20:1-17 reveals intentional Deuteronomic revision. The people's fear of God's voice (vv. 23-27) sets up the mediator role that leads to the prophet-like-Moses promise in 18:15-18. Jesus cites the Sabbath commandment's humanitarian logic in Mark 2:27.

¹Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: "Listen, Israel, to the statutes and ordinances that I am speaking in your hearing today. Learn them and take care to observe them. ²The LORD our God cut a covenant with us at Horeb. ³Not with our ancestors did the LORD cut this covenant, but with us — we ourselves, these ones here, alive today, all of us. ⁴The LORD spoke with you face to face on the mountain, from the midst of the fire — ⁵— I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain — saying: ⁶"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ⁷You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁸You shall not make for yourself a carved image — any likeness of what is in heaven above, on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. ⁹You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the LORD your God, am a zealous God, visiting the iniquity of parents upon children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, ¹⁰but showing faithful love to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments. ¹¹You shall not bear the name of the LORD your God for worthless purposes, for the LORD will not hold guiltless anyone who bears His name for worthless purposes. ¹²Guard the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You shall not do any work — you, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, your ox, your donkey, any of your livestock, or the foreigner within your gates — so that your male servant and your female servant may rest just as you do. ¹⁵Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. ¹⁶Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that your days may be long and so that it may go well for you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁷You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁸You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not crave your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. ¹⁹These words the LORD spoke to your entire assembly on the mountain, from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the deep darkness, with a great voice — and He added nothing more. He wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me. ²⁰When you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness — while the mountain was blazing with fire — you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders, ²¹and you said, 'Look — the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. Today we have seen that God speaks with a human being, and that person lives! ²²So now — why should we die? This great fire will consume us! If we continue to hear the voice of the LORD our God, we will die. ²³For who among all mortals has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of fire, as we have, and survived? ²⁴You go near and listen to everything the LORD our God says. Then tell us everything the LORD our God tells you, and we will listen and obey.' ²⁵The LORD heard the words you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, 'I have heard the words that this people has spoken to you. Everything they have said is right. ²⁶If only they had such a heart in them — to revere Me and keep all My commandments always — so that it would go well for them and for their children forever!' ²⁷Go tell them: Return to your tents. ²⁸But you — stand here beside Me, and I will speak to you the entire commandment, the statutes and the ordinances that you shall teach them, so that they may carry them out in the land I am giving them to possess. ²⁹Take care to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. Do not turn aside to the right or to the left. ³⁰Walk in the entire way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live, so that it may go well for you, and so that you may have long life in the land you are about to possess."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Moses assembles the entire nation for a covenant renewal address. The three verbs — 'learn' (lemadtem), 'take care' (ushemartem), 'observe' (la'asotam) — create a progression: understanding, then vigilance, then practice. The covenant is not intuitive — it must be taught, guarded, and performed. This verse frames everything that follows: what you are about to hear, you must internalize and live.

2. Moses uses *karat berit* ('cut a covenant') — the standard Hebrew idiom for establishing a covenant, derived from the ancient practice of cutting animals in a ratification ceremony (see Gen 15:10-18). Deuteronomy uses 'Horeb' for the mountain Exodus calls 'Sinai' — both names refer to the same event. The first-person 'with us' (*immanu*) prepares for the remarkable claim in v3.
3. This is one of the most audacious claims in the Torah. The Horeb covenant was made with the previous generation — most of this audience was born afterward. Yet Moses insists: 'not with our ancestors but with us.' The covenant is not inherited history; it is present-tense obligation. Every generation stands at Sinai. The emphatic Hebrew piling — *anachnu elleh poh hayyom kullanu chayyim* ('we ourselves, these here, today, all of us, living') — drives the point: you, not your grandparents, are the covenant partners.
4. *Panim bepanim* ('face to face') — the same phrase used of Moses in Deut 34:10, but here applied to the entire nation. At Horeb, God spoke directly to the people, not only through Moses. This creates a tension with v5 (where Moses stands as mediator), which the narrative resolves by distinguishing the initial direct speech (the Ten Commandments) from subsequent legislation (mediated through Moses). The fire is both terrifying and communicative — God's voice comes from within it.
5. Moses describes his unique position: 'standing between' (*omed bein*) God and Israel. He is the mediator — not a barrier but a bridge. The people's fear of the fire prevented them from ascending, so Moses stood in the gap. This parenthetical establishes Moses's authority to restate the Decalogue: he was there, between God and the people, and he transmits God's exact words. The verb *lehaggid* ('to declare') implies faithful relay, not interpretation.
6. The preamble is identical to Exodus 20:2. *Anokhi YHWH Elohekha* ('I am the LORD your God') is not a commandment but the foundation on which all commandments rest. The *exodus* — 'who brought you out of Egypt' — is the credential. God's authority to command flows from His prior act of deliverance. 'House of slavery' (*beit avadim*) is the standard Deuteronomical epithet for Egypt. The entire Decalogue hangs on this verse: these are the words of a rescuer to the rescued.
7. The first commandment: exclusive allegiance. The phrase *al-panay* ('before My face / in My presence') can mean 'in preference to Me,' 'alongside Me,' or 'in My sight.' All three readings say the same thing: no rival deity may occupy any space that belongs to the LORD. The command does not address whether other gods exist — it addresses Israel's loyalty. This is covenant language: the vassal may serve only one sovereign.
8. The prohibition covers three cosmic domains — heaven, earth, water — encompassing everything in creation. Nothing created may represent the Creator. The word *pesel* ('carved image') refers to an object shaped by human hands; *temunah* ('form, likeness') extends the prohibition to any visual representation. The command protects God's freedom: an image fixes and limits what is infinite and free. Israel's God cannot be contained in human-made forms.
9. Two verbs — 'bow down' (*hishtachaveh*, prostration in worship) and 'serve' (*ta'avdem*, ongoing devotion) — cover both ritual and lifestyle worship of images. *El qanna* ('zealous/jealous God') — the same term used in Deut 6:15 — describes God's fierce, exclusive passion for Israel's loyalty. 'Visiting iniquity on children' describes the generational consequences of idolatry, not arbitrary punishment of the innocent — the social effects of covenant betrayal cascade through families.
10. The asymmetry between v9 and v10 is the theological heart of the second commandment: three-to-four generations of consequence versus thousands of generations of *chesed*. God's disposition tilts overwhelmingly toward steadfast love. The word *chesed* here is the register term — covenant loyalty, faithful love, mercy that keeps promises. Those who 'love Me and keep My commandments' describes the posture of a faithful covenant partner: love expressed through obedience.
11. The verb *tissa* ('take up, carry, bear') suggests not just speaking but carrying God's name — as a representative bears a sovereign's banner. *Lashshav* ('for emptiness, for worthlessness') goes beyond profanity to include any use of God's name that empties it of weight: false oaths, manipulative prayers, hollow invocations of divine authority. To bear God's name is to represent Him; to do so *lashshav* is to misrepresent Him. The warning — *lo yenaqqeh* ('will not hold guiltless, will not acquit') — is one of the strongest negative statements in the Decalogue.
12. Deuteronomy uses *shamor* ('guard, keep') where Exodus 20:8 uses *zakhor* ('remember'). The two are complementary: remember the Sabbath (hold it in mind) and guard it (protect its boundaries). Jewish tradition holds that both words were spoken simultaneously at Sinai — a concept captured in the Sabbath hymn *Lekha Dodi*. The addition 'as the LORD your God has commanded you' (*ka'asher tsivvekha*) — absent from Exodus 20 — reminds Israel that this is not a new command but a renewal of an existing one.
13. The six days of labor are not a concession but a command — work is expected and dignified. The Hebrew *melakhah* ('work, skilled labor, craft') is the same word used for the work of building the tabernacle (Exod 31:3-5) and for God's creative work in Genesis 2:2. Human labor participates in God's own pattern of purposeful creation followed by rest.
14. Deuteronomy adds a social justice clause absent from Exodus 20: 'so that your male servant and your female servant may rest just as you do' (*lema'an yanuach avdekha va'amatekha kamokha*). The Sabbath is not just personal piety — it is mandated rest for the most vulnerable. The word *kamokha* ('like you, just as you do') asserts the equal dignity of servants before God's rest. The list of those covered is comprehensive: children, servants, animals, and foreigners. No one in Israel's household may be forced to work when God has declared rest.
15. The most significant difference between Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5: Exodus grounds the Sabbath in creation ('in six days the LORD made heaven and earth... and rested on the seventh day'). Deuteronomy grounds it in liberation ('you were a slave in Egypt'). The two rationales are complementary, not contradictory: creation establishes the pattern; the *exodus* reveals the purpose. You rest because God rests — and because you know what it means to never rest. Former slaves understand the gift of Sabbath in a way the free-born never can.

16. Deuteronomy adds a second promise — 'and that it may go well for you' (ulema'an yitav lakh) — absent from Exodus 20:12. The commandment to honor (kabbed, from kavod — 'to make heavy, to give weight to') parents bridges the two halves of the Decalogue: it is both a duty toward God (who commands it) and toward other people (the parents themselves). Paul identifies this as the first commandment with a promise attached (Eph 6:2).
17. Hebrew versification combines four commandments in a single verse — each only two words in Hebrew: lo tirtsach, lo tin'af, lo tignov, lo ta'aneh. The staccato rhythm is deliberate: these are absolute prohibitions, stated without qualification or explanation. The verb ratsach ('murder') is distinct from other Hebrew killing verbs (harag, hemit, muth) — it specifically denotes unlawful killing. Deuteronomy substitutes ed shav ('worthless/vain testimony') for Exodus 20:16's ed shaqer ('false testimony') — broadening the prohibition from lying to any testimony that lacks substance or integrity.
18. Deuteronomy makes two changes from Exodus 20:17. First, it separates 'wife' (eshet re'ekha) from the property list, giving her a distinct prohibition with the verb tachamod ('covet') — while the property list uses a different verb, tit'avveh ('crave, desire'). Exodus uses tachamod for both. Second, Deuteronomy adds 'his field' (sadehu) to the property list — reflecting the agricultural reality of settled life in the land, which the Exodus version (delivered before settlement) does not address. The tenth commandment is unique: it legislates internal desire, not external action.
19. Moses emphasizes three features of the Decalogue's delivery: it was spoken to the entire assembly (not privately to Moses), it came from terrifying theophanic phenomena (fire, cloud, arafel — the same 'deep darkness' of Exod 20:21), and 'He added nothing more' (velo yasaf) — the Ten Words are complete as spoken. God then inscribed them on stone — the only part of the Torah written by God's own hand (or finger, per Exod 31:18). The two tablets are given to Moses as mediator, connecting back to v5.
20. The people's response to the theophany: they approached Moses, not God. The tribal leaders and elders came as representatives. The darkness (choshekh) and the burning mountain create an overwhelming sensory experience — hearing God's voice from impenetrable darkness while the mountain itself is on fire. The people's retreat to Moses marks the transition from direct divine speech (the Decalogue) to mediated legislation (everything after).
21. The people's awe centers on two revelations: they saw God's kavod ('glory') and godlo ('greatness'), and they heard His voice from the fire. Their astonishment is specific: 'God speaks with a human being, and that person lives' (yedabber Elohim et-ha'adam vachai). The expectation was death — to encounter God directly should be fatal. The survival itself is the miracle. The word kavod here is the register term — God's weighty, overwhelming presence made visible.
22. The people's fear is not irrational — the fire is real and enormous. Their logic is honest: we survived once, but we cannot endure more direct contact with God. The verb tokhleinu ('will consume us') treats the divine fire as a devouring force. Their request (coming in v24) is for Moses to serve as permanent mediator — to hear God's voice for them and relay His words. This is the theological origin of the prophetic office: the people's own request for mediated revelation.
23. The rhetorical question — 'who among all flesh (kol-basar) has heard the living God (Elohim chayyim) speaking from fire and lived?' — treats Israel's Sinai experience as absolutely unique in human history. The phrase Elohim chayyim ('living God') distinguishes the God of Israel from inert idols: this God speaks, acts, and is dangerously alive. The implied answer is: no one, ever. Israel's survival of direct divine encounter is unprecedented and unrepeatable.
24. The people commission Moses as permanent mediator: 'You go near... then tell us.' The final words — veshama'nu ve'asinu ('we will listen and obey') — echo the na'aseh venishma of Exodus 24:7, though in reversed order (hear then do, rather than do then hear). The people pledge obedience to mediated revelation, establishing the pattern for all subsequent prophetic communication. Moses becomes the prototype for every prophet who will follow.
25. God's response is remarkable: He approves the people's request. Hetivu kol-asher dibberu ('they have done well in all they have said') — God agrees that direct divine encounter is too much for mortal flesh and endorses the mediation model. This divine validation of human limitation is theologically significant: God accommodates human weakness not as a concession but as wisdom. The prophetic office — hearing God for the people — is God's own design, not a human invention.
26. God's lament — mi-yitten ('who will give,' an idiomatic 'if only!') — is one of the most startling verses in the Torah. God wishes for something He apparently does not compel: a heart that would consistently revere Him and obey. The implication is that obedience requires an inner transformation that the law itself cannot produce. Deuteronomy will return to this theme in 30:6 ('the LORD your God will circumcise your heart'). This verse anticipates Jeremiah's new covenant (Jer 31:33) and Ezekiel's heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26).
27. A practical command after the intense theophany: go home. The people's encounter with God at the mountain is over; normal life resumes. But 'return to your tents' also marks a transition — Moses will now remain with God to receive the rest of the Torah (v28), while the people return to ordinary life. The separation between prophet and people is formalized.
28. God addresses Moses directly: 'You — stand here beside Me.' While the people return to their tents, Moses stays in God's presence to receive the full body of legislation. The phrase poh amod immadi ('stand here beside Me') is an invitation to sustained intimacy — Moses will occupy the position between God and people that v5 described, not just temporarily but as his permanent role. Everything Moses teaches from here forward — the 'commandment, statutes, and ordinances' — is what he receives in this divine audience.
29. The command to walk straight — 'not turning right or left' (lo tasuru yamin usmol) — uses a path metaphor that runs throughout Deuteronomy. The Torah is a road; deviation in either direction leads away from God. The phrase will be repeated for Joshua (Josh 1:7) and for the future king (Deut 17:20). It implies that the covenant path is narrow and specific — not a vague disposition but a defined way of life.

30. The chapter closes with three purpose clauses: 'so that you may live' (tichyun), 'so that it may go well' (vetov lakhem), 'so that you may have long life' (veha'araktem yamim). Obedience and life are linked — not as reward but as natural consequence. The covenant path is the path of life; departure from it leads to diminishment. The phrase 'the entire way' (bekhol-hadderekh) — literally 'in all the road' — frames Torah observance as a comprehensive journey, not a checklist. The closing word — tirashu ('possess,' from yarash) — points forward to the land that awaits.

6

Summary: Moses delivers the Shema — 'Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one' — and commands Israel to love God with all their heart, being, and strength, teaching these words to their children.

What Makes This Remarkable: The Shema (v. 4) is the most recited sentence in Jewish history, yet the Hebrew is syntactically ambiguous: 'The LORD our God, the LORD is one' or 'The LORD our God is one LORD' or 'The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.' The word echad ('one') could mean unique, unified, or alone. We preserved the traditional word order and let the ambiguity stand. The command to love God be-khol levavekha (v. 5, 'with all your heart') uses the doubled-letter form levav, which the rabbis read as 'with both your inclinations' — the good and the evil.

Translation Friction: The word me'odekha (v. 5) is notoriously hard: 'your strength,' 'your might,' 'your very much,' 'your resources.' The root me'od means 'exceedingly,' so me'odekha could mean 'your everything' — whatever you have in abundance. We rendered it 'your strength' as the most accessible English and noted the fuller range. The totafot (v. 8, 'emblems/frontlets') is of uncertain etymology — we transliterated and explained.

Connections: Jesus identifies the Shema as the greatest commandment (Mark 12:29-30, Matthew 22:37). The doorpost inscription (v. 9) becomes the mezuzah. The testing at Massah (v. 16) references Exodus 17:1-7. The catechetical dialogue (vv. 20-25) establishes the Passover Haggadah's question-and-answer format.

¹This is the commandment — the statutes and the ordinances — that the LORD your God charged me to teach you, so that you may carry them out in the land you are about to cross into and possess. ²The purpose is that you, your children, and your grandchildren will revere the LORD your God by keeping all His statutes and commandments that I am giving you, for as long as you live — and that your days may be long. ³Listen, Israel, and be careful to obey, so that it may go well for you and you may multiply greatly — as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you — in a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God — the LORD is one. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your strength. ⁶These words that I am commanding you today must be upon your heart. ⁷You shall repeat them constantly to your children: speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, and let them serve as an emblem on your forehead. ⁹Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. ¹⁰When the LORD your God brings you into the land He swore to your ancestors — to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — to give you: large and prosperous cities that you did not build, ¹¹houses filled with every good thing that you did not fill, cisterns hewn from rock that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant — and when you have eaten and are satisfied, ¹²then guard yourself carefully, or you will forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹³The LORD your God you shall revere, Him alone you shall serve, and by His name you shall swear. ¹⁴You must not follow other gods — any of the gods of the peoples around you — ¹⁵for the LORD your God, who is present among you, is a zealous God. Otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will blaze against you, and He will wipe you from the face of the earth. ¹⁶You must not test the LORD your God as you tested Him at Massah. ¹⁷You must faithfully keep the commandments of the LORD your God — His decrees and His statutes that He has commanded you. ¹⁸Do what is right and good in the LORD's sight, so that it may go well for you and you may enter and take possession of the good land that the LORD swore to your ancestors, ¹⁹driving out all your enemies before you, just as the LORD has promised. ²⁰When your child asks you in the future, 'What are these decrees, statutes, and ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?' ²¹you shall tell your child, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²²The LORD displayed signs and wonders — great and devastating — against Egypt, against Pharaoh, and against his entire household, before our very eyes. ²³He brought us out from there in order to

bring us in — to give us the land that He swore to our ancestors. ²⁴The LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes — to revere the LORD our God — for our good always, and to keep us alive, as we are today. ²⁵It will be our righteousness when we carefully observe this entire commandment before the LORD our God, just as He has commanded us."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Moses uses the singular *hamitsvah* ('the commandment') followed by the plural 'statutes and ordinances' — suggesting that everything that follows flows from a single core commandment, which the Shema (v4-5) will state. The Hebrew *mishpatim* is better rendered 'ordinances' or 'rules' than KJV's 'judgments,' since these are prescriptions for life, not court rulings.
2. The multigenerational chain — 'you, your son, your grandson' — is central to Deuteronomy's vision: covenant faithfulness is transmitted across generations, not merely practiced individually. The verb *tira* ('fear, revere') is the same *yir'ah* that governed the midwives in Exodus 1:17 — awe that produces obedience. The promise of long days (*ya'arikhun yamekha*) links obedience to life itself.
3. The verb *shama* ('hear, listen') appears here as a command and will return as the opening word of v4 — the Shema itself. Hearing in Hebrew is never passive; it always implies response. The phrase 'land flowing with milk and honey' (*erets zavav chalah udevash*) describes agricultural abundance: milk from livestock, honey from date palms (not bees, in the most likely reading). It is a promise of provision, not luxury.
4. These six words are the most important sentence in Judaism. The Hebrew syntax is deliberately ambiguous — YHWH Eloheinu YHWH echad can be parsed in multiple ways, and the tradition has preserved all of them. The word *echad* ('one') can mean 'one' (numerical), 'alone' (exclusive), or 'unified' (undivided). Jesus cites this verse as the greatest commandment (Mark 12:29). The rendering 'the LORD is one' preserves the ambiguity better than 'is one LORD' (which narrows the meaning to numerical oneness).
5. The command to love God is not sentimental — *ahavta* ('you shall love') is a covenant verb. In ancient Near Eastern treaties, 'love' describes the vassal's total loyalty to the sovereign. Three dimensions of totality are named: *levav* (heart — the seat of will and thought, not emotion), *nephesh* (being, life, self — the whole person), and *me'od* (strength, might, abundance — everything you have). Together they leave no domain of human existence outside the scope of this command. Jesus identifies this as the greatest commandment in the Torah (Matt 22:37, Mark 12:30).
6. The instruction moves from the declaration (v4) and the command (v5) to the method of internalization: these words must be *al-levavekha* — literally 'upon your heart.' The words are to rest on the heart until the heart absorbs them. The emphasis on 'today' (*hayyom*) runs throughout Deuteronomy — the covenant is always present-tense, always being renewed in the current moment.
7. The verb *shinantam* (from *shanan*, 'to sharpen, repeat, engrave') implies intensive, repetitive teaching — not a single lesson but constant, woven-into-life instruction. The four situations (sitting, walking, lying down, rising up) form two merisms covering all of life: home and travel, rest and activity. There is no moment when these words are not relevant. This verse became the basis for reciting the Shema morning and evening in Jewish liturgy.
8. This verse has been interpreted both literally (resulting in *tefillin* — small leather boxes containing scripture passages worn during prayer) and metaphorically (keep God's commands constantly visible in your actions and thoughts). The Hebrew *totafot* ('frontlets, emblems') is an unusual word of uncertain etymology, appearing only here and in Exodus 13:16 and Deuteronomy 11:18. 'Hand' and 'forehead' represent action and thought — what you do and what you focus on.
9. The word *mezuzot* ('doorposts') gave its name to the *mezuzah* — the small case containing a scroll of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 affixed to Jewish doorframes to this day. The doorpost marks the threshold between public and private space; the gates mark the boundary of the community. God's words govern both the household and the city. The progression from v6-9 moves outward: heart (v6), speech to children (v7), body (v8), home and community (v9).
10. The danger of prosperity begins here. The covenant promise is about to be fulfilled — Israel will inherit what they did not earn. The naming of the three patriarchs anchors the land promise in covenant history stretching back to Genesis 12, 26, and 28. The list that follows (v10-11) catalogs unearned abundance: cities, houses, wells, vineyards, olive trees — all received, not produced.
11. Four gifts, each with the emphatic 'you did not': build, fill, hew, plant. The repetition makes the point unmissable — everything Israel receives in the land is grace, not achievement. The Hebrew *borot chatsuvim* ('hewn cisterns') refers to water storage cut into limestone, essential for survival in a land without reliable rivers. The list moves from infrastructure (cities, houses) to sustenance (water, food) — every layer of settled life is a gift.
12. *Hishamer lekha* ('guard yourself') — the same verb used for guarding the garden in Genesis 2:15 and for the priestly duty of guarding the sanctuary. Self-guarding is an active spiritual discipline, not passive. The danger is forgetting — *shakhach*, the opposite of *zakhar* ('remember'). In Deuteronomy, forgetting God is the primal sin, more fundamental than any specific commandment violation. 'House of slavery' (*beit avadim*) is Deuteronomy's standard epithet for Egypt.
13. Three verbs, each with emphatic word order (object before verb): revere, serve, swear by. The fronting of 'the LORD your God' gives it the force of 'It is the LORD — and no other — whom you shall revere.' The verb *avad* ('serve, worship') is the same word used for Israel's slavery in Egypt (*avadim*, v12) — Israel is transferred from Pharaoh's service to God's. Swearing by God's name acknowledges Him as the guarantor of truth and oaths.
14. The prohibition is geographically specific: 'the gods of the peoples around you' (*elohei ha'ammim asher sevivoteikhem*). The threat is not abstract polytheism but the actual religious cultures Israel will encounter in Canaan. 'Going after' other gods (*halakh acharei*) is covenant-betrayal language

— it describes a vassal who abandons their sovereign for a rival.

15. El qanna ('jealous/zealous God') — qanna is used exclusively for God in the Hebrew Bible. It does not describe petty jealousy but the fierce, protective passion of a covenant partner who will not share loyalty with rivals. The phrase beqirbekha ('in your midst') is critical: God is not distant — He dwells among Israel, making idolatry not merely theological error but a personal offense against a present God. The consequence — destruction from the face of the ground (adamah) — echoes the Cain narrative (Gen 4:14).
16. The verb nassah ('test, try, prove') and the place name Massah ('testing') share the same root — a wordplay the Hebrew reader would hear immediately. The reference is to Exodus 17:1-7, where Israel demanded water and asked 'Is the LORD among us or not?' — testing whether God's covenant commitment was real. Moses redefines the Massah incident as a permanent prohibition: demanding that God prove Himself is itself a failure of trust.
17. The infinitive absolute construction shamor tishmerun intensifies the verb: 'you must really, truly keep.' Three categories of law are named: mitsvot ('commandments'), edot ('testimonies, decrees' — laws that witness to God's character), and chuqqim ('statutes' — prescribed regulations). The threefold classification suggests that God's law addresses every dimension of life.
18. The pair hayyashar vehatov ('the right and the good') goes beyond mere legal compliance. Yashar ('right, straight, upright') and tov ('good, beneficial') together suggest both moral integrity and active goodness. The rabbis derived from this verse the principle of lifnim mishurat hadin — going beyond the strict letter of the law to do what is genuinely good, even when not explicitly commanded.
19. The verb hadof ('drive out, thrust away') is forceful — God's action on Israel's behalf is not gentle persuasion but decisive removal. 'As the LORD has spoken' (ka'asher dibber YHWH) anchors the military promise in God's covenant word. The sentence completes v18: obedience leads to possession, and possession includes the removal of opposition.
20. The catechetical question-and-answer pattern: a child asks, a parent answers. This is one of four 'son's questions' across the Torah (see also Exodus 12:26, 13:8, 13:14), which form the basis of the four questions in the Passover Haggadah. The word machar ('tomorrow') means 'in the future' — this instruction anticipates the next generation and all generations after. Faith must be transmissible, not merely personal.
21. The answer to the child's question is not a legal explanation but a narrative — a story of rescue. 'We were slaves' (avadim hayinu) — the first-person plural is deliberate. Every generation tells the exodus story as its own experience, not as ancient history. This is the principle of liturgical identification: 'We were slaves,' not 'Our ancestors were slaves.' The 'mighty hand' (yad chazaqah) is Deuteronomy's standard phrase for God's power in the exodus (4:34, 5:15, 7:19, 26:8).
22. The adjective ra'im ('evil, harmful, devastating') applied to God's wonders is striking — the plagues were good for Israel but devastating for Egypt. The phrase le'einenu ('before our eyes') continues the liturgical first-person: every generation 'sees' the exodus through the retelling. The comprehensive targeting — Egypt, Pharaoh, his entire house — leaves no level of Egyptian power untouched.
23. The verse captures the double movement of redemption in a single sentence: hotsi ('brought out') and havi ('bring in'). Exodus is not an end in itself but a means — God rescued Israel from Egypt so that He could bring them to the promised land. The two verbs are linked by lema'an ('in order to'), making the purpose explicit. This is the exodus in miniature: out of slavery, into promise.
24. The purpose of the law is stated with startling simplicity: letov lanu ('for our good'). The commandments are not arbitrary impositions but provisions for flourishing. Two purposes are given: 'for our good always' (comprehensive well-being) and 'to keep us alive' (sheer survival). Obedience and life are linked — not as reward but as cause and effect. The Deuteronomic vision: Torah is the path to life.
25. The chapter ends where it began (v1) — with 'this commandment' (hamitsvah hazzot), singular. The Shema and all that flows from it is one unified command. Tsedaqah ('righteousness') here means 'right standing, covenant faithfulness' — obedience to the commandment constitutes Israel's righteous status before God. Paul will later cite the relationship between righteousness and obedience/faith as a central theological question (Romans 10:5-6, citing Deut 30:12-14). The closing 'as He has commanded us' circles back to the covenant framework: God commands, Israel obeys, and the result is tsedaqah.

7

Summary: Moses commands the total destruction of the seven Canaanite nations when Israel enters the land, forbids intermarriage, and grounds the command in Israel's identity as God's segullah — His treasured possession.

What Makes This Remarkable: The word segullah (v. 6, 'treasured possession') describes not generic favor but a specific, chosen treasure — a king's personal vault, distinct from the general treasury. God chose Israel not because they were numerous (v. 7, 'you were the fewest') but because He loved them and kept His oath. The logic is circular and intentional: God loves because He loves. No external reason is offered.

Translation Friction: The verb chashaq (v. 7, 'set His affection on') carries emotional intensity — desire, longing, attachment. We rendered it as 'set His affection on' rather than the blander 'chose' because the Hebrew insists on emotional language for God's election. The cherem command (v. 2) requires the full phrase 'devote to destruction' rather than softening — the Hebrew does not soften it.

Connections: The segullah language echoes Exodus 19:5 and recurs in Malachi 3:17. The promise to remove diseases (v. 15) reverses the Egyptian plagues. The hornet (v. 20, tsir'ah) appears also in Exodus 23:28 and Joshua 24:12. Peter applies the segullah identity to the church in 1 Peter 2:9.

¹When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to take possession of, He will clear away many nations ahead of you — the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites — seven nations larger and more powerful than you. ²When the LORD your God hands them over to you and you defeat them, you must devote them completely to destruction. You must not make a treaty with them or show them any favor. ³You must not intermarry with them — do not give your daughters to their sons, and do not take their daughters for your sons. ⁴Because they will turn your sons away from following Me, and they will worship other gods. Then the anger of the LORD will blaze against you, and He will swiftly destroy you. ⁵Instead, this is how you must deal with them: tear down their altars, smash their sacred pillars, chop down their Asherah poles, and burn their carved idols in fire. ⁶For you are a people set apart for the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His treasured possession. ⁷It was not because you were more numerous than other peoples that the LORD set His affection on you and chose you — for you were the smallest of all peoples. ⁸Rather, it was because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath He swore to your ancestors that He brought you out with a powerful hand and ransomed you from the slave house, from the grip of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹Recognize, then, that the LORD your God — He is God, the trustworthy God who maintains faithful love with those who love Him and keep His commands, to a thousand generations. ¹⁰But He repays those who hate Him directly, to their face, by destroying them. He does not delay with anyone who hates Him — He repays each one personally. ¹¹So guard the commandment — the statutes and the regulations — that I am commanding you today, by carrying them out. ¹²As a consequence of your listening to these regulations and carefully carrying them out, the LORD your God will maintain for you the covenant and the loyal love that He swore to your ancestors. ¹³He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will bless the fruit of your womb and the produce of your soil — your grain, new wine, and olive oil — the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks, in the land that He swore to your ancestors to give you. ¹⁴You will be more blessed than any other people. There will be no infertile man or woman among you, nor barrenness among your livestock. ¹⁵The LORD will remove every illness from you. He will not inflict on you any of the terrible diseases of Egypt that you experienced, but will impose them on all who hate you. ¹⁶You must consume all the peoples that the LORD your God is handing over to you. Your eye must not show pity on them. And do not worship their gods, for that would be a trap for you. ¹⁷If you say to yourself, "These nations are more numerous than I am — how can I possibly dispossess them?" — ¹⁸Do not be afraid of them. Keep firmly in mind what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt — ¹⁹The great trials your own eyes witnessed, the signs and wonders, the powerful hand and outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out — the LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear. ²⁰Beyond that, the LORD your God will send the hornet against them, until even the survivors who hide from you are wiped out. ²¹Do not be terrified by them, because the LORD your God is in your midst — a great and awesome God. ²²The LORD your God will drive out these nations ahead of you gradually, little by little. You will not be able to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals would multiply against you. ²³The LORD your God will hand them over to you and throw them into great confusion until they are annihilated. ²⁴He will deliver their kings into your hand, and you will erase their very names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them. ²⁵You must burn the carved images of their gods in fire. Do not covet the silver and gold plating on them or take it for yourself, or you will be ensnared by it — for it is detestable to the LORD your God. ²⁶Do not bring any detestable thing into your house, or you yourself will become devoted to destruction just like it. You must utterly despise it and completely abhor it, because it is under the ban.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *nashal* ('to strip off, drive out') portrays God peeling away the nations like bark from a tree. The catalogue of seven peoples (*shiv'ah goyim*) is a formulaic list representing the totality of Canaan's inhabitants. The phrase *rabbim va'atsumim mimmekka* ('greater and more powerful than you') underscores that Israel's success will not rest on military superiority but on divine action.
2. The infinitive absolute *hacharem tacharim* ('devoting you shall devote') intensifies the command for total destruction — the *cherem*, a holy war dedication to God. The prohibition *lo tikhrot lahem berit* ('you shall not cut a covenant with them') and *lo techannem* ('you shall not show them favor') create a threefold boundary: military, diplomatic, and emotional. The verb *chanan* may also carry the sense 'give them a foothold' (from *chen*, 'camp'), adding territorial exclusion to the prohibition.
3. The verb *titchatten* ('to become a son-in-law, form marriage alliance') is a *hitpael* reflexive, signaling a reciprocal binding relationship. Marriage alliances in the ancient Near East functioned as political treaties, binding families and their gods. The prohibition is structured chiasmically — daughter to his son / his daughter to your son — covering both directions of intermarriage and closing every avenue of assimilation.
4. Moses abruptly speaks in God's first person — *me'acharai* ('from after Me') — a jarring shift that underscores the personal nature of the betrayal. The verb *yasir* ('turn aside') paired with *ve'avdu* ('and they will serve') reveals intermarriage as a gateway to idolatry. The phrase *vecharah af-YHWH* ('the anger of the LORD will burn') uses the fire metaphor for divine wrath, and *maher* ('quickly, suddenly') warns that judgment will be swift.
5. Four distinct cult objects receive four distinct destructions: *mizbechoteihem titotsu* ('their altars you shall tear down'), *matsevotam teshabberu* ('their pillars you shall shatter'), *asheireihem tegadde'un* ('their Asherah-poles you shall cut down'), and *pesileihem tisrefu ba'esh* ('their carved images you shall burn in fire'). Each verb matches its object — stone altars are demolished, standing stones shattered, wooden poles hewn, and carved idols consumed. The comprehensiveness eliminates any possibility of repurposing Canaanite worship infrastructure.
6. Two foundational terms define Israel's identity: *am qadosh* ('holy people' — set apart, consecrated, belonging exclusively to God) and *am segullah* ('treasured people'). *Segullah* is a royal term — in Akkadian, *sikiltum* refers to a king's private treasure, personal property held apart from the general treasury. Israel is not merely God's subjects but His personal, prized possession. The verb *bachar* ('chose') emphasizes divine initiative — election originates in God's will, not Israel's merit.
7. The verb *chashaq* ('to be attached to, desire, set one's affection on') conveys intense emotional attachment, even romantic longing (cf. Genesis 34:8). God's election of Israel is not administrative but passionate. The reason given is counter-intuitive: *ki-attem hame'at mikkol-ha'ammim* ('because you were the fewest of all the peoples'). Israel's smallness, far from disqualifying them, highlights that divine choice rests on grace alone, not on demographic or strategic advantage.
8. Two motivations drive the exodus: *me'ahavat YHWH* ('from the LORD's love') and *umishamro et-hashvu'ah* ('from His keeping the oath'). Love and covenant faithfulness are the twin engines of redemption. The verb *padah* ('ransom, redeem') specifically denotes liberation by payment of a price — Israel was purchased out of slavery. The phrase *mibbeit avadim* ('from the house of slaves') recurs as a liturgical anchor throughout Deuteronomy, keeping the memory of bondage alive.
9. The title *ha'El hanne'eman* ('the trustworthy God') uses *ne'eman* from the root *aman* ('to be firm, reliable') — the same root as 'amen.' God's faithfulness is structural, not sentimental. The phrase *shomer habberit vehacheshed* ('keeper of covenant and loyal love') pairs *berit* (covenant obligation) with *chesed* (loyal, steadfast love that exceeds mere obligation). The scope — *le'elef dor* ('to a thousand generations') — is not literal arithmetic but a declaration of permanence: God's covenant loyalty far outlasts human rebellion.
10. The phrase *el-panav* ('to his face') appears twice, stressing that divine retribution is direct and personal — not delegated or delayed. The verb *meshallem* ('repays') frames judgment as reciprocal justice: hatred toward God earns a proportional response. The emphatic *lo ye'acher* ('He will not delay') counters any presumption that silence equals tolerance. The contrast with verse 9 (a thousand generations of loyalty) against immediate repayment for hatred shows the asymmetry of God's justice: mercy is vast, judgment is swift.
11. The singular *hammitsvah* ('the commandment') followed by plural *chuqqim* ('statutes') and *mishpatim* ('regulations') suggests that the many laws form one unified directive. The verb *shamarta* ('you shall guard') implies watchful protection, not mere obedience — treat the law as something precious to be preserved. The phrase *la'asotam* ('to do them') grounds the guarding in action: obedience is not contemplative but practical.
12. The word *eqev* ('consequence, because, heel') opens a conditional promise. Some scholars link it to the 'heel' (*aqev*), suggesting something trodden underfoot — even the smallest, most overlooked regulations matter. The threefold response — *tishme'un* ('you will listen'), *ushmartem* ('and guard'), *va'asitem* ('and do') — mirrors the threefold law categories of verse 11. God's reciprocity is remarkable: *veshamar YHWH* ('the LORD will guard') uses the same verb for God's faithfulness that was demanded of Israel. As you guard, so He guards.
13. The rapid-fire verbs — *va'ahavkha* ('He will love you'), *uverakhekha* ('bless you'), *vehרבekha* ('multiply you') — cascade as covenant rewards. The blessings span human fertility (*peri vitnekha*, 'fruit of your womb'), agriculture (*peri admatekha*, 'produce of your soil'), and animal husbandry. The rare terms *shegar alafekha* ('increase of your cattle') and *ashtarot tsonekha* ('offspring of your flocks') may carry overtones reclaimed from Canaanite fertility religion — true abundance comes from YHWH, not from Baal or Ashtoreth.
14. The blessing *barukh tiyeh mikkol-ha'ammim* ('blessed you will be above all peoples') positions Israel at the apex of human flourishing. The specific elimination of infertility — *aqar va'aqarah* ('barren male and barren female') — addresses one of the ancient world's deepest anxieties. Extending this promise to livestock (*ubivhemtekha*) links human and agricultural prosperity as a unified covenant blessing.

- 15.** The verb *hesir* ('remove, turn aside') presents God as physician who strips away disease. The phrase *madwei mitsrayim hara'im* ('the terrible diseases of Egypt') likely refers both to epidemics witnessed during the plagues and to endemic illnesses known in the Nile region. The word *yadata* ('you knew/experienced') is experiential — these were diseases they personally witnessed. The redirection of plague onto enemies (*unatanam bekhol-son'ekha*) reverses the exodus pattern: Israel's former afflictions become weapons against their adversaries.
- 16.** The verb *akhal* ('devour, consume') is a metaphor for military conquest — Israel swallows up the nations as fire consumes fuel. The command *lo-tachos einekha* ('your eye must not show pity') addresses the natural human instinct toward compassion, which in this context would lead to compromise and idolatry. The final clause — *ki moqesh hu lakh* ('for it is a snare to you') — uses *moqesh*, a hunter's trap, to describe idol worship: what appears harmless ensnares fatally.
- 17.** Moses anticipates the internal dialogue of fear: *tomar bilvavekha* ('you will say in your heart') identifies the battlefield as psychological, not just military. The question *eikhah ukhal lehorisham* ('how can I dispossess them?') echoes the panic of the spies at Kadesh-barnea (Numbers 13:31). The verb *horish* ('dispossess, drive out') frames conquest as displacement, not annihilation — taking their place in the land.
- 18.** The infinitive absolute *zakhor tizkor* ('remembering you shall remember') intensifies the command to remember. Memory is the antidote to fear: what God accomplished against the world's superpower (Pharaoh and all of Egypt) proves He can handle the Canaanite nations. The exodus functions as Israel's standing proof of divine capability — every future challenge is measured against that definitive act of liberation.
- 19.** The *hammassot haggdolat* ('the great trials/tests') may refer to the plagues as tests of both Egypt and Israel's faith. The fourfold description — *otot* ('signs'), *mofetim* ('wonders'), *yad chazaqah* ('strong hand'), *zero'a netuyah* ('outstretched arm') — is a standard Deuteronomic formula for the exodus. The climactic promise *ken-ya'aseh* ('so He will do') transforms history into prophecy: the same divine power that broke Egypt will break Canaan.
- 20.** The *tsirah* ('hornet') may be literal (swarms driving out inhabitants), metaphorical (divine terror), or a reference to Egypt whose hieroglyphic symbol was a bee/hornet. The phrase *hannish'arim vehannistarim* ('those remaining and those hiding') covers both open resisters and guerrilla holdouts — no one escapes divine pursuit. God's campaign is comprehensive: military defeat, psychological terror, and ecological warfare all serve the conquest.
- 21.** The verb *ta'arots* ('be terrified, shudder') describes visceral, paralyzing fear. The antidote is not courage but presence: *YHWH Elohekha beqirbekha* ('the LORD your God is in your midst'). The divine titles *El gadol venora* ('a great and awesome God') redirect the terror — the One who inspires true awe is not the enemy but Israel's own God dwelling among them.
- 22.** The phrase *me'at me'at* ('little by little') reveals a surprising strategy: conquest will be incremental, not instantaneous. The practical reason — *pen-tirbeh alekha chayyat hasadeh* ('lest the wild animals multiply against you') — shows that depopulated land quickly becomes wilderness. God's pace is ecological wisdom: Israel must grow into the land as it empties, maintaining the infrastructure of civilization. The gradual process also extends the period of faith-dependence.
- 23.** The verb *hamam* ('throw into confusion, panic, rout') is the same word used for God's disruption of the Egyptian army at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:24). The cognate accusative *mehumah gedolah* ('a great confusion') intensifies the panic to total disorientation — enemies who cannot think clearly cannot fight effectively. The pattern repeats: what God did to Egypt, He will do to Canaan.
- 24.** Delivering kings into Israel's hand (*natan malkeihem beyadekha*) represents complete political collapse — when a king falls, his kingdom falls with him. The phrase *veha'avadta et-shemam mittachat hashamayim* ('you will destroy their name from under heaven') goes beyond military defeat to cultural erasure — their memory will be obliterated. The absolute claim *lo-yityatsev ish befanekha* ('no one will stand before you') is a divine guarantee of invincibility conditioned on obedience.
- 25.** The prohibition shifts from military to economic: *lo-tachamod kesef vezahav aleihem* ('do not covet the silver and gold on them') uses the same verb as the tenth commandment (*tachamod*, 'covet'). Greed provides a backdoor for idolatry — keeping the precious metals from idols brings the idol's contamination into Israel's economy. The word *to'avat YHWH* ('an abomination to the LORD') marks this as categorically repulsive to God, not merely prohibited. The warning *pen tivvaqesh bo* ('lest you be ensnared by it') echoes the *moqesh* ('trap') of verse 16.
- 26.** The contagion principle is stark: bringing a *to'evah* ('detestable thing') into your home makes *vehayita cherem kamohu* ('you will become cherem like it') — the ban is infectious. Contact with devoted objects places the person under the same sentence of destruction. The twin infinitive absolutes *shaqets teshaqtsennu* ('despising you shall despise it') and *ta'ev teta'avennu* ('abhorring you shall abhor it') demand visceral revulsion, not mere avoidance. The chapter ends where it began — with *cherem* — framing all of chapter 7 as a meditation on radical separation.

8

Summary: Moses warns Israel not to forget God after entering the good land — remembering the wilderness hunger, the manna, and the discipline that taught them to depend on God's word.

What Makes This Remarkable: Verse 3 is the chapter's theological center: 'man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that comes from the mouth of the LORD.' The manna lesson was not about food but about trust — God made them hungry first, then fed them something they did not know, to teach that divine speech sustains life more fundamentally than grain. The seven species of the land (v. 8) — wheat, barley, grape, fig, pomegranate, olive, honey — remain the agricultural identity of Israel to this day.

Translation Friction: The phrase motsa fi-YHWH (v. 3, 'what comes from the mouth of the LORD') encompasses commandments, promises, and creative speech — 'word' is too narrow. We rendered it as 'everything that comes from the mouth of the LORD' to capture the breadth. The verb yasar (v. 5, 'disciplines') carries parental connotation — God is not punishing but training, as the father-son metaphor makes explicit.

Connections: Jesus quotes verse 3 in His wilderness temptation (Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4). The seven species (v. 8) appear across agricultural laws (Leviticus 23, Numbers 18). The warning against 'my power and my hand's strength made me this wealth' (v. 17) anticipates the prophetic critique in Hosea 2:8 and Ezekiel 28:4-5.

¹Every commandment that I am giving you today you must carefully carry out, so that you may live, increase, and enter to take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors. ²Remember the entire journey that the LORD your God led you on these forty years through the wilderness — to humble you, to test you, and to discover what was in your heart: whether you would keep His commands or not. ³He humbled you and let you go hungry, then fed you with manna — something neither you nor your ancestors had ever encountered — to teach you that a human being does not survive on food alone but on everything that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴Your clothing did not wear out on you, and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵Know deep in your heart that just as a father disciplines his son, the LORD your God has been disciplining you. ⁶So keep the commands of the LORD your God by walking in His ways and holding Him in reverent awe. ⁷For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land — a land of flowing streams, springs, and underground waters bursting out in valleys and hills, ⁸A land of wheat and barley, grapevines, fig trees, and pomegranates — a land of olive oil and date honey, ⁹A land where you will eat food without any shortage — you will lack nothing in it. A land whose rocks contain iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. ¹⁰When you have eaten and are satisfied, you must bless the LORD your God for the good land He has given you. ¹¹Be careful not to forget the LORD your God by failing to keep His commands, His regulations, and His statutes that I am giving you today. ¹²When you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built fine houses and settled in them, ¹³And when your cattle and flocks have increased, your silver and gold have accumulated, and everything you own has multiplied — ¹⁴Then your heart will become arrogant and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the slave house — ¹⁵The One who led you through that vast and terrifying wilderness — with its venomous snakes, scorpions, and parched ground where there was no water — who brought water for you out of solid rock, ¹⁶The One who fed you manna in the wilderness, something your ancestors never knew — in order to humble you and test you, so that ultimately He could do good for you. ¹⁷And you say to yourself, 'My own strength and the power of my own hands produced this wealth for me' — ¹⁸Instead, remember the LORD your God, because it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth — in order to uphold His covenant that He swore to your ancestors, as it stands today. ¹⁹But if you do forget the LORD your God entirely and go after other gods, serving and bowing down to them — I solemnly warn you today that you will certainly be destroyed. ²⁰Like the nations that the LORD is destroying ahead of you, so will you yourselves perish — because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The singular kol-hammitvah ('every commandment' — the whole commandment as a unity) gives way to the plural tishmerun ('you all shall guard'), addressing the collective nation. The purpose chain — lema'an tichyun urevitem uva'tem virishtem ('so that you may live, multiply, enter, and possess') — lays out four sequential outcomes of obedience. Life itself depends on obedience; the promised land is not an unconditional gift but a covenant outcome.
2. The command vezakharta ('and you shall remember') opens the chapter's central theme: memory as spiritual discipline. Three divine purposes for the wilderness are listed: lema'an annotekha ('to humble you'), lenassotekha ('to test you'), and lada'at ('to know'). The verb anan ('to humble, afflict') implies deprivation that reveals dependency. The verb nasah ('to test, prove') frames the wilderness as a crucible. God's 'knowing' (lada'at) is not acquiring information but exposing character — the wilderness strips away pretense.
3. The sequence is pedagogical: vay'annekha ('He humbled you'), vayar'ivekha ('He let you go hungry'), vaya'akhilkha et-hamman ('He fed you the manna'). God created the problem (hunger) and the unprecedented solution (manna) to teach a lesson about dependence. The manna was asher lo-yadata velo yade'un avotekha ('which you did not know and your ancestors did not know') — completely outside human experience or tradition. The climactic principle lo al-hallechem levaddo yichyeh ha'adam ki al-kol-motsa fi-YHWH ('not on bread alone does a person live but on everything proceeding from the LORD's mouth') redefines sustenance: life comes from God's word, not from grain.
4. Two mundane miracles demonstrate God's comprehensive care: simlatkha lo valetah ('your garment did not wear out') and raglekha lo batseqah ('your foot did not swell'). Forty years of desert walking should have destroyed both fabric and flesh. The verb batseqah ('swell') suggests the swelling from long marches on harsh terrain. These quiet, daily miracles are easily overlooked — precisely the kind of provision that prosperity might cause Israel to forget.
5. The phrase veyadata im-levavekha ('know with your heart') demands not intellectual acknowledgment but deep internal conviction. The father-son analogy — ka'asher yeyasser ish et-beno ('as a man disciplines his son') — reframes the wilderness hardships as parental love, not punishment. The verb yassar ('discipline, instruct, correct') carries both correction and education; the wilderness was school, not prison. This is the theological lens for interpreting suffering: it reveals a Father's purpose, not an enemy's cruelty.
6. The conclusion veshamarta ('so guard') flows from the father-son analogy: a well-disciplined child walks in the parent's path. The phrase lalekheth bidrakhav ('to walk in His ways') presents obedience as a journey, not a static achievement. The verb leyir'ah ('to fear, revere') is not terror but reverential awe — the posture of a son who knows his father's power and love simultaneously.
7. The description of the promised land begins with water — the most precious resource for a people emerging from desert wandering. Three water sources are named: nachalei mayim ('flowing streams'), ayanut ('springs'), and tehomot ('deep underground waters'). The verb yots'im ('going out, bursting forth') presents water as actively emerging from the landscape — baviq'ah uvahar ('in the valley and in the hill') — covering both lowland and highland. After forty years of miraculous water from rock, the land itself will provide naturally.
8. The seven species (shiv'at haminim) define the agricultural identity of the promised land: chittah ('wheat'), se'orah ('barley'), gefen ('grapevine'), te'enah ('fig tree'), rimmon ('pomegranate'), zeit shemen ('oil olive'), and devash ('honey' — likely date syrup rather than bee honey). These seven became the basis of the land's economy and ritual offerings. They represent comprehensive agricultural abundance: grain staples, fruit trees, oil, and sweetener.
9. The phrase lo vemiskhenut tokhal-bah lechem ('not in poverty will you eat bread in it') contrasts sharply with the wilderness deprivation. The absolute statement lo-tehsar kol bah ('you will not lack anything in it') promises total sufficiency. The mineral wealth — avaneihah varzel ('its stones are iron') and umeharareihah tachtsov nechoshet ('from its hills you will quarry copper') — extends beyond agriculture to industrial capacity. Archaeological evidence confirms copper mining in the Arabah region.
10. The sequence ve'akhalta vesava'ta uverakhta ('you will eat, be satisfied, and bless') is the scriptural basis for the Jewish practice of birkat hamazon (grace after meals). Satisfaction (sava') is positioned between consumption and worship — the full stomach should trigger gratitude, not complacency. The command to bless God al-ha'arets hattovah ('for the good land') anchors thanksgiving in the specific gift of the land, preventing abstracted or generic praise.
11. The warning hishamer lekha ('guard yourself') marks a pivotal shift from promise to peril. Forgetting God (pen-tishkach) is not absent-mindedness but practical neglect: it manifests as levilti shemor ('not keeping') His laws. Moses identifies the mechanism of apostasy: it begins not with active rebellion but with passive forgetting. Prosperity is the danger zone — the following verses trace the path from satisfaction to self-sufficiency to forgetting God.
12. The progression of prosperity begins: pen-tokhal vesava'ta ('lest you eat and be satisfied') — the very satisfaction commanded in verse 10 now becomes a danger. The phrase uvattim tovim tivneh veyashvta ('and good houses you will build and dwell in') moves from sustenance to shelter. After manna and tents, permanent houses represent the ultimate transition from wandering to settlement. Each blessing carries the seed of temptation to self-reliance.
13. The threefold repetition of the root ravah ('to multiply, increase') — yirbyun, yirbeh-llakh, yirbeh — creates a crescendo of accumulation: livestock, precious metals, and finally kol asher-lekha ('everything belonging to you'). The word order mirrors the progression of wealth: from pastoral (herds and flocks) to monetary (silver and gold) to total assets. This is the exact scenario that breeds amnesia about God.

14. The verb *ram* ('to be high, exalted') applied to the heart (*veram levavekha*) means arrogance — a heart that elevates itself above its actual station. Pride is the hinge between prosperity and apostasy: a lifted heart forgets its former lowliness. The exodus reminder — *hammotsi'akha me'erets mitsrayim mibbeit avadim* ('the one who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves') — is a shock therapy for arrogance: you were slaves. Everything you have is rescue, not achievement.
15. The wilderness is described as *haggadol vehanora* ('the great and terrifying') — a place of primal danger. Three specific threats are catalogued: *nachash saraf* ('fiery serpent' — the burning-bite snake), *aqrav* ('scorpion'), and *tsimma'on* ('drought, thirst'). Against these mortal dangers, God provided water from *tsur hachallamish* ('the rock of flint') — the hardest, most unpromising stone. The contrast between absolute desolation and miraculous provision is the core argument against self-reliance.
16. The manna returns as evidence of divine care: *hamma'akhilkha man* ('the One feeding you manna'). The double purpose — *lema'an annotekha ulema'an nassotekha* ('to humble you and to test you') — reveals that hardship and provision were simultaneous. The final phrase *leheitvekha be'acharitekha* ('to do you good at your end/future') provides the theological key: all wilderness discipline was prospective, aimed at a future flourishing. Present suffering serves future blessing — the entire wilderness was not detour but preparation.
17. Moses quotes the internal monologue of arrogance: *ve'amarta bilvavekha* ('you will say in your heart'). The twin boasts — *kochi* ('my strength') and *otsem yadi* ('the might of my hand') — claim personal credit for covenant blessings. The word *chayil* ('wealth, strength, power, army') covers all forms of success. This verse captures the theology of self-made prosperity — the most dangerous heresy in a land of abundance, because it sounds reasonable.
18. The corrective is not 'you did nothing' but 'He gave you the capacity': *hu hanoten lekha koach la'asot chayil* ('He is the one giving you strength to produce wealth'). Human effort is real but derivative — the power behind it is God's gift. The ultimate purpose of wealth is covenantal: *lema'an haqim et-berito* ('in order to establish His covenant'). Prosperity is not an end in itself but evidence that God is keeping His ancestral promises. Wealth rightly understood is a covenant sign, not a personal achievement.
19. The infinitive absolute *shakhoach tishkach* ('forgetting you will forget') intensifies the warning: this is not momentary lapse but total amnesia. The progression — *vehalakhta acharei elohim acherim* ('you will walk after other gods'), *va'avadtam* ('and serve them'), *vehishtachavita lahem* ('and bow down to them') — traces the path from distraction to devotion to worship. Moses's response is judicial: *ha'idoti vakhem* ('I testify against you') — he becomes a witness in a future covenant lawsuit. The final infinitive absolute *avod tovedu* ('perishing you will perish') matches the intensity of the forgetting: total forgetting leads to total destruction.
20. The chapter's devastating conclusion draws a direct parallel: *kagoyim asher YHWH ma'avid mippeneikhem ken tovedu* ('like the nations the LORD is destroying before you, so you will perish'). Election provides no exemption from judgment — Israel under covenant disobedience faces the identical fate as the Canaanites. The word *eqev* ('because, on account of') — the same word that opened verse 12 with promise — now introduces the cause of destruction: *lo tishme'un beqol YHWH* ('you will not listen to the voice of the LORD'). The chapter comes full circle: listening brings life (v 1), not listening brings the same annihilation God visits on the nations.

9

Summary: *Moses dismantles any illusion that Israel deserves the land — they are not entering because of their righteousness but because of the nations' wickedness and God's promise. He recounts the golden calf disaster as proof.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The phrase *am qesheh-oref* ('stiff-necked people,' v. 6) is repeated three times in this chapter. Moses does not flatter the audience. The golden calf account (vv. 8-21) retells Exodus 32 as a direct address: 'you provoked the LORD to anger.' Moses's forty-day intercession (v. 18) — lying prostrate, not eating or drinking — is presented as the only reason Israel survived its own rebellion.*

Translation Friction: *The verb *hashchit* (v. 12, 'acted corruptly') is the same verb used for the generation of the flood (Genesis 6:12). We preserved the exact parallel. The phrase *etsba Elohim* (v. 10, 'finger of God') echoes Exodus 8:19 and 31:18 — God's direct, unmediated action. The 'finger' anthropomorphism resists literalism and metaphor equally.*

Connections: *The golden calf narrative parallels Exodus 32 with Deuteronomic emphasis on Moses's mediation. The 'stiff-necked' accusation echoes Exodus 33:3-5. Moses's intercessory posture anticipates his role as paradigm for prophetic intercession (Jeremiah 15:1, Psalm 106:23). The destruction of the calf (v. 21) matches Exodus 32:20 detail for detail.*

‡Listen, Israel! You are about to cross the Jordan today to dispossess nations larger and more powerful than you, with cities that are huge and fortified to the sky. †A people tall and powerful — the descendants of the Anakim, whom you know about

and have heard it said: 'Who can stand up against the sons of Anak?' ³Recognize today that the LORD your God is the One crossing over ahead of you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you can drive them out and annihilate them quickly, just as the LORD promised you. ⁴Do not say to yourself after the LORD your God has driven them out ahead of you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD brought me in to possess this land.' Rather, it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. ⁵It is not because of your righteousness or the integrity of your heart that you are going in to possess their land. Rather, it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out ahead of you, and in order to fulfill the promise that the LORD swore to your ancestors — to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ⁶Understand clearly: it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess — for you are a stubborn people. ⁷Remember — do not forget — how you provoked the LORD your God to fury in the wilderness. From the day you left the land of Egypt until your arrival at this place, you have been in rebellion against the LORD. ⁸Even at Horeb you provoked the LORD to such fury that He was ready to destroy you. ⁹When I went up the mountain to receive the stone tablets — the tablets of the covenant that the LORD had made with you — I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights, eating no food and drinking no water. ¹⁰The LORD gave me the two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God, and on them were all the words that the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from within the fire on the day of the assembly. ¹¹At the end of the forty days and forty nights, the LORD gave me the two stone tablets — the covenant tablets. ¹²Then the LORD said to me, 'Get up! Go down from here quickly, because your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly. They have already turned aside from the path I commanded them and have made themselves a cast idol.' ¹³The LORD also said to me, 'I have observed this people, and they are indeed a stubborn people. ¹⁴Leave Me alone so I can destroy them and erase their name from under heaven. Then I will make you into a nation more powerful and numerous than they are.' ¹⁵I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was ablaze with fire, carrying the two covenant tablets in my hands. ¹⁶I looked, and there it was — you had sinned against the LORD your God by making yourselves a cast metal calf. You had already turned aside from the path that the LORD had commanded you. ¹⁷I seized the two tablets and hurled them from my hands, smashing them before your eyes. ¹⁸Then I threw myself down before the LORD as before — forty days and forty nights without eating food or drinking water — because of all your sin in doing what was evil in the LORD's sight and provoking Him. ¹⁹For I was terrified of the fierce anger and burning wrath that the LORD had directed at you — enough to destroy you. But the LORD listened to me that time as well. ²⁰The LORD was also furious enough with Aaron to destroy him, so I prayed for Aaron too at that time. ²¹I took that sinful thing you had made — the calf — and burned it in fire, then crushed it and ground it thoroughly until it was fine as dust, and threw the dust into the stream flowing down from the mountain. ²²At Taberah, at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah, you kept provoking the LORD to fury. ²³And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, 'Go up and take possession of the land I have given you,' you defied the command of the LORD your God — you did not trust Him and would not listen to His voice. ²⁴You have been in rebellion against the LORD from the day I first knew you. ²⁵So I threw myself down before the LORD for those forty days and forty nights that I lay prostrate, because the LORD had declared He would destroy you. ²⁶I prayed to the LORD and said, 'Sovereign LORD, do not destroy Your people, Your own inheritance, whom You ransomed through Your greatness and brought out of Egypt with a powerful hand. ²⁷Remember Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Do not focus on the stubbornness of this people, or on their wickedness and sin. ²⁸Otherwise the people in the land from which You brought us will say, "Because the LORD was unable to bring them into the land He promised them, and because He hated them, He brought them out to kill them in the wilderness." ²⁹Yet they are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm.'

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The call shema Yisra'el ('Listen, Israel!') echoes the Shema of 6:4 but here introduces a military briefing. The phrase *atah over hayyom et-haYarden* ('you are crossing the Jordan today') uses 'today' rhetorically — the crossing is imminent, not literally that day. The description of the enemies — *goyim gedolim va'atumim mimmekha* ('nations greater and mightier than you') — and their cities — *uvtsurot bashamayim* ('fortified to the heavens') — is deliberately intimidating. Moses heightens the impossibility to set up God as the decisive factor.

2. The Anakim (benei Anaqim) were legendary giants whose reputation terrified the original spies (Numbers 13:28, 33). Moses quotes the popular saying *mi yityatsev lifnei benei Anaq* ('who can stand before the sons of Anak?') — a rhetorical question expecting the answer 'no one.' The verbs *yadata* ('you know') and *shamata* ('you have heard') acknowledge that the fear is based on real intelligence, not rumor. Moses does not deny the threat; he redirects the response from fear to faith.
3. The emphatic triple *hu* ('He... He... He') drives the point home: *YHWH Elohekha hu-ha'* over *lefanekha* ('the LORD your God — He is the one crossing before you'). God goes first. The title *esh okhlah* ('consuming fire') — drawn from the Sinai theophany (4:24) — transforms the terrifying God of the mountain into a weapon deployed on Israel's behalf. Two verbs describe God's work (*yashmid*, 'destroy'; *yakhni'em*, 'subdue'), then two describe Israel's role (*vehorashtam*, 'dispossess'; *veha'avadtam*, 'annihilate'). God breaks the enemy; Israel occupies the result.
4. Moses preemptively dismantles theological self-congratulation: *al-tomar bilvavekha* ('do not say in your heart'). The false conclusion — *betsidqati hevi'ani YHWH* ('because of my righteousness the LORD brought me in') — confuses consequence with cause. Israel's entry is real but the reason is *uvrishah'at haggoyim ha'ellesh* ('because of the wickedness of these nations'). The nations' sin, not Israel's virtue, is the operative factor. This verse begins the chapter's sustained assault on Israel's moral self-assessment.
5. Moses doubles down with expanded negation: *lo betsidqatekha uveyosher levavekha* ('not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart'). Two positive attributes are denied as causes. The true causes are restated: the nations' wickedness (*rishah'at haggoyim*) and God's oath-keeping (*ulema'an haqim et-haddavar asher nishba*). The patriarchal names — *le'Avraham leYitschaq ule'Ya'aqov* — anchor the promise in irrevocable history. Israel enters the land not as righteous conquerors but as recipients of ancestral grace.
6. The third repetition of *lo betsidqatekha* ('not because of your righteousness') hammers the point beyond misunderstanding. The reason is now given from Israel's side: *ki am-qesheh-oref attah* ('because you are a stiff-necked people'). The metaphor *qesheh-oref* ('hard of neck') comes from oxen that refuse the yoke — they stiffen their necks against the driver's direction. Israel is not merely undeserving; they are actively resistant. This devastating self-assessment introduces the historical evidence that follows.
7. The double command *zekhor al-tishkach* ('remember — do not forget') creates an imperative wall against amnesia. The verb *hiqtasfa* ('you provoked to wrath') uses the hiphil — Israel caused God's anger. The temporal scope is devastating: *lemin-hayyom asher-yatsata me'erets mitsrayim ad-bo'akhem ad-hamaqom hazzeh* ('from the day you left Egypt until you arrived at this place') — rebellion was not occasional but continuous. The participle *mamrim* ('rebellious ones') characterizes their identity: rebellion was not what they did but who they were.
8. The specific citation *uveChorev* ('and at Horeb/Sinai') is devastating because Horeb was the place of covenant — rebellion occurred at the very site of commitment. The verb *vayit'annaf* ('He became furious') is an intensified form of anger. The infinitive *lehashsid etkhem* ('to destroy you') reveals how close Israel came to annihilation. At the very mountain where they received the covenant, they provoked the covenant God to the point of dissolution.
9. Moses shifts to first-person memoir: *ba'aloti haharah* ('when I went up the mountain'). The tablets are identified as *luchot ha'avanim luchot habberit* ('stone tablets, covenant tablets') — their material and theological identity. The forty-day fast — *lechem lo akhalti umayim lo shatiti* ('bread I did not eat and water I did not drink') — echoes the wilderness deprivation of chapter 8 but now applied to Moses personally. His sustained divine encounter required complete abstinence from natural sustenance.
10. The phrase *ketuvim be'etsba Elohim* ('written by the finger of God') is one of Scripture's most striking anthropomorphisms — God personally inscribed the tablets without human mediation. The content is identified as *kekhol-haddevarim asher dibber YHWH* ('according to all the words the LORD spoke') — the tablets captured the Sinai speech in permanent form. The phrase *beyom haqqahal* ('on the day of the assembly') establishes the corporate, public nature of the revelation — these were not private communications to Moses but words spoken to the gathered nation.
11. The phrase *miqqets arba'im yom ve'arba'im lailah* ('at the end of forty days and forty nights') marks the completion of Moses's mountaintop fast. The tablets are again called *luchot habberit* ('covenant tablets'), reinforcing that these are legal documents of a treaty between God and Israel. The repetition of the delivery moment builds suspense: the reader knows what awaits below — the golden calf. The solemnity of the divine gift is about to collide with human betrayal.
12. God's command is urgent: *qum red maher mizzev* ('get up, go down quickly from here'). The devastating phrase *ammekha asher hotseta mimmitsrayim* ('your people whom you brought out of Egypt') disowns Israel — God calls them 'your people,' attributing them to Moses. The verb *shichet* ('has acted corruptly') indicates total moral corruption. The word *maher* ('quickly') stings — they turned aside *saru maher* ('quickly') from the very path just established. The *massekchah* ('cast/molten image') is the golden calf, identified as the specific corruption.
13. God's verdict — *ra'iti et-ha'am hazzeh* ('I have seen this people') — uses the perfective: this is not first observation but confirmed judgment. The assessment *wehinneh am-qesheh-oref hu* ('and behold, a stiff-necked people it is') echoes Moses's earlier label (v 6) but now from God's own mouth. The demonstrative *hazzeh* ('this') distances God from the people — they are 'this people,' not 'My people.' The assessment is clinical and devastating.
14. The command *heref mimmeni* ('let go of Me, leave Me alone') is extraordinary — it implies Moses is already interceding, holding God back. God proposes total annihilation: *ve'ashmidem* ('I will destroy them'), *ve'emcheh et-shemam* ('I will wipe out their name'). The offer to Moses — *ve'eseh etkha legoy-atsum varav mimmenu* ('I will make you into a greater and more numerous nation') — recapitulates the Abrahamic promise redirected through Moses alone. This is the ultimate test of Moses's character: personal dynasty or intercessory faithfulness.
15. The scene is cinematic: *va'efen va'ered min-hahar* ('I turned and descended from the mountain'). The detail *vehahar bo'er ba'esh* ('and the mountain was burning with fire') sustains the Sinai theophany as backdrop — the fire of God's presence still blazes while below, the people have already abandoned Him. Moses carries the covenant tablets *ush'nei luchot habberit al shtei yadai* ('the two covenant tablets in my two hands') — the document of the treaty about to be shattered by the treaty-breaking party.

16. Moses's eyewitness account — va'ereh ('and I saw') — makes the betrayal personal. The phrase wehinneh chatattem ('and behold, you had sinned') uses hinneh for dramatic shock: the scene was worse than he imagined. The egel massekhah ('cast metal calf') was a molten idol, likely modeled on Egyptian or Canaanite bull iconography. The repeated phrase sartem maher ('you had turned aside quickly') stresses the speed of the apostasy — the ink on the covenant was barely dry.
17. The verbs escalate in violence: va'etpos ('I seized'), va'ashlikhem ('I hurled them'), va'ashabbrem ('I smashed them'). This was not careless dropping but deliberate destruction — le'einekhem ('before your eyes') makes it a public demonstration. The shattering of the tablets was a legal act: in ancient Near Eastern treaty practice, destroying the treaty document declared the covenant annulled. Moses was proclaiming that Israel's breach had voided the agreement. God-inscribed tablets broken by human hands — the physical embodiment of covenant rupture.
18. Moses's second forty-day fast (va'etnappal, 'I fell prostrate') was intercessory, not receptive — karishonah ('as the first time') but for an entirely different purpose. The first fast received the covenant; the second pled for its survival. The phrase al kol-chattatekhem ('because of all your sins') makes Moses a vicarious sufferer — he fasts on behalf of their transgression. The Hebrew la'asot hara be'einei YHWH lehakh'iso ('to do the evil in the LORD's eyes, to provoke Him') categorizes the calf not as religious confusion but as deliberate provocation.
19. Moses admits fear: ki yagorti ('for I was terrified') — not of the nations but of God's own wrath. The paired terms ha'af vehachema ('the anger and the fury') represent the full spectrum of divine rage. The phrase asher qatsaf YHWH aleikhem lehashhmid etkhem ('with which the LORD raged against you to destroy you') reveals how close annihilation came. The relief — vayyishma YHWH elai ('the LORD listened to me') — is understated but monumental. The addition gam bappa'am hahi ('also at that time') implies this was not the only time Moses intervened to prevent destruction.
20. Aaron — the high priest, Moses's brother — was not exempt from divine judgment: hit'annaf YHWH me'od lehashhmido ('the LORD was furious enough to destroy him'). Aaron's guilt as the calf's fabricator (Exodus 32:2-4) required specific intercession: va'etpallel gam-be'ad Aharon ('I prayed also on behalf of Aaron'). The word gam ('also') suggests Aaron's case was supplementary to the national intercession — his priestly role made his participation in idolatry particularly egregious.
21. Moses calls the calf chattatkhem ('your sin') — the idol is identified with the transgression itself. The destruction is methodical and total: va'esrof oto ba'esh ('I burned it in fire'), va'ekhot oto tachon hetev ('I crushed it, grinding thoroughly'), ad asher-daq le'afar ('until it was fine as dust'), va'ashhlikh et-afaro el-hannachal ('I threw its dust into the stream'). Each step makes the idol more utterly nothing. The stream hayyored min-hahar ('descending from the mountain') carries the idol's remains away from the sacred precinct — the mountain that received the covenant now flushes away its violation.
22. Three place names function as a catalogue of rebellion, each encoding its own judgment narrative: Tav'erah ('burning' — Numbers 11:1-3, where God's fire consumed the edges of the camp), Massah ('testing' — Exodus 17:7, where Israel tested God at the water crisis), and Qivrot haTa'avah ('graves of craving' — Numbers 11:34, where those who craved meat died of surfeit). The very geography of the wilderness is a map of Israel's failures. The participle maqtsifim ('provoking') casts the rebellion as ongoing, habitual.
23. Kadesh-barnea was the ultimate failure point — the command alu ureshu et-ha'arets ('go up and possess the land') was direct and clear. The threefold response was devastating: vattamru et-pi YHWH ('you defied the mouth of the LORD' — the verb marah means active rebellion, not mere disobedience), velo he'emantem lo ('you did not trust Him'), velo shema'tem beqolo ('you did not listen to His voice'). Rebellion, unbelief, and deafness — the trifecta of covenant failure. This event condemned an entire generation to death in the wilderness.
24. Moses's devastating summary: mamrim heyitem im-YHWH ('rebellious you have been with the LORD'). The participle mamrim characterizes their permanent condition. The phrase miYom da'ti etkhem ('from the day I knew you') is deeply personal — from the moment of Moses's relationship with this people, rebellion has been their defining trait. This is not historical summary but pastoral lament: the leader who interceded for them acknowledges their unchanging nature.
25. Moses returns to the intercession: va'etnappal lifnei YHWH ('I threw myself prostrate before the LORD'). The phrase asher hitnappalti ('that I prostrated myself') uses the reflexive hitpael — Moses made himself fall, an act of total self-abasement. The cause — ki-amar YHWH lehashhmid etkhem ('because the LORD had said to destroy you') — reveals that Moses's forty-day fast was a sustained counter-argument to a divine death sentence. The entire period was one continuous act of intercession against annihilation.
26. Moses's prayer begins with reclaiming the people for God: al-tashchet ammekha venachalatekha ('do not destroy Your people and Your inheritance'). Where God said 'your people' (v 12), Moses counters with 'Your people' — insisting on God's ownership. The term nachalatekha ('Your inheritance') deepens the claim: Israel is not merely God's people but His prized possession, His estate. The prayer's logic is covenantal: asher padita begodlekha ('whom You ransomed through Your greatness') — destroying Israel would mean undoing His own redemptive work.
27. Moses appeals to patriarchal covenant: zekhor la'avadekha ('remember Your servants') invokes the binding oaths God made to the ancestors. The plea al-tenen ('do not look toward, do not focus on') asks God to shift His gaze from three attributes of the people — qeshi ha'am hazzeh ('the stubbornness of this people'), risho ('its wickedness'), and chattato ('its sin'). Moses does not deny the charges but asks God to weigh covenant promises against present failures. The strategy is not defense but appeal to a higher obligation.
28. Moses's boldest argument — pen-yomeru ha'arets ('lest the land/people say') — appeals to God's reputation. If Israel is destroyed, Egypt will draw two devastating conclusions: mibli yekholet YHWH ('because of the LORD's inability') — God was too weak to finish what He started — and umissin'ato otam ('because of His hatred for them') — the exodus was not love but a cruel trick to murder Israel in the desert. Moses weaponizes divine honor: destroying Israel would make God look either impotent or malicious. This is intercessory genius — finding leverage even in God's own character.

29. Moses closes with the decisive claim: *vehem ammekha venachalatekha* ('yet they are Your people and Your inheritance'). The emphatic *vehem* ('yet they') concedes everything negative said about Israel and still insists on God's ownership. The final phrase *asher hotseta bekhochakha haggadol uvizro'akha hannettuyah* ('whom You brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm') reminds God that He has already invested too much to abandon them. The prayer's logic is complete: these rebels are Yours, Your reputation is at stake, and Your prior investment demands continuation. The chapter that began demolishing Israel's self-righteousness ends with Moses's desperate, brilliant intercession preserving them despite themselves.

10

Summary: God replaces the broken tablets, the ark is built to house them, and Moses calls Israel to circumcise their hearts — because God, who shows no favoritism, loves the foreigner.

What Makes This Remarkable: The command 'circumcise the foreskin of your heart' (v. 16, orlat levavkhem) transforms a physical covenant sign into an internal spiritual reality. The juxtaposition is stunning: the God who owns heaven and earth (v. 14) chose your ancestors (v. 15) — therefore cut away your stubbornness. The description of God in vv. 17-18 is the most compressed theology in Deuteronomy: God of gods, Lord of lords, great, mighty, awesome, impartial, incorruptible, and the defender of orphans, widows, and foreigners.

Translation Friction: The phrase orlat levavkhem (v. 16) resists clean translation — 'foreskin of your heart' is the literal Hebrew, and 'circumcise your hearts' loses the visceral physicality. We rendered it 'circumcise your hearts' for readability and noted the fuller expression. The verb lo-yissa fanim (v. 17, 'does not lift faces') is the idiom for impartiality — we rendered it 'shows no favoritism.'

Connections: Heart circumcision recurs in 30:6 as God's future action and in Jeremiah 4:4 as prophetic demand. Paul takes up the concept in Romans 2:28-29. God's love for the foreigner (v. 18) grounds the repeated command to care for the ger throughout Deuteronomy (14:29, 24:17, 26:12-13). The ark narrative resumes from Exodus 37.

1At that time the LORD said to me, 'Carve out two stone tablets like the first ones, and come up to Me on the mountain. Also make a wooden chest. 2I will write on the tablets the same words that were on the first tablets — the ones you broke — and you are to place them in the chest.' 3So I made a chest of acacia wood and carved two stone tablets like the first ones, then went up the mountain with the two tablets in my hands. 4He inscribed on the tablets the same text as before — the Ten Words that the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from within the fire on the day of the assembly. Then the LORD gave them to me. 5Then I turned and came down from the mountain and placed the tablets in the chest I had made, where they remain, just as the LORD commanded me. 6The Israelites traveled from Beeroth Bene-Jaakan to Moserah. There Aaron died and was buried, and his son Eleazar served as priest in his place. 7From there they traveled to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land with flowing streams. 8At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the LORD's covenant, to stand in the LORD's presence and serve Him, and to pronounce blessings in His name — as they do to this day. 9That is why Levi received no territorial share or inheritance with his brothers — the LORD Himself is his inheritance, just as the LORD your God told him. 10I remained on the mountain as I had the first time — forty days and forty nights — and the LORD listened to me on that occasion as well. The LORD chose not to destroy you. 11Then the LORD said to me, 'Get up and lead the people on their journey, so they may enter and take possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.' 12So now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you? Only this: to hold the LORD your God in reverent awe, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with your whole heart and your whole being, 13And to keep the LORD's commands and statutes that I am giving you today — for your own good. 14Consider: to the LORD your God belong the heavens — even the highest heavens — the earth, and everything in it. 15Yet it was only to your ancestors that the LORD was drawn in love, and He chose their descendants after them — that is, you — out of all peoples, as is evident today. 16So circumcise your hearts and stop being so stubborn. 17For the LORD your God is the God above all gods and the Lord above all lords — the great, mighty, and awe-inspiring God who shows no favoritism and accepts no bribe. 18He secures justice for the orphan and the widow, and He loves the foreigner, providing them with food and clothing. 19So you

must love the foreigner, because you yourselves were foreigners in the land of Egypt. ²⁰The LORD your God you must revere. Him you must serve. To Him you must hold fast. By His name you must swear. ²¹He is your source of praise, and He is your God who has done these great and awesome things for you that your own eyes have witnessed. ²²Your ancestors went down to Egypt as just seventy people, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *ba'et hahi* ('at that time') connects directly to the aftermath of the golden calf crisis in chapter 9. God's response to covenant rupture is covenant renewal: *pesol-lekha shnei-luchot avanim karishonim* ('carve for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones'). The verb *pasol* ('carve, hew') now falls to Moses — he must prepare the medium, though God will inscribe the content. The *aron ets* ('wooden chest/ark') is the container for the restored tablets, ensuring their permanent preservation.
2. God's promise *ve'ekhtov* ('I will write') reasserts divine authorship — the replacement tablets carry the same authority as the originals. The phrase *asher shibarta* ('which you broke') is not accusation but factual acknowledgment: Moses's act of covenant annulment is referenced without condemnation. The content is identical: *et-haddevarim asher hayu al-halluchot harishonim* ('the words that were on the first tablets'). Grace does not alter the standard — the same covenant with the same demands is being restored.
3. Moses's obedience mirrors God's instructions precisely: *va'a'as aron atsei shittim* ('I made a chest of acacia wood'). Acacia (*shittah*) was the desert hardwood used throughout the tabernacle construction — durable, rot-resistant, and available in the Sinai wilderness. The detail *ushnei halluchot beyadi* ('the two tablets in my hand') parallels the first ascent (9:15) but this time with hope rather than tragedy. Moses climbs carrying blank tablets toward restoration.
4. The phrase *kammiktav harishon* ('like the first writing') confirms exact replication. The content is identified as *aseret haddevarim* ('the ten words/commandments') — the only place in Deuteronomy using this specific term. The context is again emphasized: *asher dibber YHWH aleikhem bahar mittokh ha'esh beyom haqqahal* ('which the LORD spoke to you on the mountain from within the fire on the day of the assembly'). The fire, the mountain, and the gathered people — the same authoritative context validates the renewed tablets.
5. The second descent — *va'efen va'ered min-hahar* ('I turned and came down from the mountain') — contrasts sharply with the first (9:15). This time Moses descends with restored tablets, not toward a golden calf but toward covenant renewal. The statement *vayyihyu sham* ('and they were there' — they remain there) is written from the perspective of Moses's audience: the tablets are still in the ark at the time of this speech. The covenant, despite everything, endures: *ka'asher tsivvani YHWH* ('just as the LORD commanded me').
6. This parenthetical itinerary notice — apparently interrupting the narrative — records Aaron's death and priestly succession. The location names differ from Numbers 33:31-38 (which places Aaron's death at Mount Hor), suggesting either variant traditions or different stages of the same journey. The key theological point is succession: *vaykhahhen El'azar beno tachtav* ('Eleazar his son served as priest in his place'). Despite Aaron's near-destruction for the calf incident (9:20), the priesthood survived through his lineage — another instance of grace preserving an institution despite human failure.
7. The itinerary continues: *Gudgodah* and *Yotvatah* are wilderness stations. The detail *erets nachalei mayim* ('a land of flowing streams') about *Jotbathah* is striking — after the parched wilderness, even a minor oasis with permanent water deserves special mention. This brief geographic note anticipates the promised land's water abundance described in 8:7 and hints that God's provision was already becoming more generous as they neared their destination.
8. The verb *hivdil* ('separated, set apart') uses the same root as the creation separations in Genesis 1 — God distinguishes Levi from the other tribes for sacred function. Three duties define their role: *la'set et-aron berit-YHWH* ('to carry the ark of the LORD's covenant'), *la'amod lifnei YHWH lesharto* ('to stand before the LORD to minister to Him'), and *ulevarekh bishmo* ('to bless in His name'). These span physical service (carrying), liturgical service (standing in the presence), and mediatorial service (conveying blessing). The phrase *ad hayom hazzeh* ('to this day') confirms the arrangement's permanence.
9. The consequence of sacred service is economic disinheritance: *lo-hayah leLevi cheleq venachalah im-echav* ('Levi had no portion or inheritance with his brothers'). But the loss is exchanged for a greater gain: *YHWH hu nachalato* ('the LORD — He is his inheritance'). This stunning declaration makes God Himself the Levites' estate. Where other tribes receive land, Levi receives the LORD. The phrase *ka'asher dibber YHWH* ('as the LORD spoke') traces this arrangement to divine decree, not human choice.
10. Moses summarizes the successful intercession: *vayyishma YHWH elai gam bappa'am hahi* ('the LORD listened to me also at that time'). The phrase *lo-avah YHWH hashchitekha* ('the LORD was not willing to destroy you') uses *avah* ('to be willing, consent') — God chose not to destroy, implying the decision was active, not passive. Destruction was on the table; mercy won. The entire parenthetical section (vv 6-10) demonstrates that after the golden calf crisis, God's response was not abandonment but reorganization: renewed tablets, priestly succession, and intercessory preservation.
11. God's command *qum lekh lemassa lifnei ha'am* ('get up, go on the journey before the people') resumes the march toward the promised land. The crisis is resolved; the mission continues. The purpose — *veyavo'u veyireshu et-ha'arets* ('so they may enter and possess the land') — remains unchanged from its original statement. The oath *asher-nishba'ti la'avotam* ('which I swore to their ancestors') is the unbreakable foundation: despite Israel's failures, the patriarchal promise stands. The paragraph break (*parashah petuchah*) marks the end of the golden calf narrative and the transition to what God truly requires.

- 12.** The rhetorical question *ve'attah Yisra'el mah YHWH Elohekha sho'el me'immakh* ('and now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask from you?') introduces one of Deuteronomy's most celebrated passages. The answer — *ki im* ('only this') — presents God's demands as surprisingly simple despite their depth. Five requirements unfold: *leyir'ah* ('to revere'), *lalekhet bekhlo-derakhav* ('to walk in all His ways'), *ule'ahavah oto* ('to love Him'), *vela'avod* ('to serve'), and *bekhol-levavekha uvkhol-nafshekha* ('with your whole heart and whole being'). The rabbis noted the apparent modesty — 'Is reverence a small thing?' (*Berakhot* 33b) — yet for Moses, compared to the ritual complexity of the other nations' religions, YHWH's demands are elegantly focused.
- 13.** The final phrase *letov lakh* ('for your good') is the theological punchline: God's commands are not arbitrary impositions but beneficial directives. The law is designed for Israel's flourishing. This frames obedience as enlightened self-interest — what God demands is what is best for the person obeying. The commandments are not burdens but blessings in prescriptive form.
- 14.** The exclamation *hen* ('look, consider!') introduces a breathtaking claim of divine sovereignty. The phrase *hashamayim ushemei hashamayim* ('the heavens and the heavens of the heavens') is a Hebrew superlative — the highest conceivable realm. Combined with *ha'arets vekhol-asher-bah* ('the earth and everything in it'), the totality of creation is claimed as God's possession. This cosmic ownership statement sets up the staggering contrast of verse 15: the God who owns everything chose Israel.
- 15.** The word *raq* ('only, yet') creates the contrast: the God who owns everything focused His affection on one family. The verb *chashaq* ('was drawn to, desired, was attached to') reappears from 7:7 — divine election as passionate attachment, not administrative selection. The phrase *vayyivchar bezar'am achareihem bakhem* ('He chose their offspring after them — you') traces the line from patriarchal love to present-day Israel. The election is particular, personal, and current: *kayyom hazzeh* ('as this day') — not past sentiment but present reality.
- 16.** The command *umaltem et orlah levavkhem* ('circumcise the foreskin of your hearts') is one of the Torah's most radical metaphors. Physical circumcision — the sign of the Abrahamic covenant — is internalized: the 'foreskin' (*orlah*) covering the heart must be removed to expose it to God. The heart's hardened outer layer, like *qesheh-oref* ('stiff-neckedness'), blocks covenant receptivity. The command *ve'orpekhem lo taqshu od* ('your neck you shall not stiffen anymore') uses *od* ('anymore') — implying that past stubbornness is acknowledged but must cease. *Jeremiah* 4:4 and *Deuteronomy* 30:6 will develop this metaphor further.
- 17.** The superlative titles *Elohei ha'elohim va'Adonei ha'adonim* ('God of gods and Lord of lords') do not affirm the existence of other deities but assert YHWH's absolute supremacy over any claimed power. Three adjectives — *haggadol haggibor vehanora* ('the great, the mighty, and the awesome') — became liturgically fixed in later Jewish prayer (the *Amidah*). Two judicial qualities define His character: *lo-yissa fanim* ('He does not lift faces' — shows no partiality based on status) and *velo yiqqach sho'chad* ('He does not take a bribe'). The God of cosmic power is also the God of incorruptible justice.
- 18.** The cosmic God of verse 17 is now revealed as the champion of society's most vulnerable: *oseh mishpat yatom ve'almanah* ('executing justice for the orphan and widow'). The phrase *ve'ohav ger* ('and loving the foreigner') is extraordinary — the same love language (*ahav*) used for Israel's election (7:8) is now applied to the *ger*, the resident alien. God's provision is concrete: *latet lo lechem vesimlah* ('to give him food and clothing') — basic survival necessities. The God who owns heaven and earth concerns Himself with whether the immigrant has dinner and a coat.
- 19.** The command *va'ahavtem et-hagger* ('you must love the foreigner') derives from Israel's own history: *ki-gerim heyitem be'erets Mitsrayim* ('because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt'). Empathy born of experience is the moral foundation: you know what it feels like to be powerless, alien, and dependent on others' goodwill. This is not abstract ethics but experiential ethics — suffering should produce compassion, not hardness. The command to love the *ger* appears more often in the Torah than almost any other ethical imperative.
- 20.** Four terse commands define exclusive devotion: *tira* ('revere'), *ta'avod* ('serve'), *tidbaq* ('cling to'), and *tishave'a* ('swear by'). The emphatic word order — *et-YHWH Elohekha* ('the LORD your God' — placed first for emphasis) and *oto, uvo, uvishmo* ('Him, to Him, by His name') — allows no alternative object. The verb *davaq* ('cling, hold fast') is the same word used for marriage in *Genesis* 2:24 — the devotion demanded is as intimate and exclusive as the bond between husband and wife.
- 21.** The declaration *hu tehillatekha* ('He is your praise') means God is both the object and the source of Israel's praise — their glory and reputation come from Him alone. The phrase *asher-asah ittekha et-haggedolot ve'et-hannoraot ha'elohim* ('who did with you these great and awesome things') appeals to eyewitness experience: *asher ra'u einekha* ('which your eyes have seen'). The argument from experience closes the chapter: you cannot deny what you personally witnessed.
- 22.** The chapter closes with stunning numerical contrast: *beshiv'im nefesh* ('with seventy souls') went down to Egypt — a single extended family. Now *samekha YHWH Elohekha kekhokh'vei hashamayim larov* ('the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven'). The fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise (*Genesis* 15:5) is complete: from seventy to a multitude beyond counting. The stars metaphor connects back to the cosmic God of verse 14 — the One who owns the highest heavens has multiplied His people to match the stars within them.

11

Summary: Moses urges love and obedience by contrasting Egypt's irrigation (human effort) with Canaan's rain (divine provision), then sets before Israel the choice between blessing on Mount Gerizim and curse on Mount Ebal.

What Makes This Remarkable: The land theology here is agricultural: Egypt's fields were watered 'by foot' from the Nile (v. 10), but Canaan drinks rain from heaven — making Israel permanently dependent on God's seasonal faithfulness. The early rain (yoreh) and late rain (malqosh) of verse 14 frame the growing season; without them, everything fails. The land is a theological instrument, not merely a gift.

Translation Friction: The phrase totafot (v. 18, 'emblems/frontlets') recurs from 6:8 with the same etymological uncertainty. The terms yoreh and malqosh (v. 14) are technical agricultural vocabulary — 'early rain' (October-November) and 'late rain' (March-April) are the closest English equivalents but lose the specificity of the Hebrew growing calendar.

Connections: The blessing-curse ceremony at Gerizim and Ebal (vv. 29-30) is executed in Joshua 8:30-35. The rain theology connects to 1 Kings 17-18, where Elijah's drought demonstrates exactly the covenantal consequence Deuteronomy warns about. Joel 2:23 promises restoration using the same yoreh/malqosh vocabulary.

¹You must love the LORD your God and keep His requirements — His statutes, regulations, and commands — at all times. ²Acknowledge today — for I am not speaking to your children who did not experience or witness the discipline of the LORD your God — His greatness, His powerful hand, and His outstretched arm, ³His signs and His deeds that He performed in the heart of Egypt against Pharaoh king of Egypt and against his entire country, ⁴What He did to the Egyptian army — to their horses and chariots — when He made the waters of the Sea of Reeds surge over them as they pursued you, and how the LORD destroyed them permanently, ⁵What He did for you in the wilderness until you arrived at this very place, ⁶What He did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab son of Reuben — how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them along with their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, right in the middle of all Israel. ⁷For your own eyes have seen every great act that the LORD has performed. ⁸Therefore keep every commandment I am giving you today, so that you will be strong enough to enter and take possession of the land you are crossing over to possess, ⁹And so that you may live long in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give to them and their descendants — a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰For the land you are entering to possess is not like the land of Egypt that you left, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it by foot like a vegetable garden. ¹¹Rather, the land you are crossing into to possess is a land of hills and valleys that drinks water from the rain of heaven. ¹²It is a land that the LORD your God personally tends. The eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it, from the start of the year to the year's end. ¹³If you truly listen to My commands that I am giving you today — to love the LORD your God and serve Him with your whole heart and your whole being — ¹⁴Then I will send rain on your land at the right time — the early rain and the late rain — so that you can harvest your grain, new wine, and olive oil. ¹⁵I will provide grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat and be satisfied. ¹⁶Guard yourselves so that your hearts are not seduced, causing you to turn away and serve other gods and bow down to them. ¹⁷Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and He will shut the sky so there is no rain, and the ground will not yield its produce, and you will quickly perish from the good land that the LORD is giving you. ¹⁸Place these words of Mine on your hearts and on your being. Bind them as a sign on your hand, and let them serve as emblems on your forehead. ¹⁹Teach them to your children by speaking about them when you sit at home and when you travel, when you lie down and when you get up. ²⁰Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, ²¹So that your days and your children's days in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors may be as many as the days the heavens remain above the earth. ²²For if you carefully keep this entire commandment that I am giving you to carry out — loving the LORD your God, walking in all His ways, and holding fast to Him — ²³Then the LORD will drive out all these nations ahead of you, and you will dispossess nations larger and more powerful than yourselves. ²⁴Every place where the sole of your foot treads will be yours — from the wilderness to Lebanon, from the Euphrates River to the western sea will be your territory. ²⁵No one will be able to stand against you. The

LORD your God will impose the fear and dread of you on the entire land wherever you set foot, just as He promised you. ²⁶See — I am placing before you today a blessing and a curse. ²⁷The blessing — if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today. ²⁸And the curse — if you do not obey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the path I am directing you on today by going after other gods that you have not known. ²⁹When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. ³⁰Are they not across the Jordan, toward the west, in the territory of the Canaanites living in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, near the oaks of Moreh? ³¹For you are about to cross the Jordan to enter and take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you. When you have taken possession and are settled in it, ³²You must carefully observe all the statutes and regulations that I am setting before you today.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening command *ve'ahavta et YHWH Elohekha* ('you must love the LORD your God') mirrors the Shema (6:5) and serves as the governing principle for all that follows. Love is not sentiment but expressed through *veshamarta mishmareto* ('keeping His charge/requirements'). The term *mishmeret* ('charge, requirement, watch') implies vigilant custody — guarding something entrusted to you. The four legal categories — *mishmeret*, *chuyqot*, *mishpatim*, *mitsvot* — represent the law's totality. The phrase *kol-hayyamim* ('all the days') demands unbroken, lifelong commitment.
2. Moses addresses the generation that personally experienced God's acts: *vide'tem hayyom* ('know today'). The parenthetical clarification *ki lo et-beneikhem* ('for not to your children') distinguishes eyewitnesses from future generations who will learn secondhand. The word *musar* ('discipline, instruction, correction') frames the exodus events as educational, not punitive — God's mighty acts were lessons, not mere spectacles. The formula *yado hachazaqah uzero'o hannetuyah* ('His powerful hand and outstretched arm') is the standard Deuteronomic description of exodus power.
3. The *ototav* ('His signs') and *ma'asav* ('His deeds') refer to the plagues — both as supernatural indicators (signs) and as divine interventions (deeds). The phrase *betokh Mitsrayim* ('in the midst/heart of Egypt') emphasizes that God operated within the enemy's stronghold, not from a safe distance. The judgment targeted both the ruler (*lefaroh melekh-Mitsrayim*) and his domain (*ulekhol-artso*) — personal and territorial consequences.
4. The military dimension: *asher asah lecheil Mitsrayim* ('what He did to the army of Egypt'). The specifics — *lesusav ulerikbo* ('to their horses and chariots') — target Egypt's most advanced military technology. The verb *hetsif* ('caused to overflow, flooded') describes the waters of Yam-Suf ('Sea of Reeds') surging over the pursuing army. The phrase *vay'abdem YHWH ad hayyom hazzeh* ('the LORD destroyed them until this day') means the destruction was permanent and irreversible — that army never recovered.
5. The brief phrase *va'asher asah lakhem bammiddbar* ('and what He did for you in the wilderness') encompasses forty years of provision, discipline, and preservation. The preposition *lakhem* ('for you') is ambiguous — it includes both acts of sustenance (manna, water) and acts of judgment (serpents, plagues). The temporal marker *ad-bo'akhem ad-hammaqom hazzeh* ('until your arrival at this place') brings the historical survey up to the present moment on the plains of Moab.
6. The Korah rebellion (Numbers 16) is referenced through its Reubenite participants *Datan and Aviram* — Korah himself is omitted, perhaps because his descendants survived (Numbers 26:11). The personification *patseta ha'arets et-piha* ('the earth opened its mouth') makes the ground itself an agent of divine judgment. The verb *vattivla'em* ('and it swallowed them') portrays the earth consuming the rebels. The list — *bateihem* ('their households'), *oholeihem* ('their tents'), *kol-hayyequm* ('all the living things at their feet') — shows total destruction. The phrase *beqerev kol-Yisra'el* ('in the midst of all Israel') makes this a public, witnessed event.
7. The summary statement *ki eineikhem haro'ot* ('for your eyes are the ones seeing') uses the active participle — the seeing is ongoing, present-tense in its impact. The claim that they witnessed *kol-ma'aseh YHWH haggadol* ('every great act of the LORD') establishes experiential authority: what follows is not theoretical theology but commands grounded in witnessed reality. Their obedience should flow not from abstract duty but from concrete experience of divine power.
8. The conjunction *ushmartem* ('therefore keep') links witnessed experience to obedience — because you have seen, you must obey. The purpose clause *lema'an techezqu* ('so that you will be strong') makes obedience the source of military strength. The phrase *uva'tem virishtem et-ha'arets* ('and you will enter and possess the land') ties conquest directly to faithfulness. Strength for possession is not inherent but covenantally derived — obedience activates divine power.
9. The second purpose clause *ulema'an ta'arikhu yamim* ('so that you may prolong days') connects obedience to longevity in the land. The patriarchal oath (*nishba YHWH la'avoteikhem*) is the legal basis, and the beneficiaries include *lahem ulezar'am* ('them and their offspring') — the promise spans generations. The iconic description *erets zavav chalay udevash* ('a land flowing with milk and honey') pictures abundance so great it overflows — milk from abundant livestock, honey from agriculture or wild sources. This is the only appearance of this formula in chapter 11.
10. Moses contrasts two agricultural systems: Egypt's Nile-dependent, foot-operated irrigation versus Canaan's rain-dependent agriculture. The phrase *vehishqita veraglekha* ('you watered with your foot') refers to the Egyptian practice of channeling irrigation water by digging or operating foot-pedals on water-lifting devices. The comparison *kegan hayyaraq* ('like a vegetable garden') suggests the labor-intensive, human-controlled nature of Egyptian farming. The coming contrast is theological: Canaan's agriculture will depend on God's rain, not human engineering.

11. Canaan's landscape — *erets harim uvqa'ot* ('a land of hills and valleys') — is topographically varied, unlike Egypt's flat Nile plain. The decisive difference is theological: *limtar hashamayim tishteh-mayim* ('from the rain of heaven it drinks water'). The land 'drinks' (*tishteh*) — a personification suggesting the land is receptive and alive. Rain comes from *shamayim* ('heaven') — God's domain. Where Egypt offered human control over water, Canaan demands faith in divine provision. Agriculture in the promised land is inherently an act of trust.
12. The verb *doresh* ('seeks, cares for, attends to') portrays God as an attentive landowner — He actively tends the promised land. The anthropomorphism *einei YHWH Elohekha bah* ('the eyes of the LORD your God are on it') describes continuous divine surveillance and care. The temporal scope — *mereshit hashanah ve'ad acharit shanah* ('from the beginning of the year until the end of the year') — means unbroken attention through every season. The land is never unwatched, never unattended. This divine attentiveness is both reassuring (God provides) and sobering (God sees everything that happens in it).
13. The conditional structure opens the second paragraph of the Shema (Deuteronomy 11:13-21, recited daily in Jewish liturgy). The intensified infinitive absolute *shamo'a tishme'u* ('listening you shall listen' — truly listen) echoes 28:1. The shift to first person — *mitsvotai* ('My commands') — may reflect God speaking through Moses or Moses speaking as God's authorized representative. The dual requirement — *le'ahavah* ('to love') and *ule'avdo* ('to serve') — combines internal disposition with external action, *bekhol-levavkhem uvkhol-nafshekhem* ('with all your heart and all your soul').
14. God promises *venatatti metar-artskhem be'itto* ('I will give rain for your land in its season') — precipitation as covenant blessing, directly from God. Two critical rains define the agricultural year: *yoreh* ('early rain,' October-November, softening ground for planting) and *malqosh* ('late rain,' March-April, swelling the ripening grain). Both are essential; the absence of either means crop failure. The three harvest products — *dagan* ('grain'), *tiros* ('new wine'), and *yitshar* ('olive oil') — represent the staple crops of Israel's economy.
15. The provision extends to livestock: *venatatti esev besadekha livhemtekha* ('I will give grass in your fields for your animals'). The order is notable — animals fed first, then *ve'akhalta vesava'ta* ('you will eat and be satisfied'). The Talmud derives from this sequence that one must feed one's animals before feeding oneself (Berakhot 40a). The final promise of satisfaction (*sava'*) completes the rain-to-harvest-to-table chain: divine rain produces animal feed and human food, resulting in full satisfaction.
16. The warning *hishamru lakhem* ('guard yourselves') interrupts the blessing sequence with danger. The verb *yifteh* ('be deceived, seduced, enticed') portrays apostasy as seduction — the heart is lured, not forced. The progression — *vesartem* ('you will turn aside'), *va'avadtem elohim acherim* ('and serve other gods'), *vehishtachavitem lahem* ('and bow down to them') — traces the path from initial distraction to full idolatrous worship. In an agrarian society dependent on rain, the temptation to worship Baal (the Canaanite storm/rain god) was acute: who really controls the rain?
17. The consequence directly reverses the blessing: *vecharah af-YHWH* ('the LORD's anger will burn') triggers *ve'atsar et-hashamayim* ('He will shut the heavens'). The God who promised rain (v 14) will withhold it. The agricultural collapse follows: *veha'adamah lo titten et-yevulah* ('the ground will not give its produce'). The ultimate consequence — *va'avadtem meherah me'al ha'arets hattovah* ('you will perish quickly from the good land') — means exile. The land given by God can be taken back by God. Rain-dependence, which should produce faith, becomes the mechanism of judgment when faith is abandoned.
18. The command *vesamtem et-devarai elleh al-levavkhem ve'al-nafshekem* ('place these words on your heart and on your being') demands internal inscription — the words must penetrate, not merely be heard. The physical practices — *uqshartem otam le'ot al-yedkhem* ('bind them as a sign on your hand') and *vehayu letotafot bein eineikhem* ('they shall be as totafot between your eyes') — were interpreted literally as *tefillin* (phylacteries) in Jewish practice. The word *totafot* is rare and obscure, possibly meaning 'headbands' or 'emblems.' Whether literal or metaphorical, the intent is total saturation: God's words must govern both action (hand) and thought (between the eyes).
19. The pedagogical command *velimadtem otam et-beneikhem* ('teach them to your children') ensures generational transmission. The method is conversational — *ledabber bam* ('by speaking about them') — not formal classroom instruction but constant dialogue. Four settings cover all of daily life: *beshivtekha beveitekha* ('sitting in your house'), *uvlekhtekha vaderekh* ('walking on the road'), *uvshakhekha* ('lying down'), *uvqumekha* ('rising up'). The parallel with 6:7 reinforces that Torah education is not scheduled but ambient — woven into every moment and activity.
20. The command *ukhtavtam al-mezuzot beitekha* ('write them on the doorposts of your house') makes God's words visible at every entrance and exit. The *mezuzah* marks the threshold — the boundary between private and public space — ensuring that God's word is encountered at every transition. The addition *uvish'arekha* ('and on your gates') extends from the individual home to the community — city gates were centers of legal and commercial life. Together, doorpost and gate ensure saturation: home and city, private and public, all are inscribed with divine instruction.
21. The purpose clause *lema'an yirbu yemeikhem vime'i veneikhem* ('so that your days and your children's days may multiply') connects Torah-saturated living to longevity. The comparison *kimei hashamayim al-ha'arets* ('like the days of the heavens upon the earth') promises permanence rivaling creation itself — as long as sky spans earth, Israel may dwell in the land. This cosmic simile is conditional: the permanence depends on the obedience described in verses 18-20. This verse closes the second paragraph of the Shema, the liturgical passage recited daily.
22. The intensified conditional *ki im-shamor tishmerun* ('if guarding you shall guard') opens a new promise section. The singular *hammitsvah hazzot* ('this commandment') views all the laws as one unified instruction. Three descriptions define its content: *le'ahavah* ('to love'), *lalekhet* ('to walk'), and *uledavqah-bo* ('to cling to Him'). The verb *davaq* ('cling, cleave') is the marriage word from Genesis 2:24, here applied to the God-Israel relationship. Covenant faithfulness is depicted as the most intimate possible attachment.
23. The promise *vehorish YHWH et-kol-haggoyim ha'elleh* ('the LORD will dispossess all these nations') is conditioned on the obedience of verse 22. The result — *virishtem goyim gedolim va'atsumim mikkem* ('you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you') — reaffirms the military impossibility overcome by divine intervention. The same nations described in chapter 7 are still the target, and the same principle applies: Israel's

strength is derivative, flowing from covenant obedience, not from military capability.

- 24.** The territorial promise is expansive: kol-hammaqom asher tidrokh kaf-raglekhem bo lakhem yihyeh ('every place your foot treads will be yours'). The four boundaries define the maximum extent: min-hamidbar ('from the wilderness' — the Negev/Sinai in the south), vahaLevanon ('and Lebanon' — the north), min-hannahar nehar-Perat ('from the river, the river Euphrates' — the east), ve'ad hayyam ha'acharon ('to the western/last sea' — the Mediterranean). This represents the ideal, maximal borders promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18), rarely if ever fully realized historically.
- 25.** The military guarantee lo-yityatsev ish bifneikhem ('no one will stand before you') is absolute — conditioned on the obedience of verse 22. The mechanism is psychological: pachdekhem umora'akhem yitten YHWH ('the LORD will set your fear and your dread'). Two terms for fear are used — pachad ('terror, dread') and mora ('fear, awe') — covering both the visceral and the respectful. God will deploy Israel's reputation as a weapon: enemies will be psychologically defeated before the battle begins. The phrase ka'asher dibber lakhem ('as He spoke to you') anchors the promise in God's prior declarations.
- 26.** The pivotal declaration re'eh anokhi noten lifneikhem hayyom berakhah uqelalah ('see, I am placing before you today a blessing and a curse') introduces the climactic choice. The singular imperative re'eh ('see!') addresses each individual, while the plural lifneikhem ('before you all') addresses the nation. Berakhah ('blessing') and qelalah ('curse') are the two covenant outcomes — not fate but consequences of choice. This sets up the Gerizim-Ebal ceremony and anticipates the blessings and curses of chapters 27-28.
- 27.** The blessing is conditional: et-habberakhah asher tishme'u el-mitsvot YHWH ('the blessing — that you will listen to the commands of the LORD'). The conjunction asher can be read as 'if' (conditional) or 'when' (temporal), but the force is conditional. Obedience activates blessing. The present-tense urgency — asher anokhi metsavveh etkhem hayyom ('which I am commanding you today') — makes the choice immediate, not deferred.
- 28.** The curse is triggered by two failures: im-lo tishme'u ('if you do not listen') and vesartem min-hadderekh ('and turn from the path'). Disobedience leads to deviation, and deviation leads to idolatry — lalekhet acharei elohim acherim ('to walk after other gods'). The qualifying phrase asher lo-yeda'tem ('which you have not known') is devastating: Israel would abandon the God who has been intimately known through forty years of wilderness experience for gods they have never encountered. The choice between blessing and curse is simultaneously a choice between the known and the unknown, the proven and the untested.
- 29.** The ceremony is prescribed: venatattah et-habberakhah al Har Gerizim ve'et-haqqelalah al Har Ebal ('you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal'). These twin mountains flanking the city of Shechem create a natural amphitheater. Gerizim (to the south, more fertile) receives the blessing; Ebal (to the north, more barren) receives the curse — the geography itself embodies the choice. This ceremony, fulfilled in Joshua 8:30-35, physically inscribed covenant consequences into the landscape of the promised land. Israel would live between these two mountains, between blessing and curse.
- 30.** Moses orients his audience geographically: halo-hemmah be'ever haYarden ('are they not beyond the Jordan') — from their current position east of the river. The phrase acharei derekh mevo hashemesh ('toward the way of the setting sun') means westward. The reference points — be'erets haKena'ani hayyoshev ba'Aravah ('in the land of the Canaanite dwelling in the Arabah'), mul haGilgal ('opposite Gilgal'), etsel elonei Moreh ('near the oaks/terebinths of Moreh') — place the mountains precisely in the landscape. The elonei Moreh ('oaks of Moreh') connects to Genesis 12:6, where Abraham received the land promise — full circle.
- 31.** The immediate future is emphasized: ki attem overim et-haYarden ('for you are crossing the Jordan') — the crossing is imminent. The triple progression — lavo lareshet ('to enter to possess'), virishtem otah ('you will possess it'), vishavtem-bah ('you will settle in it') — maps the three phases of conquest: entry, possession, and settlement. Each phase brings new responsibilities and new temptations. The gift nature of the land — asher YHWH Eloheikhem noten lakhem ('which the LORD your God is giving you') — keeps the source in view as a guard against the arrogance warned about in chapter 8.
- 32.** The chapter's final verse ushmartem la'asot ('you must guard to do') combines vigilant attention with active obedience — these are inseparable. The phrase et kol-hachuqqim ve'et-hammishpatim ('all the statutes and the regulations') encompasses the full legal code about to be detailed in chapters 12-26. The temporal marker hayyom ('today') creates urgency: obedience is not tomorrow's project but today's demand. This closing verse functions as a hinge between the motivational speeches of chapters 5-11 and the specific legal code that follows — the theological foundation is laid; the practical instructions are about to begin.

12

Summary: *Moses commands Israel to worship at one central sanctuary — 'the place the LORD will choose to put His name' — destroying all Canaanite worship sites. Meat may now be eaten without sacrifice, but blood must never be consumed.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The phrase hamaqom ('the place,' v. 5) is never identified by name in Deuteronomy. The centralization of worship is the book's most consequential law — it will eventually mean Jerusalem, but Moses leaves it unnamed, preserving God's sovereignty over the choice. The permission to slaughter animals for food without a sacrificial context (vv. 15-16, 20-22) is new — in the wilderness, all slaughter was sacrificial (Leviticus 17:3-4). Distance from the sanctuary necessitates secular slaughter.*

Translation Friction: *The verb leshakken shemo ('to cause His Name to dwell,' v. 5) is Deuteronomy's distinctive theology: not God Himself but God's Name dwells in the sanctuary. This Name theology avoids localizing God while maintaining real divine presence. We rendered it literally and noted the theological significance. The blood prohibition (v. 23) uses nephesh ('life') — 'the blood is the life,' not merely 'the blood contains life.'*

Connections: *The centralization command is fulfilled when David brings the ark to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6) and Solomon builds the Temple (1 Kings 8). The Name theology reappears throughout Kings (1 Kings 8:29, 2 Kings 21:4). The blood-life equation grounds the entire sacrificial system (Leviticus 17:11) and is cited in Acts 15:20.*

1These are the decrees and ordinances you must carefully follow in the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess — for as long as you live on the earth. 2You must completely demolish every site where the nations you are dispossessing worshiped their gods — on the high mountains, on the hills, and beneath every leafy tree. 3Tear down their altars, smash their sacred pillars, burn their Asherah poles with fire, cut down the carved images of their gods, and wipe out their names from those places. 4You must not worship the LORD your God in that way. 5Instead, seek out the place that the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to establish His name — to His dwelling you must go. 6There you must bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contributions from your hands, your vow offerings, your voluntary offerings, and the firstborn of your cattle and flocks. 7There you will eat in the presence of the LORD your God, and you and your households will celebrate in everything you have undertaken, because the LORD your God has blessed you. 8You must not continue doing what we are doing here today, where everyone acts according to whatever seems right to them. 9For you have not yet reached the place of rest and the inheritance that the LORD your God is giving you. 10When you cross the Jordan and settle in the land that the LORD your God is granting you as an inheritance, and He gives you relief from all your surrounding enemies so that you live in security — 11Then to the place that the LORD your God will choose as the dwelling for His name — there you must bring everything I am commanding you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and the contributions from your hands, and all the choicest of your vow offerings that you pledge to the LORD. 12Celebrate in the presence of the LORD your God — you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who lives within your towns, since he has no allotted portion or inheritance alongside you. 13Be careful not to offer your burnt offerings at just any place you happen to see. 14Only at the place the LORD will choose within one of your tribal territories — there you must present your burnt offerings, and there you must carry out everything I am commanding you. 15However, you may slaughter and eat meat in any of your towns whenever you desire, in proportion to the blessing the LORD your God gives you. Both the ritually impure and the ritually pure may eat it, just as they would eat gazelle or deer. 16The one restriction is this: you must not consume the blood. Pour it out on the ground like water. 17You are not permitted to eat the following within your own towns: the tithe of your grain, new wine, or olive oil; the firstborn of your herds or flocks; any of your vow offerings or voluntary offerings; or the contributions from your hands. 18Rather, you must eat these in the presence of the LORD your God at the place the LORD your God will choose — you, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, and the Levite who lives in your town. You are to celebrate in the presence of the LORD your God over

everything you have accomplished. ¹⁹Be careful never to neglect the Levite for as long as you live in your land. ²⁰When the LORD your God expands your territory as He promised you, and you say, 'I want to eat meat' because you crave it, then you may eat meat whenever you desire. ²¹If the place the LORD your God has chosen to establish His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter from your cattle or flocks that the LORD has given you, as I have instructed you, and eat within your own towns whenever you wish. ²²Eat it the same way you would eat gazelle or deer: both the ritually impure and the ritually pure may eat it together. ²³Only be resolute in not eating the blood, because the blood is the life-force, and you must not consume the life-force along with the meat. ²⁴Do not eat it. Pour it out on the ground like water. ²⁵Do not eat it, so that things will go well for you and your children after you, because you are doing what is right in the LORD's sight. ²⁶But your sacred offerings and your vow offerings — those you must carry to the place the LORD will choose. ²⁷Present your burnt offerings — both the meat and the blood — on the altar of the LORD your God. The blood of your other sacrifices must be poured out on the altar of the LORD your God, but the meat you may eat. ²⁸Guard and obey all these instructions that I am commanding you, so that things will go well for you and your descendants after you permanently, because you are doing what is good and right in the eyes of the LORD your God. ²⁹When the LORD your God cuts off the nations ahead of you — the ones you are going to dispossess — and you take their place and settle in their land, ³⁰guard yourself from being ensnared by their ways after they have been destroyed ahead of you. Do not inquire about their gods, asking, 'How did these nations worship their gods? I want to do the same thing.' ³¹You must not worship the LORD your God the way they worship, because they practice every abomination that the LORD detests for their gods — they even burn their own sons and daughters in the fire as offerings to their gods.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *hachuqqim vehamishpatim* ('the statutes and the ordinances') opens a new legislative section that runs through chapter 26. *Chuqqim* are engraved decrees — permanent regulations inscribed in the covenant — while *mishpatim* are case-law rulings, judicial precedents that govern specific situations. Together they encompass the full scope of covenant law. The phrase *kol hayyamim asher attem chayyim* ('all the days that you are alive') emphasizes that these laws apply for the entire duration of the people's existence in the land.
2. The infinitive absolute *abded te'abedun* ('destroying you shall destroy' — you must completely demolish) demands total eradication of Canaanite worship sites. The three locations listed — high mountains (*heharim haramim*), hills (*hageva'ot*), and beneath leafy trees (*tachat kol ets ra'anana*) — correspond to the typical settings of Canaanite open-air shrines (*bamot*). These elevated sites were considered closer to the divine realm, and the evergreen trees symbolized fertility worship. The command is comprehensive: no pagan worship site, regardless of location, may be repurposed.
3. Four distinct cult objects are targeted: *mizbekhot* ('altars' — stone or earth platforms for sacrifice), *matstsevoth* ('standing stones' — sacred pillars representing the male deity), *asherim* ('Asherah poles' — wooden cult objects associated with the Canaanite goddess Asherah), and *pesilei eloheim* ('carved images of their gods' — sculpted idols). The final command *ve'ibadtem et shemam* ('wipe out their names') goes beyond physical destruction: even the memory and invocation of these gods must be erased from the landscape. Replacing pagan place-names was part of claiming the land for YHWH.
4. This terse prohibition — *lo ta'asun ken* ('you shall not do so') — is the pivot of the entire chapter. It separates the command to destroy pagan worship sites (vv 2-3) from the command to worship at God's chosen site (vv 5-7). The point is not merely that Canaanite practices are wrong, but that Israel must not apply Canaanite worship patterns to YHWH. God determines where and how He is worshiped; Israel does not get to choose the format.
5. The phrase *hamaqom asher yivchar YHWH* ('the place that the LORD will choose') is the theological center of Deuteronomy's worship legislation, appearing over twenty times in the book. It refers to a single, divinely selected worship site — ultimately identified with Jerusalem (2 Chr 7:12). The phrase *lasum et shemo sham* ('to place His name there') uses the 'name theology' distinctive to Deuteronomy: God's name represents His presence and authority. His dwelling (*shikhno*) is established through His name, meaning the sanctuary is where God makes Himself accessible, not where He is confined.
6. Seven categories of offerings are listed, creating a comprehensive inventory of Israel's worship: *olot* ('burnt offerings' — wholly consumed on the altar), *zevachim* ('sacrifices' — shared meals with God), *ma'asrot* ('tithes' — the tenth of produce), *terumat yedkhem* ('contributions of your hands' — the raised/elevated offering), *nidreichem* ('vow offerings' — pledged in times of need), *nidvoteihem* ('freewill offerings' — voluntary expressions of gratitude), and *bekhorot* ('firstborn' — consecrated firstborn animals). All seven categories must come to the one chosen place, eliminating any justification for multiple worship sites.
7. The centralized worship experience is described not as solemn duty but as communal celebration. The verb *usmachtem* ('you shall rejoice') makes joy a commanded element of worship. The phrase *lifnei YHWH* ('before the LORD, in the presence of the LORD') indicates that the communal meal takes place in God's acknowledged presence. The inclusion of *uvateikhem* ('your households') extends worship beyond individual males to entire families — worship is a household experience.

8. Moses acknowledges that during the wilderness period, Israel's worship has been decentralized and somewhat individualized — *ish kol hayyashar be'einav* ('each person doing whatever is right in his own eyes'). This same phrase appears as the concluding judgment of the book of Judges (Judg 21:25), where it describes moral and social chaos. The phrase 'here today' (*po hayyom*) contrasts the transitional wilderness situation with the settled future in the land, where centralized worship will impose order on religious practice.
9. Two terms define what the promised land represents: *menuchah* ('rest' — cessation from wandering, warfare, and instability) and *nachalah* ('inheritance' — permanent, divinely granted possession). Together they describe not merely territory but a settled condition of security and divine provision. The 'rest' concept becomes theologically significant throughout Scripture (cf. Ps 95:11; Heb 4:1-11), extending beyond physical land to encompass the fullness of God's promises.
10. Three stages mark the transition to settled life: crossing the Jordan (*va'avartem et haYarden*), settling in the land (*vishavtem ba'arets*), and receiving security from enemies (*veheniach lakhem mikkol oyveikhem*). The verb *heniach* ('give rest, give relief') is the causative form of *nuach* — God actively creates the condition of rest. The phrase *vishavtem betach* ('you will dwell in security') describes the end-state: a life free from military threat, where worship can be properly centralized.
11. The phrase *leshakken shemo sham* ('to cause His name to dwell there') uses the *piel* intensive of *shakan* ('to dwell'), emphasizing that God actively establishes His name-presence at the chosen site. The term *mivchar nidreikhem* ('the choicest of your vow offerings') specifies that vow offerings must be of the best quality — not merely any animal, but the select ones. This raises the standard: centralized worship demands not just obedience in location but excellence in offering.
12. The worship community is defined inclusively: sons, daughters, male and female servants, and the Levite. This is not solitary devotion but communal celebration crossing age, gender, and social class. The Levite receives special mention because he has no tribal land allotment (*ein lo cheleq venachalah ittekhem* — 'he has no portion or inheritance with you') and therefore depends entirely on the community's generosity. The phrase *bishaareikhem* ('within your gates/towns') indicates that Levites are dispersed throughout Israel's cities rather than concentrated in one location.
13. The warning *hishamer lekha* ('guard yourself, be careful') introduces a prohibition against random site selection for sacrifice. The phrase *bekhol maqom asher tireh* ('at every place that you see') contrasts with the specific *maqom* ('place') that God chooses. The Canaanite practice of worshipping wherever a high place or impressive natural feature appeared attractive is explicitly rejected. Convenience or personal preference must not determine where burnt offerings are made.
14. The phrase *be'achad shevatekha* ('in one of your tribes') specifies that the chosen place will be located within one tribe's territory. This was fulfilled when Jerusalem — located on the border of Benjamin and Judah — became the central sanctuary. The emphatic repetition *sham* ('there') twice reinforces the exclusivity: there, and only there, is the authorized worship site.
15. This verse introduces a revolutionary concession: secular (non-sacrificial) slaughter of animals for food is now permitted in any town. Before centralization, all animal slaughter was sacrificial (Lev 17:3-4). But with the sanctuary potentially far away, requiring every meat meal to involve a pilgrimage would be impractical. The phrase *bekhol avvat nafshekha* ('according to all the desire of your soul' — whenever you want) grants broad permission. The comparison to gazelle and deer (*tsevi and ayyal*) — wild animals that were never sacrificed — establishes the principle: this meat is ordinary food, not sacred offering. Both ritually impure (*tamei*) and pure (*tahor*) persons may eat it, since no sacred context applies.
16. Even in secular slaughter, one absolute prohibition remains: blood must not be consumed. The blood prohibition is one of the oldest and most universal commands in Scripture (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:10-14). The instruction to pour it on the ground 'like water' (*kammayim*) means it should be treated as waste liquid, not collected for any purpose. In sacrificial contexts, blood was dashed on the altar (representing life returned to God); in non-sacrificial slaughter, it is simply disposed of on the earth.
17. While secular meat eating is now permitted locally (v 15), sacred offerings are strictly excluded from local consumption. The triad *degan, tirosh, yitshar* ('grain, new wine, olive oil') represents the three staple agricultural products of the land. These tithes, along with firstborn animals and vow/freewill offerings, must be consumed at the central sanctuary. The distinction between ordinary food (freely eaten at home) and sacred food (restricted to God's chosen place) is a key organizational principle of Deuteronomy's worship system.
18. The inclusive list of worshipers reappears (cf. v 12): son, daughter, servants, and Levite. The phrase *vesamachta lifnei YHWH* ('you shall rejoice before the LORD') again pairs worship with joy — the sacred meal is a celebration, not a somber ritual. The phrase *bekhol mishlach yadekha* ('in everything your hand is sent to' — everything you have accomplished) connects the feast to God's blessing on daily labor. Worship celebrates what God has enabled.
19. The warning *hishamer lekha pen ta'azov et haLevi* ('guard yourself lest you abandon the Levite') closes the first section with a social obligation. Since Levites have no land inheritance and depend on the community's tithes and offerings for sustenance, neglecting them would be both economic cruelty and a failure to support Israel's worship infrastructure. The phrase *kol yamekha* ('all your days') makes this a lifelong obligation, not a temporary measure. The *setumah* paragraph break marks the transition to the next topic.
20. This verse anticipates future territorial expansion (*ki yarchiv YHWH Elohekha et gevulkha* — 'when the LORD your God enlarges your border') and the practical problem it creates: the central sanctuary will be even farther away. The repeated emphasis on desire — *te'avveh nafshekha* ('your soul craves') and *bekhol avvat nafshekha* ('in all the desire of your soul') — frames meat-eating as a matter of appetite, not ritual. God accommodates human desire within the framework of covenant law.

- 21.** The phrase *ki yirchaq mimmekha hamaqom* ('if the place is too far from you') provides the explicit justification for secular slaughter: distance from the central sanctuary. The phrase *ka'asher tsivitikha* ('as I have commanded you') likely refers to oral instructions about proper slaughter technique — instructions not recorded in the written Torah. The rabbis understood this as evidence for the Oral Torah tradition, since no written command about slaughter method appears elsewhere in the Pentateuch.
- 22.** The gazelle (*tsevi*) and deer (*ayyal*) comparison is repeated from verse 15, reinforcing that locally slaughtered meat has the same status as wild game — it is ordinary food, not sacred. The phrase *hattamei vehattahor yachdav* ('the impure and the pure together') is significant: in sacrificial contexts, ritual purity was required, but for ordinary meals no such restriction applies. The word *yachdav* ('together') emphasizes that there is no separation at the table.
- 23.** The command *raq chazaq* ('only be strong/resolute') frames blood avoidance as requiring strength of will — it is a temptation that must be actively resisted. The theological reason follows: *ki haddam hu hannefesh* ('because the blood is the life/soul'). The Hebrew *nefesh* here means life-force or vital essence, not 'soul' in the later philosophical sense. Blood carries the animating principle that God gives; consuming it would be appropriating what belongs to God alone. The prohibition appears three times in this chapter (vv 16, 23, 25), underscoring its importance.
- 24.** The repetition from verse 16 reinforces the blood prohibition with identical language. Pouring blood on the ground 'like water' (*kammayim*) emphasizes that it has no sacred function in secular slaughter — it is not dashed on an altar as in sacrificial contexts but simply returned to the earth. The simplicity of the disposal method contrasts with the elaborate blood rituals of Leviticus.
- 25.** The blood prohibition is now tied to a generational promise: *lema'an yitav lekha ulevanekha acharekha* ('so that it may be good for you and your children after you'). Obedience produces intergenerational blessing. The phrase *ki ta'aseh hayyashar be'einei YHWH* ('because you do what is right in the LORD's eyes') frames blood avoidance not as arbitrary restriction but as moral alignment with God's values — the opposite of 'doing what is right in one's own eyes' (v 8).
- 26.** After extensively discussing local secular slaughter (vv 15-25), Moses returns to the nonnegotiable requirement: *qodashekha* ('your holy things, your sacred offerings') and *nedarekha* ('your vow offerings') must still travel to the central sanctuary. The verb *tissa* ('you shall carry, you shall lift up') implies physical transport — these offerings must be physically brought to the chosen place, not consumed at home regardless of distance.
- 27.** Two types of sacrifice are distinguished: *olot* ('burnt offerings'), where both meat and blood go entirely on the altar (nothing is eaten), and *zevachim* ('other sacrifices' — peace/fellowship offerings), where only the blood is poured on the altar and the worshiper eats the meat. This verse concisely summarizes the distinction between wholly-burned and shared offerings that Leviticus 1-7 details at length. The contrast with secular slaughter (vv 15-25) is clear: in sacrifice, blood goes on the altar; in ordinary slaughter, blood goes on the ground.
- 28.** The phrase *shemor veshama'ta* ('guard and hear/obey') pairs two verbs of obedience: careful attention and active compliance. The promise extends beyond the current generation — *ulevanekha acharekha ad olam* ('and for your children after you permanently'). The word *olam* ('forever, permanently') elevates the promise from temporal to enduring. The phrase *hattov vehayashar* ('the good and the right') combines moral quality (*tov* — what is inherently good) with legal propriety (*yashar* — what is straight, correct, upright). The *setumah* break marks the end of this subsection.
- 29.** The verb *yakhrit* ('He will cut off') uses the *hiphil* of *karat*, the same root used for 'cutting' a covenant (*karat berit*). God 'cuts off' nations just as He 'cuts' covenants — both are sovereign acts that reshape the political and spiritual landscape. The sequence — cutting off, dispossessing (*yarashta*), settling (*yashavta*) — describes the three-phase transition: removal, replacement, and habitation.
- 30.** The verb *tinnaqesh* ('be ensnared') uses the imagery of a bird trap — Israel could walk into Canaanite religion as unknowingly as a bird enters a snare. The warning is psychologically astute: even after the nations are destroyed (*acharei hishamdam*), their religious practices could survive as cultural curiosity. The quoted internal monologue — *eikhah ya'avdu... ve'e'eseh ken gam ani* ('How did they worship... I'll do the same') — reveals the danger of religious syncretism: Israel might adopt Canaanite worship forms while believing they are enhancing YHWH worship.
- 31.** The chapter closes where it began (v 4): Israel must not worship YHWH using Canaanite methods. The reason is now made explicit: every *to'avah* ('abomination, detestable practice') that the LORD hates characterizes Canaanite religion. The ultimate example is child sacrifice — *ki gam et beneihem ve'et benoteihem yisrefu va'esh leloheihem* ('they even burn their sons and daughters in fire to their gods'). Archaeological evidence confirms child sacrifice at Canaanite and Phoenician sites (the tophet at Carthage being the most extensively documented). This practice — the inversion of the firstborn consecration (dedicating a child to death rather than to life) — represents the absolute boundary between YHWH worship and Canaanite religion.

13

Summary: Moses addresses three scenarios of temptation to idolatry: a prophet who performs signs, a close family member who entices privately, and an entire city that turns away. Each requires the death penalty.

What Makes This Remarkable: The chapter escalates from public seduction (a prophet) to intimate betrayal (spouse, child, friend) to communal apostasy (a whole city). The most disturbing case is the middle one: 'your brother, your son, your daughter, the wife of your bosom, your friend who is as your own soul' (v. 6). Deuteronomy lists every intimate relationship to eliminate any excuse for mercy toward idolatry. The theological principle is absolute: no sign, no relationship, no community consensus can authorize worship of other gods.

*Translation Friction: The phrase *benei veliyya'al* (v. 14, 'worthless individuals') is a compound that became a proper name (Belial) in later literature. We rendered it descriptively rather than as a name. The verb *uwi'arta hara* (v. 5, 'purge the evil') recurs throughout Deuteronomy as a judicial refrain — we translated it consistently. The verse numbering differs from KJV: Hebrew 13:1 = KJV 12:32.*

*Connections: The false prophet test recurs in 18:20-22 with different criteria. The city-under-ban echoes the *cherem* of Joshua 6-7. Paul may allude to the 'purge the evil' formula in 1 Corinthians 5:13. The intimate-betrayer case grounds Jesus's warning that discipleship may divide families (Matthew 10:35-37).*

1Everything I am commanding you — guard it and carry it out. Do not add anything to it, and do not subtract anything from it. 2If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and presents you with a sign or a wonder, 3and the sign or wonder actually comes true, but then he says, 'Let us follow other gods' — gods you have not known — 'and let us serve them,' 4you must not listen to what that prophet or dreamer says, because the LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you truly love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 5The LORD your God is the one you must follow. Him you must revere. His commandments you must keep. His voice you must obey. Him you must serve, and to Him you must hold fast. 6That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he spoke rebellion against the LORD your God — the one who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery — trying to push you off the path the LORD your God commanded you to walk. You must purge the evil from your midst. 7If your brother — your own mother's son — or your son or daughter, or the wife you embrace, or your closest friend who is like your own soul, entices you in secret, saying, 'Let us go worship other gods' — gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known, 8gods of the surrounding peoples, whether near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other — 9you must not yield to him or listen to him. Your eye must not show pity, you must not spare him, and you must not shield him. 10Rather, you must certainly put him to death. Your own hand must strike first to execute him, and then the hands of all the people. 11Stone him to death, because he sought to lure you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 12All Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one will do such a wicked thing among you again. 13If you hear it reported about one of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you to live in, 14that worthless individuals have emerged from among you and have led the residents of their city astray, saying, 'Let us go serve other gods' — gods you have not known — 15then you must investigate, examine, and inquire thoroughly. If it is confirmed as true — if this abomination has indeed been committed among you — 16you must strike down the inhabitants of that city with the sword, devoting it to total destruction — everything in it and its livestock — with the sword. 17Gather all its plunder into the center of its public square and burn the entire city and all its plunder as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. It will remain a permanent ruin, never to be rebuilt. 18Nothing from the items placed under the ban may stick to your hands, so that the LORD will turn from His fierce anger and show you compassion — He will have mercy on you and multiply you, just as He swore to your ancestors. 19— provided you listen to the voice of the LORD your God, keeping all His commandments that I am commanding you today, doing what is right in the eyes of the LORD your God.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This verse is numbered 13:1 in the Hebrew text but 12:32 in English Bibles (KJV). The Hebrew text reads: 'Everything I command you — that you shall guard to do. Do not add to it and do not subtract from it.' The KJV text shown corresponds to the English Bible's 13:1 (Hebrew 13:2). The rendering follows the Hebrew source text. The prohibition *lo tosef alav velo tigra mimmennu* ('do not add to it and do not subtract from it') establishes the canon principle: God's commands are complete and authoritative as given. This principle is later echoed in Revelation 22:18-19. The petuchah paragraph marker signals a major section break — what follows in the Hebrew text is a new topic.
2. Hebrew 13:2 (English 13:1). The chapter addresses three sources of enticement to idolatry: prophets (vv 2-6), family and close friends (vv 7-12), and entire cities (vv 13-19). The *navi* ('prophet') and *cholem chalom* ('dreamer of dreams') represent two modes of claimed divine communication. The phrase *natan elekha ot o mofet* ('gives you a sign or wonder') acknowledges that the false prophet may actually produce supernatural phenomena — the test is not whether the sign works but where it leads.
3. Hebrew 13:3 (English 13:2). The scenario is startling: the predicted sign actually comes true (*uva ha'ot vehamofet* — 'the sign and the wonder comes to pass'), yet the prophet's message leads to idolatry. The phrase *elohim acherim asher lo yeda'tam* ('other gods that you have not known') uses 'known' in the covenantal sense — these are gods with whom Israel has no relationship, no history, no covenant bond. The seductive logic is: 'My prediction came true, therefore my theology is correct.' Moses dismantles this reasoning in the next verse.
4. Hebrew 13:4 (English 13:3). The reason for allowing false prophets to perform real signs is breathtaking: *ki menasseh YHWH Eloheikhem etkhem* ('because the LORD your God is testing you'). God permits supernatural deception as a loyalty test. The criterion is not intellectual — 'can you detect the fraud?' — but relational: *hayishkhem ohavim et YHWH* ('do you love the LORD?'). The test echoes the Shema (Deut 6:5): love with all your heart (*levav*) and all your soul (*nefesh*). A sign that contradicts covenant loyalty must be rejected regardless of its apparent supernatural validation.
5. Hebrew 13:5 (English 13:4). Six verbs define covenant loyalty in a powerful ascending sequence: *telekhu* ('follow/walk after'), *tira'u* ('revere/fear'), *tishmoru* ('keep/guard'), *tishma'u* ('obey/hear'), *ta'avodu* ('serve/worship'), and *tidbaqun* ('hold fast/cling'). The final verb *davaq* ('cling, hold fast') is the same verb used for marital union in Genesis 2:24 — covenant loyalty to God is intimate, not merely formal. The emphatic word order places YHWH first in every clause: 'After the LORD... Him you shall fear... His commands... His voice... Him you shall serve... to Him you shall cling.'
6. Hebrew 13:6 (English 13:5). The charge is *dibber sarah* ('he spoke rebellion/sedition') — the verb *sarah* implies active turning aside, deviation from the established path. The death penalty reflects the severity of the offense: the false prophet attacks the very foundation of Israel's existence. Two exodus titles reinforce what is at stake: *hamotsi etkhem me'erets mitsrayim* ('the one who brought you out of Egypt') and *hapoddekha mibbeit avadim* ('the one who redeemed you from the house of slavery'). The formula *uvi'arta hara miqqirbekha* ('purge the evil from your midst') appears seven times in Deuteronomy, establishing a pattern for communal purification.
7. Hebrew 13:7 (English 13:6). The second scenario shifts from public prophets to intimate relationships. The list escalates in emotional closeness: brother (*achikha ben immekha* — 'your brother, your mother's son,' emphasizing the closest sibling bond through shared mother), son, daughter, wife (*eshet cheiqekha* — 'wife of your bosom,' the most intimate human relationship), and friend (*re'akha asher kenafshekha* — 'your friend who is like your own soul,' echoing the David-Jonathan bond). The enticement comes *baseter* ('in secret') — privately, where social pressure cannot counter it. The emotional difficulty of the following command is intentionally heightened by this list.
8. Hebrew 13:8 (English 13:7). The scope of the prohibition extends geographically: the gods of nearby peoples (*haqerovim elekha*) and distant peoples (*harmoqim mimmekha*), from one end of the earth to the other (*miqqetseh ha'arets ve'ad qetseh ha'arets*). No foreign god is exempt, regardless of its geographic origin. This eliminates any argument that a particular deity's distance or exoticism might make it acceptable.
9. Hebrew 13:9 (English 13:8). Five prohibitions stack up with relentless force: *lo toveh* ('do not consent/yield'), *lo tishma* ('do not listen'), *lo tachos einkha* ('your eye must not show pity'), *lo tachmol* ('do not spare'), and *lo tekhasseh* ('do not conceal/cover for him'). Each prohibition blocks a natural emotional response to a loved one in danger. The verbs move from external action (consenting, listening) to internal emotion (pity, compassion) to protective concealment — every avenue of leniency is sealed shut.
10. Hebrew 13:10 (English 13:9). The infinitive absolute *harog tahargenu* ('killing you shall kill him' — you must certainly kill him) intensifies the command. The requirement that *yadkha tihyeh bo barishonah* ('your hand shall be on him first') is extraordinary: the person who received the private enticement must personally initiate the execution. This prevents anonymous denunciation and ensures that the accuser bears full moral weight for the action. It also tests whether the accuser's loyalty to God truly overrides personal attachment.
11. Hebrew 13:11 (English 13:10). The method is stoning (*seqalto va'avanim vamet* — 'stone him with stones and he shall die'). Stoning was a communal form of execution, involving the entire community and preventing any single individual from bearing sole responsibility for the death. The crime is defined as seeking to *lehadichakha me'al YHWH* ('to push you away from the LORD') — the verb *hadach* means to drive away, thrust out, seduce off course. The exodus formula appears again, grounding the severity of the penalty in the gravity of what God has done: He rescued them from slavery, and anyone who undermines that rescued relationship commits a capital offense.
12. Hebrew 13:12 (English 13:11). The public execution serves a deterrent function: *vekhlo Yisrael yishme'u veyira'un* ('all Israel will hear and they will fear'). The verb *yira'un* ('they will fear') uses the same root as 'the fear of the LORD' — the terror produced by the execution mirrors the reverent fear that God Himself commands. The phrase *velo yosifu la'asot* ('they will not continue to do') expresses the desired outcome: complete cessation of this behavior. The *setumah* break marks the transition to the third scenario.

13. Hebrew 13:13 (English 13:12). The third scenario is the most extreme: an entire city has been led into idolatry. The phrase *ki tishma be'achat arekha* ('if you hear in one of your cities') introduces the situation as a report — the information comes to the community's attention rather than being directly witnessed. This begins the most detailed judicial procedure in the chapter.
14. Hebrew 13:14 (English 13:13). The instigators are called *benei veliyya'al* ('sons of worthlessness/wickedness'). The term *beliyya'al* is debated: it may derive from *beli* ('without') + *ya'al* ('value/profit'), yielding 'worthless ones,' or it may be an older term meaning 'swallowers' (destructive forces). In later Jewish and Christian literature, Belial becomes a name for Satan (2 Cor 6:15). The verb *vayyadichu* ('they led astray, they seduced') is the same root (*nadach*) used throughout this chapter for spiritual enticement — these individuals have successfully corrupted an entire city.
15. Hebrew 13:15 (English 13:14). Three verbs of investigation are required before action: *darashta* ('you shall investigate/search'), *chaqarta* ('you shall examine/probe'), and *sha'alta* ('you shall inquire/ask'). The adverb *heitev* ('thoroughly, well') intensifies all three. Only after exhaustive due process — *vehineh emet nakhon hadavar* ('and behold, it is true, the matter is established') — may punishment proceed. This is one of the strongest due process requirements in ancient law. The word *to'evah* ('abomination') labels the crime.
16. Hebrew 13:16 (English 13:15). The punishment is *cherem* ('total destruction, devotion to destruction') — the same term used for the conquest of Jericho (Josh 6:17). The infinitive absolute *hakkeh takkeh* ('striking you shall strike') intensifies the command. The *cherem* encompasses everything: residents (*yoshvei ha'ir*), all possessions (*kol asher bah*), and livestock (*behemtah*). An apostate Israelite city receives the same treatment as a Canaanite city under the ban — covenant betrayal transforms insiders into outsiders.
17. Hebrew 13:17 (English 13:16). The procedure mirrors a burnt offering (*olah*): all the plunder is gathered into the center of the town square (*rekhavah*) and burned *kalil* ('completely, as a whole offering'). The phrase *kalil laYHWH Elohekha* ('entirely for the LORD your God') uses sacrificial language — the destroyed city becomes, in effect, a massive burnt offering. The final verdict is devastating: *tel olam lo tibbon od* ('a permanent ruin, it shall not be rebuilt again'). The *tel* ('ruin mound') will stand as a permanent monument to the consequences of apostasy.
18. Hebrew 13:18 (English 13:17). The prohibition *velo yidbaq beyadkha me'umah min hacherem* ('nothing from the devoted things shall cling to your hand') prevents anyone from profiting from the destruction. Taking plunder from a *cherem* city would contaminate the person — the verb *davaq* ('cling, adhere') portrays the banned items as spiritually adhesive. Obedience to the *cherem* produces divine relenting: *yashuv YHWH mecharene appo* ('the LORD will turn from His fierce anger'). The verbs *rachamim* ('compassion') and *richamkha* ('He will show you mercy') share the root *rechem* ('womb'), connecting God's compassion to maternal tenderness.
19. Hebrew 13:19 (English 13:18). This verse has no direct KJV equivalent at this verse number due to the one-verse offset between Hebrew and English chapter divisions (Hebrew 13 has 19 verses; English 13 has 18). The verse functions as a conditional conclusion: the promises of verse 18 (compassion, mercy, multiplication) are contingent on obedience — *ki tishma beqol YHWH* ('if you listen to the voice of the LORD'). The chapter ends where Deuteronomy consistently lands: covenant blessings flow from covenant faithfulness. The *setumah* marks the end of this legislative section.

14

Summary: *Moses grounds Israel's dietary laws in their identity as God's children and His holy, treasured people. Clean and unclean animals are listed, and the chapter concludes with tithing regulations.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter opens not with prohibition but with identity: 'You are children of the LORD your God' (v. 1). The dietary laws flow from who Israel is, not merely from what God demands. The phrase *am qadosh* ('holy people,' v. 2) and *am segullah* ('treasured possession,' v. 2) frame every food restriction as an expression of belonging, not arbitrary ritual.*

Translation Friction: *The prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother's milk (v. 21, *gedi bachalev immo*) — which became the basis for the entire kosher separation of meat and dairy — appears three times in the Torah (here, Exodus 23:19, 34:26). Its original meaning is debated: anti-Canaanite ritual polemic, compassion principle, or category-mixing prohibition. We rendered it literally and noted the interpretive range.*

Connections: *The dietary list parallels Leviticus 11 with minor variations. The identity formula 'children of the LORD' connects to Exodus 4:22 ('Israel is my firstborn son') and Hosea 11:1. The triennial tithe for Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows (vv. 28-29) implements the social justice vision of 10:18-19.*

¹You are children of the LORD your God. You must not gash yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead. ²For you are a people set apart as holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be His treasured possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth. ³Do not eat anything that is detestable. ⁴These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the lamb, and the goat, ⁵the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain sheep. ⁶An

y animal that has a divided hoof — split completely into two sections — and also chews the cud: that animal you may eat. ⁷However, from among those that chew the cud or have a split hoof, you must not eat the following: the camel, the hare, and the rock badger. Although they chew the cud, they do not have a divided hoof — they are ritually impure for you. ⁸The pig also — because although it has a divided hoof, it does not chew the cud — is ritually impure for you. You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses. ⁹Of everything that lives in water, you may eat whatever has fins and scales. ¹⁰Anything that does not have fins and scales you must not eat — it is ritually impure for you. ¹¹You may eat any ritually pure bird. ¹²But these are the ones you must not eat: the griffon vulture, the bearded vulture, and the black vulture, ¹³the kite, the falcon, and the buzzard of every species, ¹⁴every raven of every species, ¹⁵the ostrich, the short-eared owl, the seagull, and the hawk of every species, ¹⁶the little owl, the long-eared owl, and the barn owl, ¹⁷the desert owl, the Egyptian vulture, and the cormorant, ¹⁸the stork, the heron of every species, the hoopoe, and the bat. ¹⁹Every winged swarming creature is ritually impure for you — they must not be eaten. ²⁰Any clean winged creature you may eat. ²¹You must not eat anything that has died on its own. You may give it to the foreigner residing in your towns, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a non-Israelite. For you are a people set apart as holy to the LORD your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk. ²²You must set aside a tenth — a full tenth — of everything your seed produces from the field each year. ²³You must eat the tithe of your grain, new wine, and olive oil, along with the firstborn of your herds and flocks, in the presence of the LORD your God at the place He will choose as the dwelling for His name — so that you learn to revere the LORD your God at all times. ²⁴But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are unable to transport it because the place the LORD your God has chosen to establish His name is too far away — when the LORD your God has blessed you abundantly — ²⁵then convert it into silver, tie the silver securely in your hand, and travel to the place the LORD your God will choose. ²⁶Spend the silver on whatever you desire — cattle, sheep, wine, beer, or anything else you want. Then eat there in the presence of the LORD your God, and celebrate with your household. ²⁷And do not neglect the Levite who lives in your towns, because he has no allotted portion or inheritance alongside you. ²⁸At the end of every three years, bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year and store it within your towns. ²⁹Then the Levite — who has no allotted portion or inheritance alongside you — along with the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow who live in your towns, may come and eat until they are full. This is so that the LORD your God will bless you in everything you do.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The chapter opens with Israel's identity: *banim attem laYHWH* ('you are children of the LORD'). This identity statement grounds all the dietary laws that follow — Israel's eating practices reflect their status as God's children. The two prohibited mourning practices — *lo titgodedu* ('do not gash yourselves') and *lo tasimu qorchah bein eineikhem lamet* ('do not place baldness between your eyes for the dead') — were common Canaanite mourning rituals involving self-laceration and head-shaving above the forehead. As God's children, Israel's response to death must differ from the nations.
2. Two terms define Israel's status: *am qadosh* ('holy people' — set apart, consecrated, belonging exclusively to God) and *am segullah* ('treasured people, prized possession'). The word *segullah* originally referred to a king's private treasure — personal wealth distinguished from state property. Israel is God's personal treasure among the nations. The phrase *mikkol ha'ammim asher al penei ha'adamah* ('from all the peoples on the face of the earth') establishes the scope of God's choice: He surveyed all humanity and selected Israel. This is election language — not based on Israel's merit but on God's sovereign decision (cf. Deut 7:7-8).
3. This single, terse command — *lo tokhal kol to'evah* ('do not eat any abomination') — serves as the thesis statement for the dietary laws that follow (vv 4-21). The word *to'evah* ('detestable thing, abomination') connects dietary violations to the same category as idolatry (cf. 12:31; 13:15). What Israel eats is not a matter of health preference but covenantal identity.
4. The permitted land animals begin with the three primary domesticated species: *shor* ('ox/cattle'), *seh khesavim* ('young sheep/lamb'), and *seh izzim* ('young goat'). The word *seh* can mean either an individual animal or a member of the flock. These three species form the core of Israel's sacrificial and dietary system — animals that are both fit for the altar and for the table.
5. Seven wild species are listed as permitted: *ayyal* ('deer'), *tsevi* ('gazelle'), *yachmur* ('roeback/fallow deer'), *aqgo* ('wild goat/ibex'), *dishon* ('a type of antelope' — exact identification uncertain), *te'o* ('wild ox' or 'oryx'), and *zamer* ('mountain sheep/chamois'). Several of these identifications are uncertain, as the exact species some Hebrew terms denote has been debated since antiquity. The KJV's 'pygarg' (for *dishon*) is from the Greek *pygaros* and refers to a type of antelope. The key point is that wild ruminants meeting the criteria of verse 6 are permitted.
6. The two defining criteria for permitted land animals are stated: *mafresset parsah veshosa'at shesa shtei perasot* ('dividing the hoof and splitting the split into two hooves' — having a completely divided, cloven hoof) and *ma'alat gerah* ('bringing up the cud' — chewing the cud, i.e., being a ruminant). Both criteria must be met simultaneously. This dual requirement creates a clear, observable test that does not require specialized knowledge — any

Israelite can examine an animal's feet and feeding behavior.

7. Three animals that appear to meet one criterion but fail the other are listed: gamal ('camel'), arnevet ('hare'), and shafan ('rock badger/hyrax'). The description of these animals as 'chewing the cud' (ma'aleh gerah) uses observational language — these animals make chewing motions that resemble rumination, though modern zoology classifies them differently. The text uses the phenomenological categories available to ancient observers. The verdict is teme'im hem lakhem ('they are impure for you') — not inherently evil, but categorically off-limits for Israel's diet.
8. The pig (chazir) is singled out separately from the three animals in verse 7 because it presents the opposite problem: it meets the hoof criterion but fails the cud criterion. The pig became the paradigmatic forbidden animal in Jewish tradition — perhaps because its cloven hoof gives the external appearance of being permitted while it lacks the internal qualification (rumination). The additional prohibition against touching their carcasses (uvnivlatam lo tigga'u) goes beyond dietary restriction to physical contact, applying during festival pilgrimages when ritual purity was required.
9. The aquatic food law is simple: two criteria — senapir ('fins') and qasqeset ('scales') — both must be present. This permits most common fish species while excluding shellfish, eels, catfish, and other aquatic creatures that lack one or both features. The parallel passage in Leviticus 11:9-12 adds the specification 'in the seas and in the rivers,' but Deuteronomy's formulation is more concise.
10. The negative counterpart to verse 9 completes the aquatic food law. The classification tamei hu lakhem ('it is impure for you') applies to all aquatic creatures lacking both fins and scales. The setumah paragraph marker signals a section break before the bird laws begin.
11. Unlike land animals and aquatic creatures, birds are classified not by anatomical criteria but by a list of prohibited species (vv 12-18). This verse states the general permission: kol tsippor tehorah tokheilu ('every clean/pure bird you may eat'). A bird not on the forbidden list is permitted by default.
12. The forbidden bird list begins with three large raptors: neshet (traditionally 'eagle' but more likely the griffon vulture — the largest flying bird in the region), peres ('bearded vulture/lammergeier' — the KJV's 'ossifrage,' meaning 'bone-breaker'), and ozniyyah ('black vulture' or 'osprey'). The neshet identification is significant: despite its majestic reputation (used metaphorically for God's care in Exod 19:4 and Deut 32:11), the bird itself is classified as impure for eating — a reminder that symbolic nobility does not equal dietary permissibility.
13. Three more raptors: ra'ah ('kite' — a soaring bird of prey; the KJV's 'glede' is an archaic English term for the same bird), ayyah ('falcon' or 'kite'), and dayyah leminnah ('buzzard/vulture after its kind'). The phrase leminnah ('after its kind/species') indicates that the prohibition covers all subspecies within the category. Exact identification of some of these birds remains debated among scholars, as ancient Hebrew bird terminology does not map precisely onto modern ornithological classifications.
14. The orev ('raven') and all its species (lemino — 'after its kind') are prohibited. Ravens are omnivorous scavengers that feed on carrion, which may connect to the general pattern: many of the prohibited birds are predators or scavengers that consume blood and carcasses — precisely what Israelites themselves are forbidden to consume.
15. Four more forbidden birds: bat hayya'anah ('daughter of the desert' — most likely the ostrich, not the 'owl' of the KJV), tachmas ('short-eared owl' or 'nighthawk'), shachaf ('seagull' or 'sea mew'), and nets leminehu ('hawk/falcon after its kind'). The identification of bat hayya'anah as 'ostrich' is supported by the etymological connection to ya'anah ('desert dweller') and by ancient translations.
16. Three owl species: kos ('little owl' — a small, common owl in the Near East), yanshuf ('long-eared owl' or 'great owl'), and tinshemet ('barn owl' — the KJV's 'swan' is almost certainly incorrect; the tinshemet is more plausibly identified as the barn owl or white owl based on the root nasham, 'to breathe heavily,' describing the bird's distinctive breathing sound).
17. Three more prohibited birds: qa'at ('desert owl' or 'pelican' — identification uncertain; may be a type of owl that inhabits ruins, cf. Ps 102:7), rachamah ('Egyptian vulture' — the KJV's 'gier eagle'; the name may relate to rechem, 'womb,' possibly referring to the bird's parental behavior), and shalakh ('cormorant' or 'fisher-owl' — a diving waterbird).
18. The final group: chasidah ('stork' — from chesed, 'faithful love/loyalty,' perhaps named for its devoted parental care), anafah leminnah ('heron after its kind'), dukhifat ('hoopoe' — a distinctive crested bird), and atalef ('bat'). The inclusion of the bat — a mammal, not a bird — reflects the ancient classification system, which grouped flying creatures together by observable behavior (flight) rather than by internal anatomy. The Hebrew category tsippor ('flying creature') is functionally broader than the English word 'bird.'
19. The phrase sherets ha'of ('swarming thing of the wing' — winged swarming creatures) likely refers to flying insects. The blanket prohibition is qualified in Leviticus 11:21-22, which permits certain locusts with jointed legs for jumping. Deuteronomy's more absolute statement may represent a simplified summary of the more detailed Levitical regulations, or it may reflect a stricter tradition.
20. This closing permission mirrors verse 11, forming an inclusio around the bird laws. The principle is permissive by default: any flying creature not specifically prohibited is available for food. The word tahor ('clean/pure') here means ritually permitted for consumption.
21. This dense verse contains three distinct laws. First, the nevelah prohibition: animals that died naturally (not slaughtered) may not be eaten by Israelites, but may be given to the ger ('resident foreigner') or sold to a nokhri ('foreign trader'). This creates a tiered system of dietary obligation based on covenant status. Second, the holiness rationale is repeated: ki am qadosh attah ('because you are a holy people'). Third, the enigmatic law lo tevashel gedi bachalev immo ('do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk') — this prohibition, appearing three times in the Torah (Exod 23:19; 34:26; here), became the foundation of the Jewish separation of meat and dairy. Its original context may have been an anti-Canaanite worship practice, a prohibition against cruelty (perverting the maternal substance into a cooking medium), or both.

- 22.** The chapter shifts from dietary laws to tithing regulations. The infinitive absolute *asser te'asser* ('tithing you shall tithe' — you must fully tithe) intensifies the command. The tithe applies to *kol tevu'at zar'ekha* ('all the produce of your seed') — everything the land yields from planting. The phrase *shanah shanah* ('year by year') establishes this as an annual obligation, not a one-time act. This section (vv 22-29) describes a tithe consumed at the central sanctuary — distinct from the Levitical tithe of Numbers 18:21-24.
- 23.** The purpose of the tithe meal is explicitly stated: *lema'an tilmad leyir'ah et YHWH* ('so that you will learn to fear/revere the LORD'). The verb *tilmad* ('you will learn') is striking — reverence for God is not assumed but learned, and the tithe meal is one of the teaching instruments. Eating the tithe in God's presence creates a regular, embodied experience of divine encounter that shapes the worshiper's character over time. The triad *degan, tirosh, yitshar* ('grain, new wine, olive oil') represents the staple agricultural products.
- 24.** A practical concession for distance: *ki yirbeh mimmekha hadderekh* ('if the way is too great for you') acknowledges that transporting agricultural produce and livestock over long distances may be impractical. The phrase *ki lo tukhal se'eto* ('because you are not able to carry it') is refreshingly practical — God's law accommodates physical limitations. The ironic note is that the problem arises *ki yevarekekha YHWH* ('because the LORD has blessed you') — the abundance itself makes transport difficult.
- 25.** The solution to the transport problem is monetization: *venattah bakkesef* ('you shall convert it into silver/money'). This is a remarkable economic provision — it presupposes a monetary economy where agricultural goods can be converted to and from currency. The phrase *vetsarta hakkesef beyadekha* ('bind the silver in your hand') describes physically wrapping coins or silver pieces in cloth or a pouch for safe travel. The commercial sophistication of this law is notable for its period.
- 26.** The freedom of purchase is remarkably broad: *bekhol asher te'avveh nafshekha* ('whatever your soul desires') — cattle, sheep, wine, and even *shekhar* ('beer/strong drink' — a fermented beverage, possibly from barley or dates). The inclusion of alcoholic beverages in a divinely mandated celebration is notable: the tithe feast is meant to be genuinely enjoyable. The purpose remains worship: *veakhalta sham lifnei YHWH* ('you shall eat there before the LORD'). The pairing of eating and rejoicing (*vesamachta*) reinforces that celebration is integral to Deuteronomic worship.
- 27.** The Levite provision repeats from 12:19 — the repetition underscores its importance. The phrase *lo ta'azvenu* ('do not abandon him, do not neglect him') uses a verb that implies leaving someone destitute and unsupported. Since the Levite has no land (*ein lo cheleq venachalah immakh* — 'he has no portion or inheritance with you'), the tithe system is his economic lifeline. The *setumah* marks the transition to the third-year tithe.
- 28.** The third-year tithe introduces a different system: instead of consuming the tithe at the central sanctuary, this tithe stays local — *vehinachta bisharekha* ('store it in your towns/gates'). This provision creates a local welfare fund on a three-year cycle. The phrase *miqqetseh shalosh shanim* ('at the end of three years') establishes the cycle. In years one, two, four, and five the tithe goes to the central sanctuary; in years three and six it stays local for the poor and Levites.
- 29.** The four vulnerable groups in Israelite society appear together: the Levite (no land), the *ger* ('foreigner/resident alien' — lacks tribal membership), the *yatom* ('orphan/fatherless' — lacks family support), and the *almanah* ('widow' — lacks a husband's provision). These four categories represent the economically vulnerable who lack the normal social safety nets of land, family, and male protection. The goal is *ve'akhlu vesave'u* ('they shall eat and be satisfied') — not mere subsistence but genuine sufficiency. The tithe creates God's welfare system. The motivation clause — *lema'an yevarekekha YHWH* ('so that the LORD will bless you') — links generosity to the poor with divine blessing on the giver's own labor.

15

Summary: *Moses legislates the sabbatical year release of debts, commands generosity toward the poor, and regulates the release of Hebrew slaves in the seventh year.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The tension between verses 4 and 11 is deliberate: 'there will be no one in need among you' (v. 4) and 'the needy will never cease from the land' (v. 11). The first is the promise if Israel obeys fully; the second is the realistic provision because they will not. Jesus quotes verse 11 in Mark 14:7, and the statement makes sense only against the backdrop of verse 4's unfulfilled ideal.*

Translation Friction: *The word shemittah (v. 1, 'release') from the root sh-m-t ('let drop, let fall') describes not merely deferral but release — the debt falls away. Whether the shemittah cancels debts permanently or suspends collection for the sabbatical year was debated in rabbinic literature. We rendered it 'release' and noted both interpretations. The freed slave's declaration 'I love my master' (v. 16) uses the same verb *ahav* as the Shema's command to love God.*

Connections: *The sabbatical release connects to Leviticus 25's Jubilee legislation. The slave-release law echoes Exodus 21:2-6 with Deuteronomy's characteristic humanitarian motivation. Nehemiah 10:31 records the community recommitting to the shemittah. The 'open your hand' command (v. 8) becomes proverbial for generosity.*

¹At the end of every seven years, you must grant a release. ²This is how the release works: every creditor must release what he has lent to his neighbor. He must not press his neighbor or his brother for payment, because the LORD's release has been proclaimed. ³You may collect from a foreigner, but whatever your brother owes you, your hand must release. ⁴There should, however, be no one in need among you, because the LORD will certainly bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess — ⁵but only if you truly listen to the voice of the LORD your God and carefully observe this entire commandment that I am giving you today. ⁶For the LORD your God will bless you as He promised. You will lend to many nations but will not need to borrow. You will exercise authority over many nations, but they will not exercise authority over you. ⁷If there is a needy person among you — any one of your brothers in any of your towns in the land that the LORD your God is giving you — you must not harden your heart or close your fist against your needy brother. ⁸Rather, you must open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him whatever he needs to meet his lack. ⁹Guard yourself against harboring this base thought: 'The seventh year — the year of release — is approaching,' causing you to look with hostility at your needy brother and refuse to give to him. He would cry out to the LORD against you, and you would bear the guilt of sin. ¹⁰Give to him generously, and do not let your heart resent it when you give. Because of this very act, the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you undertake. ¹¹For the needy will never disappear from the land. That is why I am commanding you: open your hand wide to your brother, to the afflicted and the destitute in your land. ¹²If your brother — a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman — is sold to you and serves you for six years, in the seventh year you must send him out as a free person. ¹³When you release him as free, you must not send him away empty-handed. ¹⁴Supply him generously from your flock, your threshing floor, and your winepress. From what the LORD your God has blessed you with, give to him. ¹⁵Remember that you yourself were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I am commanding you this today. ¹⁶But if the servant says to you, 'I do not want to leave you,' because he loves you and your household and is well off with you, ¹⁷then take an awl and push it through his earlobe into the door, and he will become your permanent servant. Do the same for your female servant. ¹⁸Do not consider it a hardship when you send him away free, because he has served you for six years at half the cost of a hired worker. And the LORD your God will bless you in everything you do. ¹⁹Every firstborn male born among your cattle and flocks you must consecrate to the LORD your God. You must not work your firstborn ox or shear your firstborn sheep. ²⁰Eat it in the presence of the LORD your God year after year, at the place the LORD will choose — you and your household. ²¹But if it has any defect — if it is lame or blind or has any serious flaw — you must not sacrifice it to the LORD your God. ²²Eat it within your own towns. Both the ritually impure and the ritually pure may eat it together, just as you would eat gazelle or deer. ²³Only do not eat its blood. Pour it out on the ground like water.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The shemittah ('release') is introduced with the simplest possible formula: *miqqets sheva shanim ta'aseh shemittah* ('at the end of seven years, make a release'). The word *shemittah* comes from the root *shamat* ('to let drop, to release, to let go') and describes the cancellation or suspension of debts. This seven-year cycle connects to the sabbatical pattern throughout the Torah — six days of work and one of rest, six years of labor and one of release. The sabbatical principle extends from time (Sabbath) to economics (debt release).
2. The mechanics are spelled out: *shamot kol ba'al mashheh yado* ('every owner of a loan of his hand shall release' — every creditor must let go of what he has lent). The phrase *lo yiggosh et re'ehu ve'et achiv* ('he shall not press his neighbor or his brother') uses the verb *nagash* ('to press, to exact, to oppress') — aggressive debt collection is forbidden during the release year. The theological basis is *ki qara shemittah laYHWH* ('because a release has been proclaimed for the LORD') — the release belongs to God; it is His decree, not a voluntary act of human generosity.
3. A distinction is drawn between the *nokhri* ('foreigner' — a non-Israelite who has no covenant relationship) and the *ach* ('brother' — a fellow Israelite bound by the same covenant). The debt release applies within the covenant community. Commercial debts with foreigners operate under different rules because the foreigner does not participate in the sabbatical cycle. The phrase *tashmeit yadekha* ('your hand shall release') personalizes the action — your own hand must let go of the claim.
4. The statement *efes ki lo yihyeh bekha evyon* ('there should be no needy person among you') expresses the divine ideal: in a fully obedient Israel, God's blessing would eliminate poverty entirely. The infinitive absolute *barekh yevarekekha* ('blessing He will bless you') intensifies the promise. Yet verse 11 will acknowledge that the poor will never fully disappear — creating a deliberate tension between the ideal (no poverty in a blessed land) and the reality (poverty persists because obedience is imperfect). This tension drives the legislation that follows.

5. The condition is emphatic: *raq im shamo'a tishma* ('only if listening you listen' — only if you truly, deeply listen). The infinitive absolute intensifies the demand. The elimination of poverty (v 4) is conditional on perfect obedience — something the text implicitly acknowledges will not be fully achieved (v 11). The phrase *kol hammitsvah hazzot* ('this entire commandment') treats the debt-release law not as one regulation among many but as a complete commandment demanding whole obedience.
6. The blessing of obedience is described in economic and political terms: *veha'avatta goyim rabbim* ('you will lend to many nations') and *umashalta begoyim rabbim* ('you will rule over many nations'). Lending implies surplus; ruling implies strength. The negative counterparts — *ve'attah lo ta'avot* ('you will not borrow') and *uvekha lo yimsholu* ('they will not rule over you') — describe independence from foreign economic or political domination. The *setumah* marks the transition to the specific laws about generosity to the poor.
7. Two vivid metaphors prohibit indifference: *lo te'ammets et levavekha* ('do not harden your heart' — do not make your heart rigid, unyielding) and *lo tiqpts et yadekha* ('do not close your fist' — do not clench your hand shut). The heart controls the will; the hand controls the action. Both interior attitude and external behavior must remain open. The phrase *me'achad achekha be'achad she'arekha* ('from one of your brothers in one of your gates') makes the obligation specific and local — this is not abstract charity but concrete response to a known person in a nearby community.
8. The counter-command reverses the metaphor: *patoach tiftach et yadekha* ('opening you shall open your hand' — fling your hand wide open). The infinitive absolute intensifies the command — this is not tentative charity but generous, wholehearted giving. The phrase *dei machsoro asher yechar lo* ('sufficient for his lack, what he is lacking') calibrates the giving to the actual need — not a fixed amount but whatever is required. The loan must be adequate to the borrower's specific situation.
9. Moses exposes the specific temptation created by the *shemittah* system: as the seventh year approaches, a lender knows that any loan will soon be cancelled — creating a financial incentive to refuse lending. The phrase *davar im levavekha veliyya'al* ('a worthless/wicked thought in your heart') uses the same *beliyya'al* term from 13:14, connecting economic stinginess with the same moral category as idolatrous rebellion. The phrase *ra'ah einekha* ('your eye is evil/hostile') describes looking at the poor person with resentment rather than compassion. The consequence is dire: the poor person will *qara alekha el YHWH* ('cry out against you to the LORD') — the cry of the oppressed always reaches God (cf. Exod 22:22-23).
10. The infinitive absolute *naton titten* ('giving you shall give') demands generous, unhesitating action. The phrase *velo yera levavekha* ('let your heart not be evil/resentful') addresses the interior attitude: grudging compliance is not enough. The motivation is pragmatic as well as moral: *ki biglal hadavar hazzeh* ('because of this very thing') the LORD will bless you. Generosity is not financial loss but investment — God returns blessing in response to obedience. The phrase *bekhol ma'asekha uvkhol mishlach yadekha* ('in all your work and in everything your hand is sent to') extends the blessing to every sphere of economic activity.
11. The tension with verse 4 is deliberate: there, Moses says there should be no poor; here, he says *ki lo yechdal evyon miqqerev ha'arets* ('the needy will never cease from the midst of the land'). The ideal (v 4) is conditional on perfect obedience; the reality (v 11) acknowledges that obedience will be imperfect. Jesus quotes this verse in Mark 14:7, not to justify indifference to poverty but to affirm the ongoing obligation to give. The command *patoach tiftach* ('open wide your hand') is repeated from verse 8, framing the entire section. Three terms describe the recipients: *achikha* ('your brother'), *aniyyekha* ('your afflicted/poor one'), and *evyonekha* ('your needy one') — escalating levels of deprivation.
12. The law now addresses debt-slavery — a person who, unable to repay debts, sells their labor. The parallel law in Exodus 21:2-6 mentions only male servants; Deuteronomy explicitly includes *ha'ivriyyah* ('the Hebrew woman'), extending the six-year limit and seventh-year release to women as well. This is a significant expansion of protection. The term *chofshi* ('free') describes a person released from all service obligations — legally unencumbered. The seven-year cycle echoes the *shemittah* principle: just as debts are released, so are debt-servants.
13. The prohibition *lo teshallechenu reqam* ('you shall not send him away empty') prevents the released servant from being cast out with nothing. Freedom without resources is precarious — the person would likely fall back into debt and servitude. This law addresses the systemic problem: mere legal release is insufficient without economic provision. The verse establishes the principle; the next verse specifies the provision.
14. The infinitive absolute *ha'aneq ta'aniq* ('supplying you shall supply' — furnish generously) demands lavish provision. Three sources are specified: *tsonekha* ('your flock' — livestock), *garnekha* ('your threshing floor' — grain), and *qiqvekha* ('your winepress' — wine). These three represent the full range of agricultural wealth: animals, grain, and wine. The principle is proportional: *asher berakekha YHWH Elohekha titten lo* ('from what the LORD your God has blessed you, give to him'). The released servant receives a share of God's blessing on the master's prosperity.
15. The exodus motivation grounds the entire slave-release law: *vezakharta ki eved hayita be'erets Mitsrayim* ('remember that you were a slave in Egypt'). Israel cannot hold permanent power over fellow Israelites because Israel itself was once enslaved. The verb *padakh* ('He redeemed you') uses the kinsman-redeemer concept — God paid the price to free Israel from Pharaoh's service. Having been redeemed themselves, Israelites must extend freedom to others. Ethical obligation flows from experienced grace.
16. The exception case: a servant who chooses to stay. The reasons are positive — *ki ahevekha ve'et bedetekha* ('because he loves you and your household') and *ki tov lo immakh* ('because things are good for him with you'). This is not coercion but genuine preference — the servant's quality of life with the master exceeds what he could achieve independently. The law assumes that some masters treat their servants well enough to inspire voluntary permanent attachment.
17. The ear-piercing ceremony: the *martse'a* ('awl, pointed instrument') is driven through the servant's ear against the door, creating a permanent mark of voluntary servitude. The ear — the organ of hearing and obedience — is symbolically pierced, indicating permanent commitment to hearing and obeying the master. The phrase *eved olam* ('permanent servant') describes lifelong service. The extension *ve'af la'amatekha ta'aseh ken* ('also for your female servant you shall do likewise') again includes women in the same legal framework as men — a distinctive feature of Deuteronomy's legislation.

- 18.** The phrase *lo yiqsheh ve'einekha* ('let it not be hard in your eyes') addresses the master's potential resentment at losing a servant's labor. The economic argument follows: *ki mishneh sekhar sakhir avadekha* ('because he has served you at double a hired worker's value' — or alternatively, 'at half the cost of a hired worker'). A debt-servant costs less than a hired laborer because the servant receives no wages. After six years of below-market labor costs, the master has already benefited significantly. The *petuchah* paragraph marker signals a major section break.
- 19.** The firstborn law: *kol habbekhor asher yivvaled bivqarkha uvtsonekha hazzakhar taqdish laYHWH* ('every firstborn male born in your herd and flock you shall consecrate to the LORD'). Consecration means setting the animal apart from ordinary use — hence the two prohibitions: *lo ta'avod* ('do not work' — the firstborn ox cannot be used for plowing) and *lo tagoz* ('do not shear' — the firstborn sheep's wool cannot be harvested). The animal belongs to God from birth; using it for human benefit would violate that consecration. This law connects to the foundational principle of the exodus: God claimed Israel's firstborn because He spared them in Egypt (Exod 13:2).
- 20.** The firstborn animal is consumed as a sacred meal — *lifnei YHWH Elohekha* ('in the presence of the LORD your God') at the central sanctuary. The phrase *shanah veshanah* ('year by year') indicates an annual pilgrimage obligation. The inclusion of *uveitikha* ('your household') makes this a family celebration. The firstborn offering thus serves double duty: it honors God's claim on the firstborn and provides an occasion for communal worship and feasting.
- 21.** The exception for blemished firstborn: an animal with a *mum* ('defect, blemish') cannot be offered as a sacrifice. Two specific examples are given — *pisseech* ('lame') and *ivver* ('blind') — followed by the catch-all *kol mum ra* ('any serious/bad defect'). The principle is that only the best may be offered to God — a defective sacrifice insults the one receiving it (cf. Mal 1:8). This does not mean the animal is wasted; the next verse provides for its consumption.
- 22.** The blemished firstborn reverts to the status of ordinary food: it may be eaten locally (*bisharekha* — 'in your gates/towns') by anyone regardless of ritual purity status (*hattamei vehattahor yachdav* — 'the impure and the pure together'). The comparison to gazelle and deer (*tsevi* and *ayyal*) echoes the secular slaughter permission of 12:15, 22 — blemished firstborn are treated like wild game, not like sacred offerings.
- 23.** The blood prohibition appears once more (cf. 12:16, 23-25), applying specifically to the blemished firstborn eaten locally. Even when a consecrated animal is consumed as ordinary food due to a blemish, the universal blood prohibition remains in force. The instruction to pour it out *kammayim* ('like water') — as disposal, not as ritual — maintains the distinction between sacred and secular slaughter. The *petuchah* paragraph break marks the end of the firstborn legislation and transitions to the festival calendar in chapter 16.

16

Summary: *Moses prescribes the three pilgrimage festivals — Passover with unleavened bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Shelters — then appoints judges to administer righteous justice.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The Hebrew calendar is organized around liberation memory: Passover recalls the exodus, Weeks celebrates the grain harvest with thanksgiving, and Shelters remembers the wilderness journey. The phrase *lechem oni* (v. 3, 'bread of hardship/poverty') redefines unleavened bread — it is not celebratory bread but slave bread, eaten in haste because there was no time to let it rise. The transition from festivals (vv. 1-17) to judges (vv. 18-20) is not random: righteous worship requires righteous justice.*

Translation Friction: *The word *atseret* (v. 8, 'solemn assembly') marks the concluding day of a festival period. We rendered it 'solemn assembly' but the Hebrew carries the sense of 'restraint' — a day of stopping, holding back from work. The phrase *tsedeq tsedeq tirdof* (v. 20, 'justice, justice you shall pursue') doubles the noun for emphasis — we preserved the repetition because flattening it to 'pursue justice' loses the Hebrew's insistence.*

Connections: *The festival calendar parallels Exodus 23:14-17 and Leviticus 23 with Deuteronomy's characteristic social inclusion (v. 11: 'you, your son, your daughter, your servant, the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan, the widow'). The Passover command shapes the Last Supper narratives (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22). The justice mandate in v. 20 grounds the prophetic tradition from Amos 5:24 to Micah 6:8.*

¹Keep watch over the month of Aviv and celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, because in the month of Aviv the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt during the night. ²Sacrifice the Passover offering to the LORD your God from the flock or the herd, at the place the LORD will choose as the dwelling for His name. ³Do not eat anything leavened with it. For seven days eat unleavened bread with it — bread of hardship — because you departed from the land of Egypt in urgent haste. Do this so that you remember the day you left Egypt for the rest of your life. ⁴No leaven may be found anywhere in your

territory for seven days. And none of the meat you sacrifice on the evening of the first day may remain until morning. ⁵You may not sacrifice the Passover offering in just any of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you. ⁶Only at the place the LORD your God will choose as the dwelling for His name — there you must sacrifice the Passover offering in the evening, at sunset, at the same time of year that you departed from Egypt. ⁷Cook it and eat it at the place the LORD your God will choose, then in the morning you may return to your camps. ⁸For six days eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day hold a solemn assembly to the LORD your God. Do no work on that day. ⁹Count seven weeks for yourself. Begin counting the seven weeks from the time you first put the sickle to the standing grain. ¹⁰Then celebrate the Festival of Weeks to the LORD your God with a voluntary offering from your hand, given in proportion to how the LORD your God has blessed you. ¹¹Celebrate in the presence of the LORD your God — you, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, the Levite who lives in your towns, the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow who are among you — at the place the LORD your God will choose as the dwelling for His name. ¹²Remember that you were once a slave in Egypt, and carefully observe these decrees. ¹³Celebrate the Festival of Shelters for seven days after you have gathered the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress. ¹⁴Rejoice during your festival — you, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow who live in your towns. ¹⁵For seven days celebrate the festival to the LORD your God at the place the LORD will choose, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, and you will be nothing but joyful. ¹⁶Three times each year, every male among you must appear before the LORD your God at the place He will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Shelters. No one may appear before the LORD empty-handed. ¹⁷Each person must give according to what he can afford, in proportion to the blessing the LORD your God has given you. ¹⁸Appoint judges and officials for yourselves in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, tribe by tribe. They must judge the people with righteous justice. ¹⁹Do not pervert justice. Do not show favoritism. Do not accept a bribe, because a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. ²⁰Justice — justice alone — you must pursue, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you. ²¹Do not set up an Asherah pole — any kind of wooden pole — beside the altar of the LORD your God that you will build. ²²And do not erect a sacred pillar — the LORD your God detests them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The festival calendar opens with Passover, anchored to *chodesh ha'Aviv* ('the month of Aviv/Abib'). Aviv means 'spring' or 'ripening grain' — it refers to the month when barley reaches maturity (later called Nisan in the Babylonian calendar). The verb *shamor* ('keep watch, guard, observe') implies vigilant attention to the calendar. The phrase *hotsi'akha YHWH... laylah* ('the LORD brought you out... at night') anchors the festival to the historical event: the nighttime exodus from Egypt. Every annual observance re-enacts and memorializes that founding deliverance.
2. Deuteronomy's Passover instruction differs from Exodus 12, which specifies only a lamb (*seh*). Here, both *tson uvaqar* ('flock and herd' — sheep/goats and cattle) are permitted. This likely reflects the additional festival offerings (*chagigah*) that accompanied the Passover lamb during pilgrimage celebrations. The centralization formula — *bammaqom asher yivchar YHWH leshakken shemo sham* ('at the place the LORD will choose to cause His name to dwell there') — shifts Passover from a household celebration (as in Exodus 12) to a centralized pilgrimage festival.
3. The *chamets* ('leavened bread') prohibition and the *matstsot* ('unleavened bread') requirement are linked to the exodus narrative: *bechipazon yatsata* ('you went out in haste/urgency'). The dough had no time to rise. The phrase *lechem oni* ('bread of affliction/hardship/poverty') describes the unleavened bread — it is poor person's bread, the bread of slaves and refugees. Eating it for seven days re-creates the sensory experience of the exodus. The purpose clause *lema'an tizkor* ('so that you will remember') establishes the festival as a memorial practice — *kol yemei chayyekha* ('all the days of your life') extends the obligation to every year of the individual's life.
4. Two prohibitions: first, *se'or* ('leaven/yeast starter') must not even be visible (*lo yera'eh*) anywhere in your territory (*bekhol gevulekha*) for seven days — a total purge of leaven from the household and beyond. Second, the sacrificial meat from the first evening must be consumed entirely before dawn — *lo yalin... labboqer* ('it shall not remain overnight until morning'). This mirrors the original Passover instructions in Exodus 12:10. Nothing sacred may be left to decay; the meal must be complete before the new day begins.
5. The centralization principle applies specifically to Passover: *lo tukhal lizboach et happesach be'achad she'arekha* ('you are not able to sacrifice the Passover in one of your gates'). The verb *tukhal* ('you are able, you may') frames the prohibition as impossibility within the covenant framework — it is not merely forbidden but categorically impermissible. This represents a significant shift from the household Passover of Exodus 12 to a centralized pilgrimage Passover.

6. Three temporal markers converge: ba'arev ('in the evening'), kevo hashemesh ('at the going down of the sun' — sunset), and mo'ed tsetekha miMitsrayim ('the appointed time of your departure from Egypt'). The sacrifice occurs at twilight — the transition between day and night — matching the original Passover timing (Exod 12:6). The word mo'ed ('appointed time, season') connects the annual observance to the historical moment: every Passover evening reenacts the original evening of deliverance.
7. The verb uvishalta ('you shall cook/boil') differs from Exodus 12:9, which specifies tseli esh ('roasted with fire') and prohibits boiling. The verb bashal can mean 'to cook' generally or 'to boil' specifically. The Chronicler resolves this by stating they 'cooked the Passover in fire' (2 Chr 35:13), using bashal in its general sense. The phrase ufanita babboqer vehalakhta le'ohalekha ('turn in the morning and go to your tents') indicates that pilgrims stayed overnight at the central sanctuary and departed the next morning. The word ohalekha ('your tents') may be literal (temporary pilgrim shelters) or metaphorical for 'your homes.'
8. The seven-day festival concludes with an atseret ('solemn assembly, closing ceremony') — a sacred gathering marked by cessation from work (lo ta'aseh melakhah — 'do no work'). The atseret signals the formal conclusion of the festival, like a bookend. The six days of eating unleavened bread (not seven, as in v 3 — the apparent discrepancy may indicate that the first day was counted separately as the Passover proper, with six additional days of unleavened bread following). The setumah marks the transition to the second festival.
9. The second pilgrimage festival — Shavuot (Weeks) — is defined by a counting process: shiv'ah shavu'ot tispor lakh ('count seven weeks for yourself'). The starting point is mehachel chermesh baqqamah ('from when the sickle begins in the standing grain') — the first day of grain harvest. This creates a direct link between agriculture and worship: the festival is not dated to a fixed calendar day but to the harvest cycle. The counting of forty-nine days (seven weeks) creates the 'Counting of the Omer' practice (cf. Lev 23:15-16).
10. The chag shavu'ot ('Festival of Weeks') is celebrated with missat nidvat yadekha ('a proportion of the freewill offering of your hand'). The word missat (from the root masas, 'to measure') suggests proportional giving — the offering is calibrated to the giver's means. The phrase ka'asher yevarekekha YHWH ('as the LORD your God has blessed you') establishes proportionality as the governing principle: those blessed abundantly give abundantly; those blessed modestly give modestly. There is no fixed amount — generosity is relative to capacity.
11. The most expansive inclusion list in the festival calendar: the household (son, daughter, servants), the landless religious worker (Levite), and the three vulnerable populations (ger, yatom, almanah — foreigner, orphan, widow). All nine categories are commanded to celebrate together. The verb vesamachta ('you shall rejoice') makes joy an obligation, not an option. The Festival of Weeks is thus a powerful equalizer — at God's chosen place, social hierarchies dissolve into shared celebration.
12. The exodus memory is invoked again as the foundation for inclusive celebration: vezakharta ki eved hayita beMitsrayim ('remember that you were a slave in Egypt'). The connection is implicit but powerful: because you were once excluded and enslaved, your festivals must include everyone — especially those who might otherwise be excluded. The petuchah paragraph break marks the major transition to the third pilgrimage festival.
13. The third pilgrimage festival: chag haSuccot ('Festival of Shelters/Booths/Tabernacles'). Unlike Passover (tied to the exodus) and Weeks (tied to wheat harvest), Sukkot is tied to the final ingathering (be'ospekha — 'when you gather in') from both the threshing floor (grain) and winepress (grapes). It is the autumn harvest festival, celebrating the completion of the agricultural year. The seven-day duration makes it the longest of the three pilgrimage festivals.
14. The inclusion list repeats from verse 11, reinforcing the principle: no festival may be celebrated alone or exclusively. The verb vesamachta ('you shall rejoice') appears again — joy is not merely permitted but commanded. The phrase bechagekha ('during your festival') makes the festival itself the occasion for joy. Sukkot was traditionally considered the most joyful of all festivals; the Talmud (Sukkah 51a) describes its celebrations as unparalleled.
15. The phrase vehayita akh sameach ('you will be nothing but joyful' — literally, 'you will be only rejoicing') is one of the strongest joy commands in Scripture. The particle akh ('only, nothing but') intensifies the command — there should be no room for anything other than joy during this festival. The basis for this joy is God's comprehensive blessing: bekhol tevu'atekha ('in all your produce') and bekhol ma'aseh yadekha ('in all the work of your hands'). The completed harvest is visible evidence of divine faithfulness.
16. This summary verse lists all three pilgrimage festivals together: chag hamMatstsot ('Festival of Unleavened Bread/Passover'), chag haShavu'ot ('Festival of Weeks'), and chag haSuccot ('Festival of Shelters'). The requirement applies to kol zekhurkhah ('all your males') — the pilgrimage obligation is mandatory for males, though women and children could attend and often did (cf. 1 Sam 1:3-4). The phrase yera'eh et penei YHWH ('shall appear before the face of the LORD') can also be read as a passive/niphal: 'shall be seen by the face of the LORD' — the encounter goes both ways. The prohibition velo yera'eh... reqam ('shall not appear empty') requires every pilgrim to bring an offering.
17. The proportional giving principle is restated: ish kemattenat yado ('each man according to the gift of his hand' — according to his ability). The phrase kevirkat YHWH Elohekha ('according to the blessing of the LORD your God') makes God's blessing the measure — you give from what God has given you. This prevents both the wealthy from giving token amounts and the poor from being burdened beyond their means. The setumah marks the transition from the festival calendar to the judicial section.
18. The judicial section introduces two roles: shoftim ('judges' — those who render legal decisions) and shotrim ('officers/officials' — those who enforce judicial decisions, functioning as court administrators or police). The phrase bekhol she'arekha ('in all your gates/towns') mandates a local judicial system — justice must be accessible to every community, not concentrated only at the central sanctuary. The mandate is mishpat tsedeq ('judgment of righteousness/just judgment') — not merely formal legal process but substantively righteous outcomes.

- 19.** Three judicial corruptions are prohibited: *lo tatteh mishpat* ('do not bend/pervert justice' — distorting legal outcomes), *lo takkir panim* ('do not recognize faces' — showing favoritism based on status, wealth, or personal connection), and *lo tiqqach shochad* ('do not accept a bribe'). The reason for the bribe prohibition is psychological: *hashochad ye'avver eini chakhamim* ('a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise') — even wise, experienced judges become unable to see truth clearly when corrupted by payment. The parallel *vayesallef divrei tsaddiqim* ('and twists the words of the righteous') indicates that bribery doesn't just affect stupid people — it corrupts even those who are normally righteous and wise.
- 20.** The emphatic repetition *tsedek tsedek tirdof* ('justice, justice you shall pursue') is one of the most quoted phrases in the Hebrew Bible. The doubling of *tsedek* is interpreted variously: 'justice and only justice,' 'thorough justice,' 'justice in every case,' or 'justice by just means.' The verb *tirdof* ('you shall pursue, you shall chase') implies active, energetic effort — justice does not come to you; you must chase it. The stakes are national survival: *lema'an tichyeh veyarashta et ha'arets* ('so that you may live and possess the land'). Justice and life in the land are inseparable — injustice leads to exile.
- 21.** The prohibition against planting an *asherah* (a sacred wooden pole or tree associated with the Canaanite goddess Asherah) beside YHWH's altar addresses the specific temptation of syncretism — blending Canaanite and Israelite worship at the same site. The phrase *kol ets* ('any tree/wood') broadens the prohibition: no wooden cult object of any kind may stand near God's altar. The placement of this law after the justice section (vv 18-20) may seem abrupt, but it connects to the judicial theme: just as justice must be pure and uncompromised, so must worship.
- 22.** The *matstsevah* ('standing stone, sacred pillar') prohibition echoes 12:3, where Israel was commanded to smash the nations' pillars. The brief but powerful phrase *asher sane YHWH Elohekha* ('which the LORD your God hates') uses the strongest possible language of divine aversion. The personal emotional language — God 'hates' these objects — moves beyond legal prohibition to theological revulsion. The *setumah* marks the end of this section, transitioning to chapter 17's judicial and royal legislation.

17

Summary: *Moses addresses judicial procedure for difficult cases, requiring multiple witnesses for capital crimes, and sets out the law of the king — Israel's future monarch must copy the Torah and read it daily.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The king law (vv. 14-20) is the most restrained royal charter in the ancient Near East. The king must not multiply horses (military power), wives (political alliances), or silver and gold (treasury). He must write a personal copy of the Torah — mishneh haTorah (v. 18, 'a copy of this Law'), which gives Deuteronomy its Greek name. The king is not above the Law; he is its first student. His heart must not 'rise above his brothers' (v. 20) — kingship is leveled to brotherhood.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase mishneh haTorah (v. 18) could mean 'a copy of this law' or 'a second law' or 'a repetition of this law' — the LXX translated it as deuteronomion ('second law'), giving the book its English name. We rendered it 'a copy of this Law.' The judicial escalation 'if a case is too difficult for you' (v. 8) uses the verb *yipale*, from the same root as 'wonderful/extraordinary' — the hard case is literally 'too wonderful' for local courts.*

Connections: *The king law shapes the evaluation of every monarch in Kings — Solomon violates all three prohibitions (1 Kings 10-11). The prophet-like-Moses promise (18:15) functions as the king law's counterpart — prophet checks king. Josiah's Torah discovery (2 Kings 22:8-13) fulfills the mishneh haTorah command. The multiple-witness requirement (v. 6) is cited in Matthew 18:16 and 2 Corinthians 13:1.*

¹You must not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or sheep that has any defect or serious flaw, because that is detestable to the LORD your God. ²If a man or woman is found among you, in any of the towns the LORD your God is giving you, who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God by violating His covenant — ³by going to serve other gods and bowing down to them — whether the sun, the moon, or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded — ⁴and it is reported to you and you hear about it, then you must investigate thoroughly. If it is confirmed as true — if this abomination has been committed in Israel — ⁵then bring that man or that woman who committed this wicked act out to your city gate — that man or that woman — and stone them to death. ⁶A person may be put to death only on the testimony of two or three witnesses. No one may be executed on the testimony of a single witness. ⁷The hands of the witnesses must be the first raised against the condemned person to execute the sentence, and then the hands of all the people. In this way you will purge the evil from your midst. ⁸If a legal case arises in your towns that is too difficult for you to decide — whether it involves bloodshed, civil disputes, or physical injuries — any contested matter, then go up to the place the LORD your God will choose. ⁹Go to the

Levitical priests and to the judge serving at that time. Inquire of them, and they will announce the legal verdict to you. ¹⁰You must carry out the decision they announce to you from that place the LORD will choose. Be careful to do exactly as they instruct you. ¹¹Act according to the instruction of the law they teach you and the verdict they deliver to you. Do not deviate from the ruling they declare to you, either to the right or to the left. ¹²Anyone who acts presumptuously by refusing to obey the priest who stands serving the LORD your God there, or the judge — that person must die. You must purge the evil from Israel. ¹³All the people will hear about it and be afraid, and no one will act presumptuously again. ¹⁴When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, take possession of it, and settle in it, and you say, 'I want to set a king over me, like all the nations around me,' ¹⁵you may indeed set a king over you — but only one whom the LORD your God chooses. You must appoint a king from among your own brothers. You may not place a foreigner over you who is not one of your brothers. ¹⁶However, he must not acquire many horses for himself, and he must not send the people back to Egypt to acquire more horses, since the LORD has told you, 'You are never to go back that way again.' ¹⁷He must not acquire many wives, so that his heart will not be led astray. And he must not accumulate excessive amounts of silver and gold. ¹⁸When he takes his seat on the throne of his kingdom, he must write for himself a copy of this Law on a scroll, taken from the one kept by the Levitical priests. ¹⁹It must remain with him, and he must read from it every day of his life, so that he learns to revere the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this Law and these decrees, and carrying them out. ²⁰This will prevent his heart from becoming arrogant toward his brothers and keep him from deviating from the commandment in any direction, so that he and his descendants may enjoy a long reign over his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This verse connects to the blemished-firstborn law of 15:21 but broadens the principle to all sacrificial animals. The phrase *mum kol davar ra* ('a blemish — any bad thing') combines the specific term *mum* ('defect, blemish') with the general *kol davar ra* ('any bad/evil thing'), creating a comprehensive prohibition. The verdict *ki to'avat YHWH Elohekha hu* ('because it is an abomination/detestable thing to the LORD your God') classifies defective offerings in the same category as idolatry and pagan practices — it is not merely improper but revolting to God. Offering the imperfect insults God's worth (cf. Malachi 1:6-14).
2. The judicial procedure begins with the discovery of covenant violation. The phrase *ish o ishah* ('man or woman') establishes gender equality before the law — both are equally subject to covenant obligations and penalties. The crime is defined as *la'avor berito* ('to cross over/transgress His covenant'). The verb *avar* ('to cross, to pass over') when applied to covenant means to violate its terms — literally 'crossing the line' of the covenant boundary. The specific violation is detailed in the next verse.
3. The specific covenant violation is apostasy: serving other gods (*ya'avod elohim acherim*) and bowing to them (*vayishtachu lahem*). Three forms of astral worship are singled out: the sun (*shemesh*), moon (*yareach*), and the host of heaven (*tseva hashamayim* — the stars and planets). Astral worship was widespread in the ancient Near East, particularly in Mesopotamian and Canaanite cultures. The phrase *asher lo tsiviti* ('which I have not commanded') is understated but devastating — these objects were not merely forbidden; they were never part of God's instructions. The authority of divine command is the criterion: if God did not command it, it has no place in worship.
4. The due process requirements parallel 13:15: *vedarashta heitev* ('you shall investigate thoroughly'). Three stages of judicial procedure are described: *huggad lekha* ('it is reported to you' — the initial report), *veshama'ta* ('you hear' — you receive the information), and *vedarashta heitev* ('you investigate well/thoroughly'). Only after exhaustive investigation, when *vehineh emet nakhon hadavar* ('behold, it is true, the matter is established'), can the case proceed. The standard of proof is high: both *emet* ('truth') and *nakhon* ('established, certain') must be met. The word *to'evah* ('abomination') classifies the crime.
5. The execution takes place *el she'arekha* ('at your gates') — the city gate was the judicial center in ancient Israelite towns, where elders sat, cases were heard, and public justice was administered (cf. Ruth 4:1-2). The phrase *et ha'ish o et ha'ishah* is repeated emphatically — regardless of gender, the same penalty applies. Stoning (*seqaltam ba'avanim vaMethu* — 'stone them with stones and they shall die') was a communal act of execution, involving the entire community in enforcing the covenant.
6. The two-witness rule: *al pi shenayim edim o sheloshah edim yumat hammet* ('on the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses the condemned shall die'). This foundational due process requirement prevents false convictions based on personal grudges or fabricated testimony. The phrase *lo yumat al pi ed echad* ('he shall not die on the mouth of one witness') states the negative counterpart with equal force. This principle became foundational in both Jewish and Christian legal traditions (Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19).
7. The witnesses bear primary responsibility: *yad ha'edim tiyeh bo barishonah lahamito* ('the hand of the witnesses shall be upon him first to put him to death'). This requirement serves as a deterrent against false testimony — if you testify against someone, you must personally participate in carrying out the death sentence. Knowing that your own hand must strike the first blow makes false accusation a grave personal act. The phrase *veyad kol ha'am ba'acharonah* ('and the hand of all the people last') involves the entire community. The formula *uvi'arta hara miqqirbekha* ('purge the evil from your midst') closes the section, as in 13:6. The *petuchah* marks a major section break.

8. The appellate court system: *ki yippale mimmekha davar lammishpat* ('if a matter is too extraordinary/difficult for you to judge'). The verb *yippale* ('it is extraordinary, it is beyond you') uses the same root as *pele* ('wonder') — the case exceeds local judicial competence. Three categories are listed: *bein dam ledam* ('between blood and blood' — homicide cases, distinguishing murder from manslaughter), *bein din ledin* ('between legal claim and legal claim' — civil disputes), and *bein nega lanega* ('between skin affliction and skin affliction' — cases involving physical injury or ritual impurity). When local courts cannot resolve these, the case goes up (*ve'alita* — 'you shall go up,' reflecting Jerusalem's elevation) to the central sanctuary.
9. The central court has two components: *hakkohanim haLeviyim* ('the Levitical priests' — religious authority) and *hashofet asher yihyeh bayyamim hahem* ('the judge who will be in those days' — civil authority). This dual structure combines priestly Torah expertise with judicial experience. The phrase *vedarashta* ('you shall inquire') places the burden on the litigant to bring the case; the phrase *vehiggidu lekha* ('they shall tell you') grants the central court authority to render binding decisions. The term *devar hammishpat* ('the word/verdict of the judgment') is authoritative — it is not advice but legal ruling.
10. The binding authority of the central court is emphasized: *ve'asita al pi hadavar* ('you shall act according to the word/decision'). The phrase *veshamarta la'asot kekhol asher yorukha* ('you shall carefully do according to all that they instruct you') uses the verb *yarah* ('to instruct, to teach, to direct') — the same root as *Torah*. The central court's ruling carries the authority of Torah instruction. Compliance is not optional — the next verses establish the penalty for defiance.
11. Two sources of authority are distinguished: *haTorah asher yorukha* ('the Torah/instruction they teach you' — the legal principle) and *hammishpat asher yomeru lekha* ('the judgment they tell you' — the specific ruling). The prohibition *lo tasur min hadavar* ('do not turn aside from the matter') uses the same language as the prohibition against straying from God's commands generally (cf. 5:32; 28:14). The right/left metaphor (*yamin usmol*) describes any deviation — there is no acceptable departure from the central court's ruling in either direction.
12. The penalty for contempt of court is death: *veha'ish asher ya'aseh bezadon* ('the man who acts in presumption/arrogance'). The word *zadon* ('presumption, arrogance, willful defiance') describes not mere disagreement but deliberate, prideful refusal to submit to legitimate authority. The defiance is directed at both religious (*hakkohen ha'omed lesharet sham et YHWH* — 'the priest standing to serve the LORD there') and civil (*hashofet*) authority. The formula *umet ha'ish hahu* ('that man shall die') and *uvi'arta hara miYisrael* ('purge the evil from Israel') establish that defiance of the judicial system threatens the entire community's covenant standing.
13. The deterrent function: *vekhol ha'am yishme'u veyira'u* ('all the people will hear and fear'). The verb *yezidun* ('they will act presumptuously') uses the same root as *zadon* in verse 12, creating a verbal link — the punishment for presumption prevents future presumption. The *setumah* marks the transition to the king's law, one of the most distinctive passages in Deuteronomy.
14. The king's law (*vv 14-20*) is unique in the ancient Near East — no other nation's law code regulates the king's behavior. The scenario is anticipatory: *ki tavo el ha'arets* ('when you come into the land'). The desire for a king is presented as Israel's initiative — *ve'amarta asimah alai melekh* ('you will say, I will set over me a king'). The motivation is conformity: *kekhol haggoyim asher sevivotai* ('like all the nations around me'). This is telling: the request is driven by imitation of other nations, not by divine instruction. The text does not condemn kingship outright but subjects it to strict conditions.
15. Three conditions for kingship: first, *som tasim* ('setting you may set' — the infinitive absolute grants permission but with the following qualifications). Second, *asher yivchar YHWH Elohekha bo* ('whom the LORD your God will choose in him') — the king must be God's choice, not merely the people's. Third, *miqqerev achekha* ('from the midst of your brothers') — the king must be an Israelite. The negative *lo tukhal latet alekha ish nokhri* ('you cannot place over you a foreign man') explicitly excludes non-Israelites. This prevents foreign domination disguised as domestic kingship. The king serves under God's authority, not independently of it.
16. The first royal restriction: *lo yarbeh lo susim* ('he shall not multiply horses for himself'). Horses in the ancient Near East were military technology — chariot warfare required large horse stables. Accumulating horses meant building a standing army and trusting in military power rather than God. The specific prohibition against returning to Egypt for horses (*velo yashiv et ha'am Mitsraymah lema'an harbot sus*) prevents both military alliance with Egypt and the symbolic reversal of the exodus. God's declaration *lo tosifu lashuv badderekh hazzeh od* ('you shall not again return by this way') treats return to Egypt as covenant betrayal. Solomon violated this law spectacularly (1 Kgs 10:28-29).
17. Two more restrictions: *lo yarbeh lo nashim velo yasur levavo* ('he shall not multiply wives, so that his heart does not turn aside') and *kesev vezahav lo yarbeh lo me'od* ('silver and gold he shall not greatly multiply'). Multiple wives in royal contexts meant political marriages — alliances sealed by marriage to foreign princesses who brought their gods with them. The danger is explicitly stated: *velo yasur levavo* ('so his heart will not turn aside') — foreign wives lead to foreign gods. Solomon's story is the definitive illustration (1 Kgs 11:1-8). The gold/silver restriction prevents the king from building a personal treasury at the people's expense — taxation for royal enrichment is prohibited.
18. The most distinctive requirement: *vekhatav lo et mishneh haTorah hazzot al sefer* ('he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah on a scroll'). The phrase *mishneh haTorah* ('copy of the Torah, second Torah') gives Deuteronomy its Greek name (Deuteronomion — 'second law'). The king must personally copy the Torah — not merely possess it but write it out by hand. The act of copying forces sustained engagement with every word. The source is specified: *millifnei hakkohanim haLeviyim* ('from before the Levitical priests') — the priests maintain the authoritative text, and the king copies from their master copy. The king is not above the Torah; he is under it.
19. Three requirements for the royal Torah copy: *vehayetah immo* ('it shall be with him' — constant physical proximity), *veqara vo kol yemei chayyav* ('he shall read in it all the days of his life' — daily reading, not occasional reference), and the purpose clause *lema'an yilmad leyir'ah et YHWH Elohav* ('so that he will learn to fear/revere the LORD his God'). As with the tithe in 14:23, reverence is something learned through practice, not assumed. The king learns reverence through daily Torah engagement. The result is practical: *lishmor et kol divrei haTorah hazzot... la'asotam* ('to keep all the

words of this Torah... to do them'). Knowledge must produce obedience.

20. Two dangers the Torah guards against: *levilti rum levavo me'echav* ('so his heart does not rise above his brothers' — arrogance, the belief that the king is superior to ordinary Israelites) and *levilti sur min hammitsvah yamin usmol* ('so he does not turn from the commandment right or left' — deviation from God's instructions). The king is *achim* ('brothers') with his subjects — first among equals, not a separate class. The promise for compliance is dynastic longevity: *lema'an ya'arikh yamim al mamlakhto hu uvanav* ('so that he may extend days over his kingdom, he and his sons'). The king's obedience secures not just his reign but his dynasty's future. The *setumah* closes the king's law and the judicial section of Deuteronomy.

18

Summary: *Moses provides for the Levites' support through sacrificial portions, prohibits Canaanite divination practices, and promises that God will raise up 'a prophet like me' from among Israel's own brothers.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The prophet-like-Moses promise (vv. 15-19) is one of the most consequential prophecies in the Hebrew Bible. A *navi kamoni* ('a prophet like me') will arise who speaks God's words directly. The criteria for true prophecy are devastatingly simple: if the word comes true, it was from God; if not, the prophet spoke presumptuously. No theological test, no character test — only fulfillment. The passage sits between the king law (ch. 17) and the cities of refuge (ch. 19), placing prophetic authority at the center of Israel's institutional life.*

Translation Friction: *The list of prohibited practices (vv. 10-11) includes terms of uncertain definition: *qosem* (diviner), *me'onen* (soothsayer or cloud-reader), *menachesh* (one who reads omens), *mekhashef* (sorcerer), *chover chaver* (spell-caster), *sho'el ov* (medium), *yidde'oni* (spiritist), *doresh el ha-metim* (necromancer). We translated each descriptively and noted the semantic uncertainty where it exists.*

Connections: *The prophet-like-Moses promise is applied to Jesus in Acts 3:22-23 and 7:37. The divination prohibition grounds Saul's crisis when he consults the medium at Endor (1 Samuel 28). The Levitical provision connects to Numbers 18:20-24. The test of true prophecy (vv. 21-22) is invoked throughout the prophetic literature, particularly Jeremiah 28.*

¹The Levitical priests — the entire tribe of Levi — shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel. They shall eat from the LORD's fire offerings and from His inheritance. ²They shall have no inheritance among their relatives — the LORD is their inheritance, as He promised them. ³This shall be the priests' rightful portion from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice — whether ox or sheep: the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach shall be given to the priest. ⁴You shall give him the firstfruits of your grain, new wine, and oil, and the first shearing of your flock. ⁵For the LORD your God has chosen him from all your tribes to stand and serve in the name of the LORD — him and his sons, for all time. ⁶If a Levite comes from any of your towns throughout Israel, where he has been residing, and comes with all his heart's desire to the place the LORD will choose, ⁷he may serve in the name of the LORD his God, just like all his fellow Levites who stand in service there before the LORD. ⁸He shall eat equal portions with them, in addition to whatever he has from the sale of family property. ⁹When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, you must not learn to practice the abominations of those nations. ¹⁰There must not be found among you anyone who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, anyone who practices divination, reads omens, interprets signs, or practices sorcery, ¹¹anyone who casts spells, consults mediums, practices spiritism, or seeks out the dead. ¹²For everyone who does these things is an abomination to the LORD, and it is because of these abominations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you. ¹³You shall be wholehearted with the LORD your God. ¹⁴These nations that you are about to dispossess listen to omen-readers and diviners, but the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. ¹⁵The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet from among you, from your own people, like me. You shall listen to him. ¹⁶This is what you requested from the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Do not let me hear the voice of the LORD my God again or see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' ¹⁷The LORD said to me, 'What they have said is right. ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet from among their own people, like you, and I will put My words in his mouth. He shall speak to them everything I command him. ¹⁹Anyone who does not listen to My words that the prophet speaks in My name — I Myself will hold that person accountable.' ²⁰But a prophet who presumes to speak a word in

My name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods — that prophet must die. ²¹You may ask in your heart, 'How can we recognize a word that the LORD has not spoken?' ²²When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD and the thing does not happen or come true, that is a word the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously — do not be afraid of him."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The tribe of Levi receives no territorial allotment — no land, no farms, no herds of their own. Their 'inheritance' (nachalah) is the LORD Himself (v2) and the offerings brought to Him. This arrangement makes the priesthood economically dependent on the faithfulness of the other tribes: if Israel stops bringing offerings, the priests have nothing. The system incentivizes both priestly faithfulness (to maintain their credibility) and communal generosity (to sustain those who serve God full-time).
2. YHWH hu nachalato ('the LORD is their inheritance') — one of the most remarkable statements in Deuteronomy. While every other tribe inherits land, Levi inherits God. This is not metaphorical deprivation but theological privilege: the priestly tribe's 'possession' is the covenant relationship itself. The phrase ka'asher dibber-lo ('as He spoke to him') refers to the original Levitical commission, grounded in their loyalty during the golden calf crisis (Exod 32:26-29).
3. Three specific cuts: the zeroa ('shoulder/foreleg'), the lechayaim ('cheeks/jaws'), and the qevah ('stomach/fourth stomach of a ruminant'). These differ from the Levitical priestly portions (breast and thigh, Lev 7:31-34) — Deuteronomy may describe a different tradition or supplementary allocation. The practical effect is the same: the priests are fed from the sacrificial system, ensuring that those who serve God's altar do not go hungry.
4. Four categories of firstfruits: dagan ('grain'), tirosh ('new wine'), yitshar ('fresh oil'), and gez tsonekha ('shearing of your flock'). The firstfruits represent the initial yield — given before the farmer knows whether the harvest will be abundant or meager. Giving first requires trust: you release to God's servants before you know what remains for yourself.
5. The priestly role is defined as la'amod lesharet beshem-YHWH ('to stand and serve in the name of the LORD'). Two verbs: amad ('to stand' — the posture of readiness and attendance) and sharet ('to serve, to minister' — personal, intimate service). The priests serve 'in the name of the LORD' — they represent God to the people and the people to God. The phrase hu uvanav kol-hayyamim ('he and his sons, all the days') establishes the perpetual, hereditary nature of the office.
6. This provision addresses Levites living in outlying towns who wish to serve at the central sanctuary. The phrase bekhoh-avvat nafsho ('with all the desire of his soul') emphasizes the voluntary, passionate nature of this movement — the Levite comes because he wants to serve, not because he is summoned. 'The place the LORD will choose' (hammaqom asher-yivchar YHWH) is Deuteronomy's standard phrase for the central sanctuary, later identified as Jerusalem.
7. Equal access: the traveling Levite serves on the same terms as those already stationed at the sanctuary (kekhol-echav haleviyim ha'omedim sham). No distinction is made between 'local' and 'visiting' Levites — all who desire to serve may serve equally. This provision protects the rural Levite from being treated as second-class when he arrives at the central sanctuary.
8. Equal food allocation: cheleq kecheleq ('portion like portion'). The arriving Levite receives the same share as the permanent staff. The final clause — levad mimkarav al-ha'avot ('apart from what comes from the sale of ancestral property') — acknowledges that some Levites may have private resources from family transactions, and these do not reduce their sanctuary allotment. Private means do not diminish communal rights.
9. The chapter shifts abruptly from priestly provision (v1-8) to forbidden practices (v9-14). The connection is purposeful: Israel will not need Canaanite divination practices because God provides prophets (v15-22). The verb tilmad ('learn') suggests these practices are acquired behaviors, not instincts — Israel must choose not to learn what Canaan teaches. The to'avot ('abominations') are specified in v10-11.
10. The forbidden list begins with the most horrific: ma'avir beno-uvitto ba'esh ('making a son or daughter pass through fire') — child sacrifice, associated with the Canaanite god Molech. Four additional categories follow: qosem qesamim ('practicing divination' — seeking knowledge through forbidden means), me'onen ('reading omens' — from clouds, animal behavior, etc.), menachesh ('interpreting signs' — serpent omens or whispered spells), and mekhashef ('sorcerer' — using supernatural manipulation). Each represents an attempt to access information or power outside God's authorized channels.
11. Four more forbidden categories: chover chaver ('spell-caster' — binding through incantation), sho'el ov ('consulting a medium' — ov refers to a spirit of the dead or the pit from which it speaks), yidde'oni ('spiritist' — from yada, 'to know' — one who claims forbidden knowledge through spirits), and doresh el-hammetim ('inquirer of the dead' — necromancy). The comprehensive list of nine forbidden practices (v10-11) covers every known form of Canaanite occult activity. Israel is prohibited from all of them without exception.
12. The Canaanite dispossession is explicitly linked to these practices — ubighlal hatto'evot ha'elohim ('because of these abominations'). The conquest is not arbitrary but judicial: the land's previous inhabitants are removed because of their occult practices. This creates a warning for Israel: the same behavior that caused the Canaanites' expulsion will cause Israel's expulsion if adopted. The land does not tolerate to'evah regardless of who commits it.
13. Tamim tiyeh im YHWH Elohekha ('you shall be wholehearted/blameless with the LORD your God') — the same tamim required of Abraham (Gen 17:1) and of sacrificial animals (Lev 1:3). For a person, tamim means undivided loyalty — not moral perfection but complete devotion. The contrast

with v9-12 is clear: instead of dividing loyalty between God and occult practices, Israel must be tamim — whole, integrated, entirely committed to the LORD.

14. The pivotal contrast: the nations listen to diviners — ve'attah lo khen natan lekha YHWH Elohekha ('but as for you, the LORD your God has not given you such a thing'). Israel does not need divination because God provides something better: prophetic revelation (v15-22). The denial creates a vacuum that v15 fills: no omens, no sorcery — instead, a prophet.
15. Navi miqqirbekha me'achekha kamoni ('a prophet from your midst, from your brothers, like me') is Moses's designation of the prophetic office as his institutional successor. The word kamoni ('like me') is ambiguous: it could mean 'a prophet like me' (one specific future figure) or 'prophets like me' (a succession of prophetic voices). Both readings have been maintained across Jewish and Christian traditions. The command elav tishma'un ('to him you shall listen') echoes the Shema — the same verb shama ('listen/obey') that governs the entire covenant relationship.
16. Moses connects the prophetic promise back to the people's request in Deuteronomy 5:23-27: the nation asked for a mediator because direct divine encounter was unbearable. The prophet is God's answer to that request — authorized human speech replacing the terrifying divine voice from the fire. The prophetic office is born from the people's own acknowledged limitation: they cannot endure God's direct presence.
17. God's validation — heitivu asher dibberu ('they spoke well in what they said') — repeats verbatim from 5:28. God approves the request for mediated revelation. The prophet is not a concession to weakness but a divinely endorsed arrangement. Direct encounter with God's voice and fire is legitimate but unsustainable; prophetic mediation is God's preferred long-term communication method.
18. God speaks in first person, confirming v15: navi aqim lahem ('I will raise up a prophet for them'). The mechanism of prophetic authority: venatatti devaray befv ('I will put My words in his mouth'). The prophet does not generate his own message — God places the words there. The prophet is a vessel, not a source. The phrase vedibber aleihem et kol-asher atsavvennu ('he shall speak to them everything I command him') defines the prophet's total obligation: nothing added, nothing withheld.
19. The consequence of rejecting the prophet's message: anokhi edrosh me'immo ('I Myself will hold them accountable,' literally 'I will seek it from them'). God takes personal responsibility for enforcing the prophet's authority. To reject the prophet is to reject God, because the prophet speaks beshmi ('in My name') — with God's full authorization. The first-person anokhi ('I Myself') is emphatic.
20. Two capital offenses for prophets: speaking unauthorized words in God's name (asher lo-tsvivtiv ledabber — words God did not command) and speaking in the name of other gods. The verb yazid ('presumes, acts presumptuously') describes arrogant overreach — the prophet who puts his own words in God's mouth. The death penalty for false prophecy protects the community from being misled by someone claiming divine authority fraudulently. The same verb yazid connects to Nadab and Abihu's unauthorized fire (Lev 10:1) — presumptuous approach to God is lethal.
21. The practical question: how do you tell a true prophet from a false one? The question arises 'in your heart' (bilevavekha) — it is an internal struggle, not merely an academic inquiry. The question is legitimate: if prophets claim to speak for God, how does the community evaluate the claim? The answer (v22) provides one criterion, though the Hebrew Bible elsewhere adds others (Deut 13:1-5, Jer 28).
22. The fulfillment test: if the predicted event does not occur (velo-yihyeh haddavar velo yavo — 'the thing does not happen and does not come'), the prophet spoke without divine authorization. The closing imperative — lo tagur mimmennu ('do not be afraid of him') — frees the community from the intimidation of false prophetic authority. A false prophet may be charismatic and convincing, but failed prediction exposes the fraud. The test is retrospective: it evaluates prophecy after the predicted time has passed. The chapter's logic is complete: instead of divination (v9-14), God provides prophets (v15-19), with a test to distinguish true from false (v20-22).

19

Summary: *Moses establishes three cities of refuge for those who kill unintentionally, legislates against moving boundary markers, and requires multiple witnesses for legal testimony.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The city-of-refuge law distinguishes between the manslayer (rotseach, one who kills accidentally) and the murderer. The test case is vivid: a man swings an axe, the iron head flies off the handle, and strikes his neighbor (v. 5). The go'el haddam ('blood avenger,' v. 6) is the victim's kinsman whose obligation to avenge is acknowledged but channeled — emotion is real, but justice requires investigation. The boundary-marker prohibition (v. 14) treats a survey stone as sacred: to move it is to steal from the dead who established it.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase bivli da'at (v. 4, 'without knowledge/intention') is the Hebrew legal standard for accidental killing — English 'unintentionally' captures the sense but loses the epistemological dimension: the killer literally 'did not know.' The lex talionis in verse 21 — 'life for life, eye for eye' — is placed in a judicial context, specifying proportional punishment administered by courts, not personal vengeance.*

Connections: The cities of refuge elaborate Numbers 35:9-34 and are implemented in Joshua 20. The go'el haddam institution connects to the go'el theology in Ruth 3-4. The multiple-witness rule (v. 15) echoes 17:6 and is cited by Jesus (Matthew 18:16) and Paul (2 Corinthians 13:1). The false-witness law anticipates the Naboth episode in 1 Kings 21.

¹When the LORD your God cuts off the nations whose land the LORD your God is giving you, and you dispossess them and settle in their cities and in their houses, ²you must set apart three cities for yourself within your land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess. ³You must prepare the road and divide the territory of your land — which the LORD your God is granting you as an inheritance — into three regions, so that anyone who kills a person may flee there. ⁴This is the provision for the one who kills and may flee there to save his life: someone who strikes his neighbor unintentionally, without having previously harbored hostility toward him. ⁵For example, if a man goes into the forest with his neighbor to chop wood, and as he swings the axe to cut down a tree the iron head flies off the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies — that man may flee to one of these cities and save his life. ⁶Otherwise the blood avenger might pursue the killer in the heat of his anger, overtake him because the distance is too great, and strike him dead — even though he does not deserve the death penalty, since he had no prior hostility toward the victim. ⁷This is why I am commanding you: you must set apart three cities for yourself. ⁸When the LORD your God expands your territory, as He swore to your ancestors, and gives you the entire land that He promised to give to your ancestors — ⁹provided you keep this entire commandment that I am commanding you today by carrying it out — to love the LORD your God and to walk in His ways at all times — then you must add three more cities beyond these three, ¹⁰so that innocent blood is not shed in your land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and bloodguilt fall upon you. ¹¹But if a man harbors hatred toward his neighbor, lies in ambush for him, rises up and strikes him fatally so that he dies, and then flees to one of these cities, ¹²the elders of his own city must send for him, take him from there, and hand him over to the blood avenger, and he must die. ¹³Your eye must not show pity for him. You must purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, so that it may go well with you. ¹⁴You must not move your neighbor's boundary marker, which previous generations established in your inheritance that you will receive in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess. ¹⁵A single witness may not stand against a person for any crime or any offense — whatever the transgression. A matter may be established only on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ¹⁶If a malicious witness rises up against a person to accuse him of wrongdoing, ¹⁷then both parties to the dispute must stand before the LORD — before the priests and the judges who are serving at that time. ¹⁸The judges must investigate thoroughly. If the witness turns out to be a lying witness who has testified falsely against his brother, ¹⁹then you must do to him what he intended to do to his brother. So you will purge evil from your midst. ²⁰Those who remain will hear about it and be afraid, and they will never again do such an evil thing in your midst. ²¹Your eye must not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *yakhrit* ('cuts off') signals complete removal of the Canaanite nations from the land. The sequence *dispossess*–*settle* (*virishtem*–*veyashavtem*) describes Israel stepping into an existing infrastructure — cities already built, houses already standing. This opening sets the geographical context for the refuge-city legislation that follows: once the land is settled, accidental homicide needs legal infrastructure.
2. The verb *tavdil* ('set apart, separate') is the same root used for God's separating acts in creation (Genesis 1:4, 6, 14). Setting apart refuge cities is an act of sanctified distinction — carving sacred space within the land where justice operates differently. Three cities ensures reasonable geographic coverage across the territory west of the Jordan.
3. The command *takhin lekha haderekh* ('prepare the road for yourself') requires active infrastructure work — roads must be maintained and marked so a fleeing manslayer can reach safety quickly. The Talmud (*Makkot 10b*) records that the roads to refuge cities were kept clear and signposted. The verb *shilashta* ('divide into three') ensures equal geographic distribution so no part of the land is too far from a refuge city.
4. The phrase *bivli da'at* ('without knowledge' — unintentionally) is the crucial legal distinction: the refuge city protects only unintentional killers. The idiom *lo sone lo mitmol shilshom* ('not hating him from yesterday and the day before' — no prior hostility) establishes a second criterion: the killing must be both accidental and unpremeditated. Prior hostility converts an accident into suspected murder.

5. This case study is remarkably specific: a woodcutting accident where the axe head (*habarzel* — 'the iron') detaches from the handle (*ha'ets* — literally 'the wood,' used here for the wooden shaft). The specificity makes the law accessible — it illustrates the principle through a concrete scenario that any Israelite could envision. The verb *nashal* ('slipped off, flew off') emphasizes the accidental nature: the tool malfunctioned, not the person.
6. The *go'el haddam* ('blood avenger, kinsman redeemer of blood') had a legal obligation in ancient Israel to pursue and kill the person who shed his relative's blood. The law recognizes the emotional reality — *ki yecham levavo* ('because his heart is hot') acknowledges legitimate grief-driven rage — while insisting that justice, not vengeance, must prevail. The refuge city system channels the blood avenger's rights through judicial process.
7. The emphatic *al ken anokhi metsavvekha* ('therefore I am commanding you') connects the commandment directly to the scenario just described. The three-city requirement is not arbitrary but grounded in the urgency of protecting innocent life from misguided retribution.
8. The conditional *im yarchiv* ('if He expands') envisions a future territorial expansion beyond the initial conquest, fulfilling the full scope of the Abrahamic land promise. The reference to the patriarchal oath (*nishba laavotekha* — 'He swore to your fathers') roots the refuge-city system in covenant history: as God's promise grows, so must the infrastructure of justice.
9. The expansion from three to six refuge cities is conditioned on covenant faithfulness: loving God (*le'ahavah*) and walking in His ways (*lalekhet bidherakhav*). This is remarkable — more territory means more responsibility for justice, not just more land. The three additional cities would bring the total to six west of the Jordan, matching the six cities of refuge prescribed in Numbers 35:13-14 (three east, three west).
10. The purpose clause reveals the deeper logic: failing to provide refuge cities results in *dam naqi* ('innocent blood') being shed — both the accidental killer's (if murdered by the avenger) and collectively, the community's bloodguilt (*damim* — literally 'bloods,' plural for accumulated guilt). The land itself bears the moral weight of unpunished or unjust killing.
11. The contrasting case: premeditated murder marked by three elements — hatred (*sona*), ambush (*arav*), and lethal violence (*hikkahu nefesh* — 'struck him dead'). The sequence establishes motive, planning, and execution. The murderer's attempt to misuse the refuge system — fleeing there after deliberate killing — is anticipated and explicitly prohibited.
12. The elders of the murderer's home city — not the refuge city — bear responsibility for extradition. They know the accused and can testify to the prior hostility. The process is communal and judicial: the elders act, not a vigilante. Handing over to the *go'el haddam* restores the blood avenger's legitimate claim while ensuring that only confirmed murderers face execution.
13. The phrase *lo tachos einekha* ('your eye shall not pity') appears repeatedly in Deuteronomy's justice legislation (13:8, 19:13, 21, 25:12). It combats the natural human impulse toward misplaced mercy that would allow murderers to escape justice. The verb *bi'arta* ('purge, burn out') treats bloodguilt as contamination that must be removed from the community's midst — the same verb used for purging evil throughout Deuteronomy.
14. The boundary marker (*gevu*) was a stone or cairn marking property lines. Moving it was a form of land theft — enlarging your own field at your neighbor's expense. The phrase *asher gavlu rishonim* ('which the predecessors established') gives the markers intergenerational authority: they reflect the original divine allocation of land at the conquest. To move them is to challenge not just a neighbor's rights but the covenant's distribution of inheritance.
15. The two-witness rule (*al pi shnei edim* — 'on the mouth of two witnesses') is one of ancient Israel's most important legal safeguards and is cited by Jesus (Matthew 18:16) and Paul (2 Corinthians 13:1). The threefold repetition of 'any' (*lekhon avon, lekhon chattat, bekhon chet*) emphasizes universality: no exception exists, regardless of the offense's severity. This prevents false accusation from destroying an innocent person.
16. The *ed chamas* ('witness of violence' — malicious witness) is not merely mistaken but intentionally harmful. The term *chamas* ('violence, wrongdoing') characterizes the witness's intent: the testimony itself is an act of violence against the accused. The phrase *la'anot bo sarah* ('to testify against him a turning aside' — to give deviant testimony) uses *sarah*, which implies deliberate departure from truth.
17. The accused and the accuser both appear *lifnei YHWH* ('before the LORD'), indicating that the judicial proceeding is conducted in God's presence — likely at the central sanctuary. The dual judicial authority of priests and judges (*kohanim* and *shoftim*) reflects Israel's integrated system where religious and civil authority collaborate in adjudication. The phrase 'in those days' allows for future institutional development.
18. The verb *dareshu* ('they must investigate') with the adverb *hetev* ('thoroughly, well') demands rigorous judicial inquiry — not passive reception of testimony but active interrogation. The double use of *sheqer* ('lie, falsehood') — *ed sheqer* ('lying witness') and *sheqer anah* ('testified falsely') — emphasizes the gravity of perjury. Calling the accused 'his brother' (*be'achiv*) reminds the court that false testimony violates covenant brotherhood.
19. The *lex talionis* applied to perjury: the false witness receives the exact punishment he sought to impose on the accused (*ka'asher zamam* — 'as he plotted'). This is not general retribution but precise judicial mirroring. The formula *ubi'arta hara miqirbekha* ('you shall purge evil from your midst') appears seven times in Deuteronomy, functioning as a theological conclusion to judicial prescriptions — evil is a contaminant that must be removed.
20. The deterrent function of public punishment: *yishme'u veyira'u* ('they will hear and fear'). The judicial system serves not only retributive justice but communal education — the consequence is meant to be known and to prevent repetition. This formula (hear-and-fear) appears in Deuteronomy 13:12, 17:13, 19:20, and 21:21, always after cases involving community-threatening offenses.
21. The *lex talionis* ('law of retaliation') — *nefesh benefesh, ayin be'ayin* — establishes proportional justice: the punishment must match the crime, no more and no less. In context, this applies specifically to the false witness (v 19): the perjurer receives the same harm he intended. Ancient Near Eastern legal scholars broadly recognize this principle as limiting excessive punishment rather than mandating physical mutilation — the penalty cannot exceed the damage sought.

20

Summary: *Moses lays out the laws of warfare: a priest encourages the army, four categories of men are exempted from battle, terms of peace are offered to distant cities, but Canaanite cities receive no such offer.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The exemptions are extraordinary by ancient standards: a man who built a house but has not dedicated it (chanakho, v. 5), planted a vineyard but not yet enjoyed its fruit, betrothed a wife but not yet married her, or is simply afraid. The last exemption (v. 8) is the most remarkable — a frightened soldier is sent home not as punishment but to prevent his fear from spreading. The military chaplain's speech (vv. 3-4) places theology before tactics: 'the LORD your God is the one going with you.'*

Translation Friction: *The cherem command for Canaanite cities (vv. 16-17) — 'you shall not let anything that breathes remain alive' (kol neshamah) — is Deuteronomy's hardest text. We rendered it without softening, as the Hebrew does not soften it. The verb hacharim tacharimem uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis: 'you shall utterly devote them to destruction.' The tree-protection law (vv. 19-20) — 'are the trees of the field human, that they should be besieged by you?' — is a surprising ecological ethic embedded in a military code.*

Connections: *The warfare exemptions are applied in Judges 7:3 (Gideon's army reduction). The distant-city/near-city distinction governs Joshua's campaigns (Joshua 9-11). The tree-preservation law may ground the later rabbinic principle of bal tashchit ('do not destroy'). The priest's speech anticipates the Levitical war-theology of 2 Chronicles 20:15-17.*

¹When you go out to battle against your enemies and you see horses and chariots — a force larger than your own — do not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt. ²When you draw near to battle, the priest must come forward and address the troops. ³He must say to them: 'Hear, Israel! Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not let your hearts grow weak. Do not be afraid. Do not panic. Do not be terrified of them, ⁴because the LORD your God is the one marching with you. He will fight for you against your enemies to deliver you.' ⁵Then the officers must address the troops: 'Is there anyone who has built a new house and has not yet dedicated it? Let him go back home, so that he does not die in battle and another man dedicate it. ⁶Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard and has not yet begun to enjoy its fruit? Let him go back home, so that he does not die in battle and another man enjoy it. ⁷Is there anyone who has become engaged to a woman and has not yet married her? Let him go back home, so that he does not die in battle and another man marry her.' ⁸The officers must continue speaking to the troops: 'Is there anyone who is afraid or faint of heart? Let him go back home, so that his brothers' hearts do not melt like his own.' ⁹When the officers have finished addressing the troops, they must appoint army commanders at the head of the people. ¹⁰When you approach a city to fight against it, you must first offer it terms of peace. ¹¹If it responds with peace and opens its gates to you, then all the people found in it will become your forced laborers and will serve you. ¹²But if it does not make peace with you and instead wages war against you, you must lay siege to it. ¹³When the LORD your God delivers it into your hands, you must strike down every male in it with the sword. ¹⁴However, the women, the children, the livestock, and everything else in the city — all its plunder — you may take as spoil for yourselves. You may consume the plunder of your enemies that the LORD your God has given you. ¹⁵This is how you must treat all the cities that are very far from you — those that are not among the cities of these nearby nations. ¹⁶However, in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. ¹⁷You must completely devote them to destruction — the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites — just as the LORD your God has commanded you, ¹⁸so that they do not teach you to imitate all the detestable practices they performed for their gods, and you thereby sin against the LORD your God. ¹⁹When you besiege a city for an extended time, waging war against it to capture it, you must not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you must not cut them down. Is a tree of the field a human being, that it should be besieged by you? ²⁰Only trees that you know are not food-producing trees — those you may destroy and cut down. You may use them to build siege works against the city that is waging war with you,

until it falls.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Horses and chariots (sus varekev) represent the most advanced military technology of the ancient Near East — Israel's enemies routinely possessed what Israel lacked. The command lo tira ('do not fear') is grounded not in military capability but in divine presence (YHWH Elohekha immakh — 'the LORD your God is with you'). The exodus reference (hamma'alkha me'erets Mitsrayim) is the theological warrant: the God who defeated Egypt's chariots at the sea can handle any army.
2. The kohen ('priest') speaks before the military officers — war in Israel begins with theological proclamation, not tactical briefing. This is the mashuach milchamah ('the priest anointed for war') mentioned in rabbinic literature. His role establishes that Israel's warfare is fundamentally different: it is covenant warfare under divine command, not merely political conflict.
3. The priest's address opens with shema Yisra'el ('Hear, Israel!') — the same formula as the great confession of Deuteronomy 6:4, here deployed in a military context. Four prohibitions cover the full spectrum of fear: al yerakh levavkhem ('do not let your hearts go soft'), al tire'u ('do not fear'), al tachpezu ('do not panic, do not be hasty'), al ta'artsu ('do not be terrified'). The escalating vocabulary addresses every stage from private anxiety to public terror.
4. The theological core of Israel's warfare doctrine: God fights (lehillachem lakhem — 'to fight for you'). The verb lehoshi'a ('to save, to deliver') transforms the battle from a military engagement into a salvation event. Israel's role is faithfulness and obedience; the outcome belongs to God. This same theology appears at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:14): 'The LORD will fight for you; you need only be still.'
5. The shotrim ('officers, officials') administer three military exemptions (vv 5-7), each protecting a man's right to enjoy the fruit of his labor. The first: building but not dedicating a house (chanakho — the root ch-n-k gives us 'Hanukkah,' meaning 'dedication'). The exemption reflects a deep humane principle: a man should not die before experiencing what he has worked to create.
6. The second exemption: planting a vineyard without having chillelo ('profaned it' — that is, made it available for common use). Under Leviticus 19:23-25, a vineyard's fruit was forbidden for the first three years and sacred in the fourth. The verb chillel here means to take the fruit from the sacred domain into ordinary use — the first non-sacred harvest. A man deserves to taste what he planted.
7. The third exemption: betrothal without marriage. In Israelite law, betrothal (erusin) created a binding legal relationship — the woman was legally committed — but the marriage was not yet consummated. The fear that ish acher yiqqachennah ('another man will take her') would mean the betrothed woman becomes a widow before ever becoming a wife. Deuteronomy 24:5 extends this protection to a full year of exemption for newly married men.
8. The fourth exemption differs from the first three: it is psychological, not circumstantial. The hayare verakh hallevav ('fearful and soft of heart') may leave because fear is contagious — velo yimas et levav echav ('so he does not cause his brothers' hearts to melt'). The verb masas ('melt') describes the collapse of courage. Gideon's army was reduced by this same principle (Judges 7:3). Military effectiveness requires wholehearted commitment.
9. Only after theological preparation (the priest's speech) and humane exemptions (the officers' announcements) does the military organize for battle. The sarei tseva'ot ('commanders of armies') are appointed to lead — military structure follows spiritual and social readiness. The section marker (samekh) closes the pre-battle procedures.
10. The requirement to offer shalom ('peace') before attacking is a remarkable restraint on warfare. The verb qara'ta ('you shall call, proclaim') suggests a formal, public announcement — not a private negotiation but an official offer. This applies to cities outside the Promised Land (distant cities, v 15); the Canaanite cities within the land have a different legal status (vv 16-18).
11. Acceptance of peace terms results in subjugation, not extermination. The population becomes lamas ('forced labor, corvée workers') — the same institution Solomon later imposed on non-Israelite populations (1 Kings 9:21). While coercive by modern standards, within the ancient Near Eastern context this represents restraint: the alternative was total destruction. Lives are preserved through submission.
12. Refusal of peace terms triggers siege warfare (tsarta aleiha — 'you shall besiege it'). The verb tsur ('besiege, confine') describes surrounding a city to cut off supplies and force capitulation. The city's own decision to fight — rather than accept peace — determines its fate. The moral responsibility shifts to the city that rejected the offer.
13. Upon divine victory (unetanah YHWH — 'the LORD gives it'), the male combatants are executed (kol zekhorah — 'every male'). The phrase lefi charev ('by the mouth of the sword') is a standard Hebrew idiom treating the sword as a devouring instrument. This applies to distant cities (v 15), not the Canaanite cities within the land, which have stricter terms (v 16).
14. Non-combatants (women, children) and property (livestock, goods) are exempted from the sword. The verb tavor ('you may plunder') and the phrase ve'akhalta et shelal oyevekha ('you may consume your enemies' plunder') frame the spoils as God's provision — asher natan YHWH ('which the LORD gave'). Even the spoils of war are a divine gift, not merely a military prize.
15. This verse clarifies that the preceding rules (peace offer, male combatants, non-combatant exemptions) apply only to distant cities (harechokot mimmekha me'od — 'very far from you'). The sharp distinction between distant and nearby cities creates a two-tier system of warfare: negotiation-based rules for foreign wars versus total destruction for Canaanite cities (vv 16-18).

16. The command *lo techayah kol neshamah* ('you shall not keep alive anything that breathes') applies exclusively to the Canaanite cities within the Promised Land. The totality is absolute: *neshamah* ('breath, living being') encompasses all human life. This is the *cherem* ('ban, devotion to destruction') — an act of sacred judgment, not military strategy. The theological rationale follows in verse 18.
17. The infinitive absolute construction *hacharim tacharimem* ('destroying you shall destroy' — you must completely devote to destruction) intensifies the command. The six-nation list (sometimes seven with the Girgashites) represents the indigenous Canaanite population. The verb *charam* means to devote irrevocably to God — items under *cherem* are removed from human use and given entirely to God, whether through destruction or dedication.
18. The theological rationale for the *cherem*: prevention of religious contamination. The verb *lo yelammedu* ('so that they do not teach') identifies the Canaanite nations as sources of instruction in *to'avot* ('detestable practices, abominations') — a term encompassing child sacrifice, ritual prostitution, and other practices condemned throughout Deuteronomy. The logic is quarantine: Israel's covenant faithfulness requires removing the source of spiritual infection.
19. This environmental law during wartime is extraordinary in the ancient world. The rhetorical question *ki ha'adam ets hassadeh* is debated: it can be read as 'Is the tree a man that it should come under siege?' (prohibitive — trees are not combatants) or 'The tree of the field is man's life' (utilitarian — trees sustain human life). The rendering follows the interrogative reading, which most modern scholars prefer. The practical distinction between fruit trees (protected) and non-fruit trees (v 20, may be cut) reveals ecological wisdom embedded in military law.
20. Non-fruit trees may be used for siege construction (*matsvor* — 'siege works, bulwarks'). The distinction preserves the agricultural infrastructure that will sustain the land after conquest. The phrase *ad riddat* ('until it falls, until its going down') describes the city's eventual capitulation. The paragraph marker (pe) closes the warfare laws section. These regulations — from priestly encouragement to environmental protection — create what later Jewish tradition calls *milchemet reshut* ('optional warfare') as distinct from *milchemet mitsvah* ('commanded warfare').

21

Summary: *Moses addresses unsolved murder (the heifer ritual), rights of captive women, the firstborn's inheritance rights, the rebellious son, and the burial of executed criminals.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The heifer ritual for unsolved murder (vv. 1-9) is one of the Torah's most mysterious ceremonies. The elders of the nearest city break a heifer's neck in a flowing wadi, wash their hands over it, and declare 'our hands did not shed this blood.' The ritual transfers communal guilt for unavenged blood — because even unknown murder pollutes the land. The rebellious son law (vv. 18-21) requires both parents to bring the charge, making unilateral patriarchal punishment impossible.*

Translation Friction: *The verb *araf* (v. 4, 'break the neck') describes a specific method of killing used nowhere else in sacrificial law — this is not a sacrifice but a ritual of atonement through substitution. The phrase *kapper le-ammekha* (v. 8, 'grant atonement for your people') uses the same *kippur* vocabulary as Leviticus 16. The hanged man under 'God's curse' (*qilelat Elohim*, v. 23) is cited by Paul in Galatians 3:13 as applied to Christ.*

Connections: *The captive-woman law (vv. 10-14) provides rights unprecedented in ancient Near Eastern warfare. The firstborn inheritance law (v. 17, *pi shnayim*, 'a double portion') establishes the legal framework that Esau trades away (Genesis 25:31-34) and Elisha requests spiritually (2 Kings 2:9). The burial requirement (v. 23) governs the treatment of Jesus's body in John 19:31.*

1If a slain person is found lying in the open field in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who struck him down, 2then your elders and your judges must go out and measure the distances to the cities surrounding the slain person. 3The elders of the city nearest to the body must take a young cow that has never been worked and has never worn a yoke. 4The elders of that city must bring the cow down to a perennial wadi — a valley that is neither plowed nor sown — and they must break the cow's neck there in the wadi. 5Then the Levitical priests must come forward, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to pronounce blessings in the name of the LORD, and every dispute and every case of physical assault is to be resolved by their verdict. 6All the elders of the city nearest to the body must wash their hands over the young cow whose neck was broken in the wadi. 7They must declare: 'Our hands did not shed this blood, and our eyes did not see it happen. 8Grant atonement for your people Israel, whom you redeemed, O LORD, and do

not hold the guilt of innocent blood against your people Israel.' Then the bloodguilt will be atoned for. ⁹So you will purge the guilt of innocent blood from your midst by doing what is right in the eyes of the LORD. ¹⁰When you go out to war against your enemies and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands, and you take captives, ¹¹and you see among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, desiring to take her as your wife, ¹²then you must bring her into your house. She must shave her head and trim her nails. ¹³She must remove the clothing of her captivity, live in your house, and mourn her father and mother for a full month. After that, you may go to her and become her husband, and she will be your wife. ¹⁴If you later find that you are not pleased with her, you must let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her for money. You must not treat her as property, because you have had intimate relations with her. ¹⁵If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, but the firstborn belongs to the unloved wife, ¹⁶then on the day he distributes his property to his sons as inheritance, he may not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the loved wife in place of the son of the unloved wife, who is actually the firstborn. ¹⁷He must acknowledge the firstborn — the son of the unloved wife — by giving him a double portion of everything he owns, for that son is the first evidence of his vitality. The right of the firstborn belongs to him. ¹⁸If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father or his mother, and even after they discipline him he still will not listen to them, ¹⁹then his father and his mother must seize him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his town. ²⁰They must say to the elders of his city: 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.' ²¹The n all the men of his city must stone him to death. So you will purge evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear about it and be afraid. ²²If a man has committed a sin deserving the death penalty and is put to death, and you hang his body on a tree, ²³his body must not remain on the tree overnight. You must bury him that same day, for a hanged person is under God's curse, and you must not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *chahal* ('pierced one, slain person') refers to someone killed by violence, not natural death. Found *nofel bassadeh* ('fallen in the field') — in open land between settlements where no witnesses were present. The phrase *lo noda mi hikkahu* ('it is not known who struck him') creates the legal problem: unsolved homicide leaves bloodguilt unresolved, contaminating the land.
2. The measuring ceremony (*umadedu* — 'they shall measure') determines which city is nearest and therefore bears responsibility for the unsolved death. Elders and judges acting together (*zeqenekha veshoftekha*) ensures both communal authority and judicial precision. The physical act of measurement transforms an abstract question of guilt into a concrete civic responsibility.
3. The *eglat baqar* ('heifer, young cow') must meet two conditions: *lo ubbad bah* ('not worked with') and *lo mashkhah be'ol* ('not pulled in a yoke'). An animal untouched by human labor represents innocence and unused potential — mirroring the innocent life cut short. The parallel with the red heifer of Numbers 19 (also never yoked) suggests a purification ritual, though the mechanism here differs.
4. The *nachal eitan* ('enduring wadi' — a valley with a permanent stream) must be uncultivated land, matching the animal's unworked status. The verb *arefu* ('break the neck') is not a sacrificial slaughter but a distinct killing method — the animal's death absorbs the community's bloodguilt. The unworked animal in unworked ground creates a ritually pristine setting for absorbing the contamination of unsolved murder.
5. The priests' triple function is stated: *lesharto* ('to minister to Him'), *ulevarekh beshem YHWH* ('to bless in the LORD's name'), and judicial authority over *kol riv vekhol nega* ('every dispute and every injury'). The word *nega* ('stroke, plague, injury') covers both physical harm and skin diseases (as in Leviticus 13-14), giving priests jurisdiction over bodily matters.
6. Handwashing over the slain animal is a public declaration of innocence — the symbolic transfer of potential guilt. This is the biblical origin of the 'washing hands of responsibility' gesture, later echoed by Pilate in Matthew 27:24. The ritual combines physical act (washing) with verbal declaration (v 7) to formally dissociate the community from the bloodshed.
7. The declaration is a formal oath of innocence with two components: hands (action — 'we did not kill') and eyes (knowledge — 'we did not witness it'). The Qere/Ketiv variant: the Ketiv (— *shafkhah*, singular feminine) may reflect an older grammatical form; the Qere (— *shafkhu*, plural) matches the plural subject 'our hands.' The community leaders speak on behalf of the entire city.
8. The prayer contains the verb *kapper* ('atone, cover, purge') twice: as imperative petition (*kapper le'ammekha* — 'grant atonement for your people') and as result (*venikapper lahem haddam* — 'the blood-guilt will be atoned for them'). The appeal to God as redeemer (*asher padita* — 'whom you redeemed') invokes the exodus as grounds for mercy. Israel's identity as a redeemed people obligates God to maintain their purity.
9. The concluding formula *teva'er haddam hannaqi miqirbekha* ('you will purge innocent blood from your midst') uses the familiar purging language of Deuteronomy. Performing the ceremony is itself the act of doing *hayashar* ('the right thing') — the community's proactive response to unsolved violence demonstrates commitment to justice even when the perpetrator remains unknown.

- 10.** A new law section begins with the warfare formula *ki tetsel lammilchamah* ('when you go out to war'). God's role as the one who delivers victory (*unetano YHWH beyadekha* — 'the LORD gives him into your hand') is stated before any human action. The taking of captives (*shavita shivyo* — 'you capture his captivity') transitions to a specific regulation about captive women.
- 11.** The *eshet yefat to'ar* ('woman beautiful of form') is a war captive whom an Israelite soldier desires. The verb *chashaqta* ('you desire, you are attracted to') acknowledges sexual attraction as a reality of warfare without condemning it. Rather than prohibiting the marriage or permitting immediate sexual exploitation, the law creates a structured process (vv 12-13) that protects the woman's dignity and humanity.
- 12.** The three actions — entering the house, shaving the head, and trimming nails — mark a transition from captive to household member. Shaving the head (*gillchah et roshah*) may represent mourning for her former life, or symbolically shedding her foreign identity. The trimming of nails (*ve'astah et tsipporneiha* — literally 'do her nails') similarly marks a physical transformation. Some scholars see these as de-beautification acts that test whether the man's attraction is genuine.
- 13.** Removing the *simlet shivyah* ('clothing of captivity') marks another identity transition. The mandatory mourning period — *uvekhta et aviha ve'et immah yerach yamim* ('she shall weep for her father and mother a full month') — serves multiple functions: it honors her grief, grants her time to adjust, imposes a cooling-off period on the soldier, and prevents immediate sexual exploitation. The month-long delay transforms what could be wartime rape into a structured marriage with legal protections.
- 14.** The woman's protections upon divorce: she goes *lenafshah* ('on her own terms' — wherever she wants), cannot be sold (*makhor lo timkerenah* — absolutely cannot be sold), and cannot be treated as merchandise (*lo tit'ammer bah* — 'you shall not exploit her commercially'). The reason: *tachat asher innitah* ('because you humbled her') — the intimate relationship created obligations that survive the marriage's end. Once married, she has the rights of a free woman.
- 15.** The scenario assumes polygamy (*shtei nashim* — 'two wives') and introduces a preference dynamic: *ahuvah* ('loved') versus *senu'ah* ('hated, unloved') — probably meaning 'less loved' rather than literal hatred, as with Leah in Genesis 29:31). The legal problem arises when the firstborn son is from the unloved wife and the father wants to favor the loved wife's son — precisely the scenario of Jacob, Rachel, Leah, and their sons.
- 16.** The prohibition *lo yukhal levakker* ('he cannot give firstborn status') prevents a father from reassigning birth order based on marital preference. The verb *bakker* ('treat as firstborn, give firstborn status to') specifically prohibits the transfer of legal priority from the actual firstborn to a younger son. This law protects inheritance rights from the distortions of favoritism.
- 17.** The double portion (*pi shnayim* — literally 'a mouth of two,' meaning two shares) is the firstborn's inheritance right: if there are three sons, the estate is divided into four parts, and the firstborn receives two. The father must *yakkir* ('acknowledge, recognize') the true firstborn. The phrase *reshit ono* ('the beginning of his strength/virility') connects the firstborn to the father's reproductive power — the first son is the first proof of the father's generative capacity. The *mishpat habbekhorah* ('right of the firstborn') is a legal entitlement, not a parental gift.
- 18.** The *ben sorer umoreh* ('stubborn and rebellious son') is described with two adjectives: *sorer* ('turning aside, stubborn') and *moreh* ('defiant, rebellious'). Three conditions limit the law: (1) both parents must agree — *einenu shome'a beqol aviv uveqol immo* ('he does not listen to the voice of his father or the voice of his mother'); (2) prior discipline has been attempted — *veyisseru oto* ('they disciplined him'); (3) the defiance persists — *velo yishma aleihem* ('he still does not listen to them'). Rabbinic tradition added so many conditions that this penalty was considered practically impossible to carry out.
- 19.** Both parents (*aviv ve'immo*) must act together — neither parent alone can initiate the proceedings. This requirement of mutual parental agreement serves as a safeguard against one parent's anger or prejudice. The city gate (*sha'ar meqomo*) is the traditional location for legal proceedings in ancient Israel, functioning as the public courthouse.
- 20.** The parents make a formal legal accusation before the elders, adding two specific charges: *zolel vesove* ('glutton and drunkard'). These terms describe a lifestyle of self-indulgent excess that wastes family resources and shames the household. Proverbs 23:20-21 connects the *zolel vesove* with poverty and disgrace. The public accusation before elders ensures communal oversight — the parents' charge must be credible enough for community leaders to act.
- 21.** The execution by communal stoning (*urgemahu kol anshei iro* — 'all the men of his city shall stone him') makes the punishment a communal act — no single person bears the weight of the killing. The double formula returns: *ubi'arta hara* ('purge evil') and *vekhlo Yisra'el yishme'u veyira'u* ('all Israel will hear and fear'). The severity of the punishment for a rebellious son underscores how seriously Israelite law took family structure as the foundation of social order.
- 22.** The law addresses post-execution display, not the method of execution. The man is first executed (*humat* — 'he is put to death') and then hung (*vetalita oto al ets* — 'you hang him on a tree/pole'). Public display of the executed criminal served as both deterrent and statement of communal judgment. The term *ets* ('tree, wood, pole') could refer to any wooden structure used for display.
- 23.** The prohibition against overnight exposure (*lo talin nivlato* — 'his corpse shall not remain overnight') limits the duration of public display. The theological reason is striking: *ki qilelat Elohim talui* ('for a curse of God is a hanged person') — the displayed body represents a divine curse, and prolonged display defiles the land. Paul applies this verse christologically in Galatians 3:13, identifying Jesus's crucifixion with the curse of the hanged. The land's sanctity requires prompt burial — even executed criminals retain enough dignity to demand interment.

22

Summary: Moses collects laws about returning lost property, cross-dressing, bird nests, roof parapets, mixed-kind prohibitions, tassels, and sexual offenses including marriage disputes and assault.

What Makes This Remarkable: The chapter moves from compassion for a lost ox (v. 1) to compassion for a mother bird (v. 6-7) to a parapet requirement preventing falls (v. 8) — the thread is the sanctity of life at every scale. The mother-bird law (shiluach haqen) promises long life for something as small as letting a bird go free. The prohibition of sha'atnez (v. 11, mixing wool and linen) remains one of the Torah's most opaque commands — no reason is given, and the mixture is reserved for priestly garments (Exodus 28).

Translation Friction: The phrase to'avat YHWH (v. 5, 'detestable to the LORD') applied to cross-dressing uses the strongest disapproval term in Deuteronomy's vocabulary, but the exact scope of the prohibition is debated: is it about deception, cultic cross-dressing, or gender categories? We rendered it plainly and noted the interpretive range. The word gedilim (v. 12, 'tassels') connects to the tsitsit of Numbers 15:38-39.

Connections: The lost-property law (vv. 1-4) develops Exodus 23:4-5. The roof-parapet law (v. 8) applies building-code ethics that persist into Talmudic law. The tassels command echoes Numbers 15:37-41. The marriage-dispute laws (vv. 13-29) provide the legal background for Joseph's dilemma in Matthew 1:19.

¹You must not see your brother's ox or sheep wandering off and ignore them. You must make sure to return them to your brother. ²If your brother does not live nearby, or if you do not know who he is, you must bring the animal into your own house and keep it until your brother comes looking for it, and then you must return it to him. ³You must do the same with his donkey, the same with his garment, and the same with anything your brother has lost that you find. You may not look the other way. ⁴You must not see your brother's donkey or ox fallen on the road and ignore them. You must help him lift them up again. ⁵A woman must not wear a man's equipment, and a man must not put on a woman's clothing, for anyone who does this is detestable to the LORD your God. ⁶If you come across a bird's nest along the road, in any tree or on the ground, with chicks or eggs, and the mother bird is sitting on the chicks or on the eggs, you must not take the mother along with the young. ⁷You must certainly let the mother go, but you may take the young for yourself, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life. ⁸When you build a new house, you must construct a parapet for your roof, so that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house if someone falls from it. ⁹You must not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, or the entire yield will become sacred — both the seed you sowed and the produce of the vineyard. ¹⁰You must not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. ¹¹You must not wear fabric made of wool and linen woven together. ¹²You must make tassels on the four corners of the garment you wrap yourself in. ¹³If a man marries a woman, has relations with her, and then turns against her, ¹⁴and he levels charges against her, publicly defaming her by saying, 'I married this woman, but when I was intimate with her, I did not find evidence of her virginity' — ¹⁵then the young woman's father and mother must take the evidence of the young woman's virginity and bring it to the elders of the city at the gate. ¹⁶The young woman's father must say to the elders: 'I gave my daughter to this man in marriage, and now he has turned against her. ¹⁷He has made false charges, saying, "I did not find evidence of your daughter's virginity." But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity.' Then they must spread out the cloth before the elders of the city. ¹⁸The elders of that city must take the man and discipline him. ¹⁹They must also fine him one hundred silver shekels and give them to the young woman's father, because the husband publicly defamed a virgin of Israel. She will remain his wife, and he may never divorce her as long as he lives. ²⁰But if the charge is true and evidence of virginity was not found for the young woman, ²¹then they must bring the young woman to the entrance of her father's house, and the men of her city must stone her to death, because she committed a disgraceful act in Israel by being sexually promiscuous while in her father's house. So you will purge evil from your midst. ²²If a man is found sleeping with a woman who is married to another man, both of them must die — the man who slept with the woman and the woman. So you will purge evil from Israel. ²³If a young woman who is a virgin is engaged to a man, and another man encounters her in the

city and sleeps with her, ²⁴you must bring both of them out to the gate of that city and stone them to death — the young woman because she did not cry out even though she was in the city, and the man because he violated another man's wife. So you will purge evil from your midst. ²⁵But if the man encounters the engaged young woman in the open field and the man seizes her and sleeps with her, only the man who slept with her must die. ²⁶You must do nothing to the young woman — the young woman has committed no sin deserving death. This case is like a man attacking his neighbor and murdering him. ²⁷Because he found her in the open field — the engaged young woman cried out, but there was no one to rescue her. ²⁸If a man encounters a virgin who is not engaged, and he seizes her and sleeps with her, and they are discovered, ²⁹then the man who slept with her must give the young woman's father fifty silver shekels, and she must become his wife. Because he violated her, he may never divorce her as long as he lives.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb hit'allamta ('hide yourself, look the other way') condemns willful indifference to a neighbor's loss. The infinitive absolute hashev teshivem ('returning you shall return them') intensifies the obligation — this is not optional neighborliness but a covenant duty. The term 'brother' (achikha) extends beyond blood relatives to any fellow Israelite, establishing mutual care as a communal norm.
2. The law extends to situations where the owner is unknown or distant. The finder must actively care for the lost animal — asafto el tokh beitekha ('gather it into your house') — bearing the cost of feeding and sheltering it. The obligation persists ad drosh achikha oto ('until your brother seeks it') — indefinitely, until the owner claims it. This creates a positive duty of stewardship over another's property.
3. The law expands from livestock to any lost property: donkey, garment, and lekhol avodat achikha ('every lost thing of your brother'). The universal scope means there is no item too small or inconvenient to return. The closing phrase lo tukhal lehit'alleim ('you cannot hide yourself, you may not ignore it') makes indifference itself a violation — seeing and doing nothing is morally equivalent to causing the loss.
4. Beyond returning lost animals, this law requires active assistance when an animal collapses under its load. The infinitive absolute haqem taqim ('raising you must raise') intensifies the command — you must absolutely help. The parallel in Exodus 23:5 extends this duty even to the donkey of your enemy, making it clear that the obligation transcends personal relationships.
5. The term keli gever ('man's equipment/articles') is broader than clothing — keli can mean tools, weapons, or any characteristically male implements. The prohibition is reciprocal: women wearing male items and men wearing female clothing. The label to'avat YHWH ('detestable to the LORD') places this among the most seriously condemned behaviors in Deuteronomy. The precise rationale is debated: proposals include opposition to Canaanite cult practices involving cross-dressing, maintenance of created order distinctions, or prevention of deceptive identity.
6. The phrase ki yiqqare ('if it happens to be found' — if you chance upon) indicates a spontaneous encounter, not deliberate hunting. The law covers both efrokhim ('chicks') and betsim ('eggs'), and whether the nest is in a tree or on the ground. The prohibition lo tiqqach ha'em al habbanim ('do not take the mother upon the young') protects the breeding female — taking mother and offspring together eliminates future reproduction.
7. The infinitive absolute shalle'ach teshalach ('sending you must send away') makes the release of the mother bird mandatory. The reward formula — lema'an yitav lakh veba'arakhta yamim ('so that it goes well with you and you prolong your days') — is the same promise attached to honoring parents (5:16). Only two commandments carry this specific reward, and rabbinic tradition noted the connection: if such a seemingly minor commandment brings long life, how much more the weightier ones?
8. The ma'aqeh ('parapet, railing') is a safety barrier on flat rooftops, which in ancient Israel served as living space, sleeping areas, and work surfaces. The legal principle is remarkable: the builder is held liable for preventable accidents. The phrase lo tasim damim beveitekha ('do not put blood-guilt on your house') treats negligence as morally equivalent to causing death. This is one of the earliest building safety codes in recorded law.
9. The kil'ayim ('mixed kinds') prohibition forbids planting different crops in the same vineyard. The consequence pen tiqdash ('lest it become holy/set apart') is counterintuitive: the mixed crop becomes qadosh — sacred, and therefore forbidden for ordinary use. The verb qadhash here means 'become forfeit to the sanctuary,' effectively making the entire harvest unusable. Mixing categories produces something that belongs to neither and must be surrendered entirely.
10. Yoking different species (shor vachamor — ox and donkey) is prohibited because they differ in size, strength, and gait, causing the weaker animal to suffer. The law may also reflect the broader kil'ayim principle of maintaining created distinctions. Paul applies this metaphorically in 2 Corinthians 6:14 ('Do not be unequally yoked').
11. Sha'atnez is a technical term for the forbidden mixture of wool and linen in a single garment. The prohibition parallels Leviticus 19:19. Notably, the priestly garments did combine wool and linen (Exodus 28), suggesting that what is forbidden for ordinary use is reserved for sacred service — the prohibition maintains the distinction between common and holy.
12. The gedilim ('twisted cords, tassels') correspond to the tsitsit of Numbers 15:38-39, where their purpose is stated: to remind Israel of God's commandments. Placement on the arba kanfot ('four corners') of the outer garment makes them visible during daily life. The garment is the kesut ('covering, wrap-around cloak') — the standard outer garment of an Israelite.

13. The verb *usne'ah* ('and he hates her') marks the husband's rejection after consummation. The sequence — marriage, intimacy, hostility — establishes the context for a false accusation of premarital unchastity. This law section (vv 13-21) protects women from being discarded through false charges.
14. The husband's accusation involves three escalating actions: *sam lah alilot devarim* ('he placed against her fabricated charges'), *hotsi aleiha shem ra* ('he brought out against her a bad name' — public defamation), and a specific claim about missing *betulim* ('virginity evidence'). The term *alilot devarim* implies deliberate fabrication — trumped-up charges designed to justify divorce and avoid returning the bride-price.
15. Both parents (*avi hanna'arah ve'immah* — 'the young woman's father and her mother') act to defend their daughter — the mother's role is explicitly included. The *betulei hanna'arah* ('evidence of the young woman's virginity') likely refers to the stained bedsheet from the wedding night, a custom attested across the ancient Near East and still practiced in some cultures. The elders at the gate serve as the judicial body.
16. The father speaks as the family's legal representative. His statement establishes the facts: a valid marriage was contracted (*natatti et bitti la'ish hazzeh le'ishah* — 'I gave my daughter to this man as a wife') and the husband has rejected her (*vayyisna'eha* — 'and he hated her'). The father's testimony sets up the defense.
17. The father quotes the husband's accusation and presents counter-evidence. The verb *ufarsu* ('they shall spread out') describes publicly displaying the *hassimlah* ('the cloth, the garment') — the wedding-night bedsheet — before the judicial assembly. The physical evidence serves as a public refutation of the husband's claim.
18. The verb *veyisseru* ('they shall discipline') likely refers to corporal punishment — flogging — as the penalty for false accusation. The elders act as both judge and enforcer. The husband's public lie against his wife is treated as a serious offense against both her and the community.
19. Three penalties: physical discipline (v 18), a financial penalty of *me'ah kasef* ('one hundred silver shekels' — double the standard bride-price of fifty shekels), and permanent marriage without the right of divorce (*lo yukhal leshallchah kol yamav* — 'he cannot send her away all his days'). The fine goes to the father as compensation for the public shame. The irrevocable marriage protects the woman from being abandoned after being publicly accused.
20. The conditional reversal: *im emet hayah haddavar hazzeh* ('if this matter was true'). The absence of evidence (*lo nimitse'u vetulim* — 'virginity evidence was not found') shifts the case from false accusation to proven charge. The gravity of the consequence that follows (v 21) must be understood within the context of betrothal as a binding covenant agreement.
21. The execution takes place at *petach bet aviha* ('the entrance of her father's house'), associating the crime with the household that should have prevented it. The charge is *nevalah beYisra'el* ('a disgraceful act in Israel') — *nevalah* denotes something scandalously out of bounds, a violation of community norms so severe it shames the entire people. The phrase *liznot bet aviha* ('to act promiscuously in her father's house') specifies the offense: premarital sexual activity while under her father's legal protection.
22. Adultery with a married woman (*ishah be'ulat ba'al* — 'a woman mastered by a husband,' that is, a married woman) carries the death penalty for both parties. The phrase *gam shneihem* ('both of them together') insists on equal punishment — the man is not less guilty than the woman. This reflects the covenant understanding of marriage: adultery violates the marriage covenant and defiles the community.
23. The case involves a betrothed virgin (*na'arah vetulah me'orasah le'ish* — 'a young woman, a virgin, betrothed to a man'). Betrothal in Israelite law was a legally binding contract — the betrothed woman had the legal status of a wife even before the marriage was consummated. Sexual contact with her therefore constituted adultery.
24. The urban setting matters: in a city, help was available. The young woman's failure to cry out (*lo tsa'aqah va'ir* — 'she did not cry out in the city') is treated as evidence of consent. The man's guilt is stated as *asher innah et eshet re'ehu* ('because he violated his neighbor's wife') — using 'wife' for a betrothed woman, confirming that betrothal equals marriage in legal status. The contrasting rural case (v 25) addresses situations where crying out would not have brought help.
25. The field setting (*bassadeh* — 'in the open field') changes the legal calculus entirely. The verb *hecheziq bah* ('he seized her, he overpowered her') indicates force — this is not consensual. Only the man dies (*levaddo* — 'alone, by himself'). The law distinguishes between urban consent (where crying out would bring help) and rural assault (where no help was available).
26. The law explicitly exonerates the victim: *ein lanna'arah chet mavet* ('there is no capital sin in the young woman'). The analogy to murder (*ka'asher yaqum ish al re'ehu uretsacho nefesh* — 'as when a man rises against his neighbor and murders him') is a legal comparison: just as a murder victim is not complicit in their own death, so the rape victim bears no guilt. This is one of the earliest legal protections for victims of sexual assault.
27. The reasoning is stated: *bassadeh metsa'ah* ('he found her in the field') — the isolated location explains both the assault and the inability to get help. The phrase *ve'ein moshi'a lah* ('and there was no rescuer for her') uses the same verb (*yasha* — 'save, deliver') that describes God's salvation. The absence of a human deliverer establishes the woman's helplessness and therefore her innocence.
28. The third case: an unbetrothed virgin (*na'arah vetulah asher lo orasah*). The verb *utfasah* ('he seizes her') indicates force or coercion. The phrase *venimtsa'u* ('and they are discovered') means the act becomes publicly known — the discovery triggers the legal process. Since she is not betrothed, no marriage covenant has been violated, so the penalty differs from the previous cases.
29. The penalties: *chamishim kasef* ('fifty silver shekels') paid to the father as bride-price, mandatory marriage (*velo tihyeh le'ishah* — 'she must become his wife'), and permanent marriage without divorce rights (*lo yukhal shallchah kol yamav* — 'he cannot send her away all his days'). The payment compensates the father for the loss of bride-price; the irrevocable marriage protects the woman from abandonment. The parallel in Exodus 22:16-17 adds that the father may refuse the marriage, suggesting the woman's family retains veto power.

23

Summary: *Moses defines who may enter the assembly of the LORD, addresses camp purity during warfare, protects escaped slaves, prohibits cult prostitution and interest on loans to fellow Israelites, and regulates vows.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The exclusion list (vv. 2-8) and the inclusion timeline are striking: Ammonites and Moabites are excluded to the tenth generation, but Edomites and Egyptians are accepted in the third generation — 'because he is your brother' (Edom) and 'because you were a foreigner in his land' (Egypt). Gratitude and kinship override hostility. The escaped-slave law (vv. 15-16) is revolutionary: a runaway slave must not be returned but allowed to live 'wherever he chooses' — a direct challenge to every slave-return treaty in the ancient Near East.*

Translation Friction: *The word mamzer (v. 2) is traditionally rendered 'illegitimate child' but its precise meaning is debated — it may refer specifically to the offspring of an incestuous or prohibited union rather than any child born outside marriage. We rendered it 'one of illegitimate birth' with a note on the semantic range. The term qahal YHWH (v. 2, 'assembly of the LORD') refers to the covenant community's formal worship gathering, not the nation in general.*

Connections: *Ruth the Moabite challenges the Moabite exclusion — her inclusion in David's genealogy (Ruth 4:17-22) stands in tension with this law. The runaway-slave protection contrasts sharply with the Philemon situation in Paul's letter. The interest prohibition (vv. 19-20) is developed in Ezekiel 18:8, 13, 17 as a marker of righteousness.*

¹A man must not marry his father's wife, and he must not uncover his father's covering. ²No man who has been crushed in the testicles or has had his male organ cut off may enter the assembly of the LORD. ³No one of illegitimate birth may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD. ⁴No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants may ever enter the assembly of the LORD, ⁵because they did not meet you with food and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram-naharaim to curse you. ⁶But the LORD your God refused to listen to Balaam. Instead, the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. ⁷You must never seek their peace or their prosperity as long as you live. ⁸You must not despise an Edomite, for he is your brother. You must not despise an Egyptian, because you were a foreigner in his land. ⁹Children born to them in the third generation may enter the assembly of the LORD. ¹⁰When you go out as a military camp against your enemies, you must guard yourself from every evil thing. ¹¹If there is among you a man who becomes ritually unclean because of a nocturnal emission, he must go outside the camp. He may not re-enter the camp. ¹²Toward evening he must wash himself with water, and at sunset he may re-enter the camp. ¹³You must designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself. ¹⁴You must have a digging tool among your equipment. When you relieve yourself outside, you must dig a hole with it and then cover up your excrement. ¹⁵For the LORD your God moves about within your camp, to deliver you and to hand your enemies over to you. Therefore your camp must be holy, so that He does not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you. ¹⁶You must not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped to you from his master. ¹⁷He may live with you, in your midst, in whatever place he chooses within any of your towns — wherever suits him best. You must not mistreat him. ¹⁸No Israelite woman may become a cult prostitute, and no Israelite man may become a cult prostitute. ¹⁹You must not bring the earnings of a prostitute or the payment for a dog into the house of the LORD your God to fulfill any vow, for both of these are detestable to the LORD your God. ²⁰You must not charge your brother interest — interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent at interest. ²¹You may charge interest to a foreigner, but to your brother you must not charge interest, so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything you undertake in the land you are entering to possess. ²²When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you must not delay in fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will certainly require it of you, and it would be counted as sin against you. ²³But if you refrain from making a vow, there is no sin in that. ²⁴Whatever comes from your lips you must keep and perform, just as you vowed to the LORD your God — the

freewill offering that you promised with your own mouth. ²⁵When you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as you wish until you are full, but you must not put any in a container. ²⁶When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck heads of grain with your hand, but you must not swing a sickle over your neighbor's grain.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. In Hebrew versification, this is 23:1; in KJV it is 22:30. The verse prohibits marrying one's stepmother (eshet aviv — 'his father's wife,' not necessarily his biological mother). The phrase lo yegalleh kenaf aviv ('he shall not uncover his father's skirt/wing') is a sexual euphemism: the father's 'covering' represents his marital rights. The same imagery appears in Ruth 3:9, where Ruth asks Boaz to spread his garment over her — a proposal of marriage.
2. In Hebrew versification, this is 23:2; the KJV text shown corresponds to KJV 23:2 (about a mamzer), but the Hebrew text addresses physical emasculation. The petsu'a daka ('crushed of crushing' — a man with crushed testicles) and kerut shofkhah ('cut off of the pouring member' — a man whose penis has been severed) are excluded from the qahal YHWH ('assembly of the LORD'). The exclusion likely targeted deliberate castration associated with pagan priesthood practices, not accidental injury.
3. The mamzer is traditionally understood as a child born from a forbidden sexual union (incest or adultery), not simply an out-of-wedlock child. The KJV text shown corresponds to KJV 23:3 (about Ammonites and Moabites), but the Hebrew text of this verse addresses the mamzer. The exclusion extends to dor asiri ('the tenth generation'), effectively meaning permanently — 'ten generations' functions as a synonym for 'forever' in this legal context.
4. The permanent exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites (ad olam — 'forever') is harsher than the generational limit for Edomites and Egyptians (v 8). Both peoples descended from Lot (Genesis 19:30-38) and were therefore distant relatives of Israel, making their hostility a betrayal of kinship. The reason follows in verse 5.
5. Two charges against Ammon and Moab: (1) failure of hospitality — lo qiddemu etkem ballechem uvammayim ('they did not meet you with bread and water') when Israel passed through during the exodus; (2) active hostility — hiring Bil'am (Balaam) to curse Israel. The combination of neglect and aggression compounds their guilt. The Balaam narrative is told in Numbers 22-24.
6. God's sovereignty overrules human cursing: vayahafokh YHWH lekha et haqqelalah livhrakha ('the LORD turned the curse into a blessing for you'). The verb hafakh ('turn, reverse, overturn') — the same word used for the overthrow of Sodom — here describes God's power to reverse hostile spiritual forces. The theological ground is stated simply: ki ahevka YHWH ('because the LORD loves you'). Divine love protects Israel from external spiritual assault.
7. The prohibition lo tidros shelomam vetobhatam ('do not seek their peace or well-being') forbids treaties and trade alliances with Ammon and Moab. The phrase kol yamekha le'olam ('all your days forever') makes this permanent. This verse is notably severe compared to the treatment of Edomites and Egyptians in verse 8.
8. Two nations receive more favorable treatment: Edom (ki achikha hu — 'because he is your brother' — descended from Esau, Jacob's twin) and Egypt (ki ger hayita ve'artso — 'because you were a stranger in his land'). Despite Egypt's oppression, Israel's memory of Egyptian hospitality during the Joseph era creates an ongoing obligation. The verb te'ta'ev ('despise, abhor') is forbidden — Israel may not harbor collective hatred against these peoples.
9. Edomites and Egyptians face a three-generation waiting period (dor shelishi — 'third generation') before integration into the Israelite assembly. This is significantly more lenient than the permanent exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites. The distinction reflects different degrees of kinship and historical relationship — closer relatives and former hosts receive more favorable terms for eventual inclusion.
10. The transition to camp purity laws. The phrase ki tetsu machaneh ('when you go out as a camp') treats the army as a sacred encampment — God's presence accompanies the military camp (v 15), requiring the same purity standards as the tabernacle camp. The broad command venishmarta mikkol davar ra ('guard yourself from every evil thing') introduces specific regulations in the following verses.
11. The miqreh laylah ('nocturnal occurrence') is a seminal emission during sleep, which creates temporary ritual impurity (see Leviticus 15:16-17). The impure man must leave the camp entirely — even in a military setting, purity laws apply. This reflects the theological conviction that the war camp is sacred space.
12. The restoration process: washing with water as evening approaches (lifnot erev yirchats bammayim), then waiting until sunset (ukevo'a hashemesh) before re-entering. The timing follows the standard Levitical pattern — impurity lasts until evening, and the new day begins at sunset. Even in the urgency of military operations, purification cannot be rushed.
13. The yad ('designated place' — literally 'hand,' meaning a marked or pointed-out location) is a latrine area outside the camp perimeter. The practical sanitation regulation has a theological foundation: the military camp must be kept clean because of God's presence within it (v 15). Ancient Near Eastern armies often suffered disease from poor sanitation — this law prevents that.
14. The yated ('peg, stake, digging tool') is part of mandatory military equipment — alongside weapons, each soldier carries a sanitation implement. The procedure is specific: dig (chafartah), then cover (vekhissita et tse'atekha — 'cover your excrement'). This is one of the Bible's most practical commands, combining public health with theological concern for camp sanctity.

15. The theological foundation for all camp regulations: YHWH Elohekha mithallekh beqerev machanekha ('the LORD your God walks about in the midst of your camp'). The verb mithallekh ('walks about') uses the same hitpael form as God walking in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8). God's presence makes the camp sacred ground (qadosh — 'holy'). The consequence of impurity: veshav me'acharekha ('He will turn away from behind you') — God withdraws His protective presence, leaving Israel militarily vulnerable.
16. This law is extraordinary in the ancient Near East, where extradition treaties for runaway slaves were standard (as in the Code of Hammurabi §15-16, which imposed the death penalty for harboring fugitives). Israel's law reverses the norm entirely: lo tasgir eved el adonav ('you shall not surrender a slave to his master'). The escaped slave who reaches Israel receives asylum — a radical statement about the value of human freedom.
17. The escaped slave receives extraordinary rights: freedom to choose where to live (bammaqom asher yivchar — 'in the place he chooses'), residence among Israelites (immekha yeshev beqirbekha — 'with you he shall dwell in your midst'), and legal protection from oppression (lo tonennu — 'you shall not oppress him'). This is full social integration, not second-class residency.
18. The qedeshah (feminine) and qadesh (masculine) are temple prostitutes — persons consecrated to fertility cult rituals associated with Canaanite worship. The root q-d-sh ('holy') is used ironically: these 'consecrated ones' serve a false holiness. The prohibition applies to both women (mibbenot Yisra'el — 'from the daughters of Israel') and men (mibbenei Yisra'el — 'from the sons of Israel'), indicating that both male and female cult prostitution existed in the ancient Near East.
19. The etnan zonah ('wages of a prostitute') and mechir kelev ('price of a dog') may not be used for sacred offerings. The term 'dog' (kelev) likely refers to a male cult prostitute — attested in other ancient Near Eastern texts as a designation for males engaged in temple prostitution. Both income sources are to'avat YHWH ('detestable to the LORD'). Money earned through sexual exploitation cannot be laundered through sacred giving.
20. The neshek ('interest' — literally 'bite,' from nashakh, 'to bite') is prohibited in all forms when lending to a fellow Israelite (le'achikha — 'to your brother'). Three categories are specified: money (kesef), food (okhel), and anything else (kol davar asher yishshakh — 'anything that can generate interest'). The comprehensive list closes loopholes: no form of interest extraction from a fellow Israelite is permitted.
21. The distinction between brother and foreigner (nokhri) allows commercial interest on international trade loans while prohibiting it within the covenant community. The motivation is stated: lema'an yevarkhekha YHWH ('so that the LORD may bless you'). Covenant generosity toward fellow Israelites activates divine blessing on the national economy. The distinction is economic, not ethnic — a resident alien (ger) would typically be treated as a brother.
22. Vows to God must be fulfilled promptly: lo te'acher leshalmo ('do not delay to pay it'). The infinitive absolute darosh yidreshenu ('seeking He will seek it' — He will certainly demand it) emphasizes that God holds people accountable for their promises. An unfulfilled vow becomes sin (hayah vekha chet — 'there will be sin in you'). The urgency reflects the weight of speech directed to God — words spoken to the divine are binding.
23. The counterbalance to verse 22: not vowing is perfectly acceptable — ki techdal lindor lo yihyeh vekha chet ('if you refrain from vowing, there will be no sin in you'). Ecclesiastes 5:5 echoes this: 'Better not to vow at all than to vow and not fulfill.' The law protects against rash vows by making clear that silence before God is always an option.
24. The phrase motsa sefatekha ('what goes out of your lips') makes spoken words the binding standard — once uttered to God, a vow acquires the force of obligation. The term nedavah ('freewill offering') emphasizes that the vow was voluntary, not compelled. Precisely because it was freely given, it must be freely honored. The integrity of speech before God is a covenant fundamental.
25. The right to eat from a neighbor's vineyard while passing through (akhalta anavim kenafshekha sov'ekha — 'eat grapes to your desire, your satisfaction') reflects communal generosity and hospitality laws. The limit — ve'el kelyekha lo titten ('do not put any in your container') — prevents taking and profiting from what is meant for immediate sustenance. The principle: satisfying hunger is a communal right; commercial harvesting of another's produce is theft.
26. This verse extends the vineyard principle to grain fields. The distinction is between hands (qatafta melilot beyadekha — 'you may pluck ears with your hand') and tools (chermesh lo tanif — 'do not swing a sickle'). Hand-plucking for immediate eating is permitted; using harvest tools constitutes unauthorized harvesting. Jesus's disciples exercised this right in Matthew 12:1, plucking grain on the Sabbath. The verse has no KJV equivalent at this verse number due to the Hebrew-KJV versification offset in this chapter.

24

Summary: *Moses addresses divorce procedure, protections for newlyweds, millstone pledges, kidnapping, skin diseases, loan collateral ethics, worker wages, and gleaning rights for the vulnerable.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The divorce certificate (sefer keritut, v. 1) is one of the most debated passages in the Torah. The phrase ervat davar ('something indecent/objectionable') triggered the famous Hillel-Shammai debate: Shammai read it as sexual immorality only, Hillel as any cause of displeasure. Moses does not command divorce — he regulates an existing practice to protect the woman with a written document. The chapter's consistent refrain is 'remember that you were a slave in Egypt' (vv. 18, 22) — every humanitarian law is grounded in liberation memory.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase ervat davar (v. 1) is deliberately vague — and the vagueness may be intentional, leaving the community to discern boundaries rather than codifying them. We rendered it 'something indecent' and noted the full interpretive range. Jesus addresses this passage directly in Matthew 19:3-9, siding with neither school but appealing to Genesis 2:24 as the prior and governing text.*

Connections: *Jesus cites this passage in Matthew 19:7-8, calling it a concession to hardness of heart. The gleaning law (vv. 19-21) is practiced by Ruth in Ruth 2. The same-day wage payment (v. 15) is echoed in James 5:4. The principle that 'fathers shall not be put to death for children' (v. 16) is applied in 2 Kings 14:6.*

¹If a man takes a wife and marries her, and she does not find favor in his eyes because he has found something indecent about her, then he must write her a certificate of divorce, place it in her hand, and send her from his house. ²After she leaves his house, she may go and become another man's wife. ³If the second husband also rejects her and writes her a certificate of divorce, places it in her hand, and sends her from his house — or if the second husband dies — ⁴then her first husband, who divorced her, may not take her back as his wife after she has been with another man, for that is detestable before the LORD. You must not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. ⁵When a man has recently married a wife, he must not go out with the army, and no public duty may be imposed on him. He must be free for his household for one year, bringing joy to the wife he has married. ⁶No one may take a pair of millstones — or even the upper millstone — as collateral for a loan, for that would be taking a person's livelihood as collateral. ⁷If a man is found kidnapping one of his brothers from among the Israelites — exploiting him or selling him — that kidnapper must die. So you will purge evil from your midst. ⁸Be careful in cases of skin disease to follow very carefully all that the Levitical priests instruct you. Just as I commanded them, you must observe and carry out their directions. ⁹Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the journey after you came out of Egypt. ¹⁰When you make any kind of loan to your neighbor, you must not enter his house to take his collateral. ¹¹You must stand outside, and the person to whom you are lending must bring the collateral out to you. ¹²If the person is poor, you must not keep his collateral overnight. ¹³You must return the collateral to him at sunset so that he may sleep in his own garment and bless you. And it will be counted as righteousness for you before the LORD your God. ¹⁴You must not exploit a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your own people or a foreigner residing in your land within your towns. ¹⁵You must pay him his wages each day before the sun sets, for he is poor and his life depends on it. Otherwise he may cry out to the LORD against you, and it would be counted as sin against you. ¹⁶Fathers must not be put to death for the sins of their children, and children must not be put to death for the sins of their fathers. Each person must be put to death only for his own sin. ¹⁷You must not deny justice to the foreigner or the fatherless, and you must not take a widow's garment as collateral. ¹⁸Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I am commanding you to do this. ¹⁹When you harvest your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you must not go back to get it. It must be left for the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰When you beat your olive trees, you must not go over the branches again. What remains must be left for the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²¹When you harvest your vineyard, you must not go through it again to pick what you missed. It must be left for the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²²Remem

number that you were a slave in the land of Egypt. That is why I am commanding you to do this.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *ervat davar* ('indecent of a matter' — something objectionable) is deliberately vague and became the center of the famous Hillel-Shammai debate: Shammai restricted it to sexual immorality; Hillel extended it to any cause of displeasure. Jesus addressed this passage in Matthew 19:3-9. The *sefer keritut* ('document of cutting' — certificate of divorce) is a formal legal instrument that frees the woman to remarry. The law does not institute divorce but regulates an existing practice.
2. The divorced woman has full legal freedom to remarry: *vayahyah le'ish acher* ('she may become another man's wife'). The certificate of divorce protects her from being considered an adulteress if she remarries. Without the formal document, her status would be ambiguous and dangerous.
3. The scenario now involves a second marriage that also ends, whether by divorce (*usene'ah ha'ish ha'acharon* — 'the second husband hates her') or by death (*ki yamut ha'ish ha'acharon* — 'or the second husband dies'). The elaborate conditional setup — spanning verses 1-3 — builds toward the actual legal ruling in verse 4.
4. This is the actual legal ruling: the first husband may not remarry her (*lo yukhal ba'alach harishon lashuv leqachah* — 'her first husband cannot return to take her'). The reason is stated as *to'evah lifnei YHWH* ('detestable before the LORD'). Jeremiah 3:1 applies this principle metaphorically to Israel's relationship with God. The prohibition prevents marriage from becoming a revolving door and protects the woman from being treated as property shuttled between men.
5. The newlywed exemption covers both military service (*lo yetse batsava* — 'he shall not go out with the army') and all public obligations (*velo ya'avov alav lekhol davar* — 'no matter shall pass upon him'). The purpose is stated positively: *vesimmach et ishto* ('he shall bring joy to his wife'). The verb *simmach* is in the *piel* — intensive — meaning he must actively make her happy, not merely stay home. The year-long duration (*shannah echat*) exceeds the month-long exemption for the betrothed soldier in 20:7.
6. The *rechayim varokhev* ('millstones and rider' — the lower and upper grinding stones) were essential daily equipment for processing grain into flour. Taking them as pledge (*lo yachavol* — 'shall not seize as collateral') would deprive a family of their ability to prepare food. The principle: *ki nefesh hu chovel* ('for he is taking a life as pledge') — *nefesh* here means livelihood, not literally life. Essential survival tools may not be confiscated for debt.
7. Kidnapping (*gonev nefesh* — 'stealing a person') is a capital offense. The verb *hit'ammer* ('exploit, treat as merchandise') and *umkharo* ('sell him') describe the crime's full scope: abduction for the purpose of enslavement and sale. This law corresponds to the Eighth Commandment's original scope — 'You shall not steal' (Exodus 20:15) was understood to prohibit primarily person-theft, with property theft addressed elsewhere.
8. The *nega hatsara'at* ('affliction of tsara'at') refers to the skin conditions described in Leviticus 13-14 — a broader category than modern leprosy, encompassing various scaly or discolored skin conditions. The emphasis is on obedience to priestly instruction (*kol asher yoru etkhem* — 'everything they teach you'), positioning the priests as the authoritative diagnosticians for these conditions.
9. The reference to Miriam's *tsara'at* (Numbers 12:1-15) serves as a powerful warning: even Moses's own sister was not exempt from divine discipline for sin. The verb *zakhor* ('remember') in Deuteronomy always calls for active response, not mere recollection. The lesson: no one stands above the purity laws, and the priests' authority in these matters must be respected.
10. The creditor is prohibited from entering the debtor's house (*lo tavo el beto* — 'do not enter his house') to seize collateral. The debtor retains the dignity of his home — the creditor must wait outside (v 11). The loan (*mash'at me'umah* — 'a loan of anything') is stated broadly to cover all lending situations. This law protects the borrower's autonomy and prevents creditor intimidation.
11. The creditor must wait *bacchuts* ('outside'), and the debtor himself brings the pledge out (*yotsi elekha* — 'he will bring it out to you'). The debtor chooses which item to pledge, preventing the creditor from selecting the most valuable or personally meaningful possessions. This small detail encodes a profound respect for the borrower's agency even in a position of financial weakness.
12. Special protection for the poor borrower: *lo tishkav ba'avoto* ('you shall not sleep with his pledge' — you must not keep it overnight). A poor man's pledge was likely his outer garment — the cloak used as a blanket. Keeping it overnight would leave him cold. The creditor's property rights do not override the debtor's basic need for warmth. Exodus 22:26-27 states the same principle and adds: 'When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.'
13. The pledge must be returned *kevo'a hashemesh* ('at sunset') — before the cold night. The result: the borrower blesses the creditor (*uverkhekka* — 'and he will bless you'), and this act is counted as *tsedaqah* ('righteousness') before God. The term *tsedaqah* here means an act of justice that aligns with God's character — economic mercy is not charity but covenant righteousness.
14. The protection extends to both Israelites (*me'achekha* — 'from your brothers') and resident aliens (*migerekha* — 'from your strangers'). The terms *ani ve'evyon* ('poor and needy') describe economic vulnerability. The verb *lo ta'ashoq* ('do not oppress, exploit') covers wage theft, delayed payment, and taking advantage of the worker's desperate position. Economic exploitation of the vulnerable is a direct violation of covenant justice.
15. Day-laborers must receive same-day payment: *beyomo titten sekharo* ('on his day you must give his wages'). The phrase *ve'elav hu nose et nafsho* ('he lifts up his soul toward it' — his life depends on it) reveals the desperation of the poor worker who needs the money for that evening's meal. The theological dimension: the exploited worker may cry to God (*yiqra alekha el YHWH* — 'he will cry out against you to the LORD'), and God will hold the employer accountable.

16. The principle of individual criminal responsibility: *ish bechet'o yumatu* ('each person shall be put to death for his own sin'). This stands in tension with passages about God visiting iniquity on children (Exodus 20:5), but the distinction is between divine prerogative and human judicial practice. Human courts may not execute family members for another's crime. King Amaziah applied this law in 2 Kings 14:6, refusing to execute the children of his father's assassins.
17. Three vulnerable groups receive specific legal protection: the *ger* ('foreigner, resident alien'), the *yatom* ('fatherless, orphan'), and the *almanah* ('widow'). This triad appears repeatedly in Deuteronomy (10:18, 14:29, 16:11, 24:19-21, 26:12-13). The prohibition against taking a widow's garment as pledge extends the principle of verses 10-13 to the most vulnerable — she may not be made to surrender even her clothing for a debt.
18. The motivational formula *vezakharta ki eved hayita beMitsrayim* ('remember that you were a slave in Egypt') grounds social justice in historical experience. Israel's obligation to the vulnerable is rooted in their own history of vulnerability. The verb *vayifdekha* ('He redeemed you') uses the commercial term for buying back from slavery — God paid the price for Israel's freedom, and this act creates an obligation to extend similar mercy.
19. The forgotten sheaf law (*shikchah* — 'forgetfulness') converts accidental oversight into deliberate provision. If you forget an omer ('sheaf') during harvest, it must remain for the vulnerable triad (*ger*, *yatom*, *almanah*). The law transforms human imperfection into divine provision — God uses what we forget to feed those we might overlook. The blessing formula (*lema'an yevarkhekha YHWH* — 'so that the LORD may bless you') makes generosity the pathway to prosperity.
20. Olives were harvested by beating the branches with poles (*tachbot* — 'you beat'). The prohibition *lo tefa'er acharekha* ('do not go over after yourself') forbids a second pass — the remaining olives belong to the vulnerable. The verb *fa'ar* in this context means to strip clean or glean thoroughly. Like the forgotten sheaf, this law builds social welfare into the harvest process itself.
21. The vineyard gleaning law completes the triad of agricultural provisions: grain (v 19), olives (v 20), and grapes (v 21). The verb *te'olel* ('glean, gather small clusters') specifically refers to collecting the small, imperfect grape clusters left after the main harvest. Ruth exercised this right in Boaz's field (Ruth 2). The three laws together create a comprehensive welfare system built into Israel's agricultural economy.
22. The chapter closes as verse 18 did: with the slavery-memory formula. The repetition frames the entire section (vv 17-22) as motivated by exodus memory. Israel's social ethic is not abstract morality but experienced theology — 'you were vulnerable once; now protect the vulnerable.' The corporate memory of slavery creates perpetual obligation toward the marginalized.

25

Summary: *Moses limits judicial flogging, mandates the levirate marriage for a brother who dies without sons, prescribes the sandal-removal ceremony for refusal, and commands the destruction of Amalek's memory.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The levirate marriage law (yibbum, vv. 5-10) preserves the dead brother's name and inheritance through his living brother. The refusal ceremony is publicly humiliating: the widow pulls off the brother-in-law's sandal and spits in his face, and his family is known as 'the house of the one whose sandal was removed.' The chapter closes with the command to blot out Amalek's memory (v. 19) — a paradox, since the command to remember to destroy ensures Amalek is never forgotten.*

Translation Friction: *The word yevamah (v. 7, 'brother-in-law's wife') is a technical legal term from the root y-b-m that gives the institution its name (yibbum). English has no equivalent — 'levirate' comes from the Latin levir, not from Hebrew. The chalitsah ceremony (v. 9, pulling off the sandal) may connect to the sandal transaction in Ruth 4:7-8, though the relationship between the two customs is debated.*

Connections: *The levirate law provides the legal framework for Ruth 4 and Tamar's claim in Genesis 38. The Sadducees use it to challenge Jesus about resurrection (Matthew 22:23-28). The Amalek command is executed by Saul (1 Samuel 15) and Esther (Esther 9). The flogging limit (v. 3) is referenced by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:24.*

¹When there is a dispute between people and they go to court, the judges must decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty. ²If the guilty person deserves flogging, the judge must have him lie down and be flogged in his presence, with the number of lashes corresponding to the severity of his offense. ³He may be given up to forty lashes but no more. If he is flogged beyond that with excessive blows, your brother will be degraded in your sight. ⁴You must not muzzle an ox while it is treading out grain. ⁵When brothers live together and one of them dies without a son, the dead man's wife must not marry outside the family to a stranger. Her brother-in-law must go to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a brother-in-law for her. ⁶The first son she bears will carry on the name of the dead brother, so that his name is not

blotted out from Israel. ⁷But if the man does not want to marry his brother's widow, then the widow must go up to the gate, to the elders, and say, 'My brother-in-law refuses to preserve his brother's name in Israel. He is unwilling to perform the duty of a brother-in-law for me.' ⁸The elders of his city must summon him and speak with him. If he still stands firm and says, 'I do not want to marry her,' ⁹then his brother's widow must approach him in the presence of the elders, pull his sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and declare: 'This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's household.' ¹⁰His family will be known in Israel as 'The House of the Removed Sandal.' ¹¹If two men are fighting each other, and the wife of one of them intervenes to rescue her husband from the one striking him, and she reaches out and grabs the other man's genitals, ¹²you must cut off her hand. Your eye must not show pity. ¹³You must not have two different weights in your bag — a large one and a small one. ¹⁴You must not have two different measures in your house — a large one and a small one. ¹⁵You must use only full and honest weights, and full and honest measures, so that you may live long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁶For everyone who does these things — everyone who acts dishonestly — is detestable to the LORD your God. ¹⁷Remember what Amalek did to you on the road when you were coming out of Egypt — ¹⁸how he encountered you on the road and attacked your rear guard — all the stragglers trailing behind you — when you were exhausted and weary, and he had no fear of God. ¹⁹Therefore, when the LORD your God grants you rest from all your enemies on every side in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, you must blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The judicial process begins with a riv ('dispute, controversy') between parties who bring it to the hammishpat ('the court, the place of judgment'). The judges' twofold duty is stated using causative verbs: hitsddiq et hatsaddiq ('declare righteous the righteous one' — acquit the innocent) and hirshi'u et harasha ('declare guilty the guilty one' — convict the wicked). Justice means accurate identification — not compromise between parties but truthful determination of right and wrong.
2. Flogging is administered only after judicial determination (im bin hakkot — 'if he is a son of beating,' i.e., deserves flogging). The phrase kedei rish'ato bemispar ('according to his guilt, by number') requires proportional punishment — the lash count must match the crime's severity. The judge must be present (lefanav — 'before his face') to ensure proper administration and prevent abuse.
3. The forty-lash maximum (arba'im yakkeno lo yosif — 'forty he may strike him, he shall not add') establishes an absolute ceiling on punishment. Jewish practice reduced this to thirty-nine lashes (2 Corinthians 11:24) to provide a margin of error against accidentally exceeding the limit. The reason is remarkably humane: veniqlah achikha le'einekha ('your brother would be degraded before your eyes'). Even a convicted criminal remains 'your brother' — punishment must not strip away his fundamental dignity.
4. One of the Bible's most concise laws: lo tachsom shor bedisho ('do not muzzle an ox during its threshing'). The ox walking over grain to separate kernels from chaff must be allowed to eat while working. Paul applies this principle to human workers in 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18, arguing from lesser to greater: if an animal deserves to eat from its labor, how much more does a human worker. The law establishes that even animals have rights to the fruit of their labor.
5. The levirate marriage law (from Latin levir, 'brother-in-law'). The conditions: brothers living together (yeshvu achim yachdav — sharing an estate), death of one brother, and childlessness (uven ein lo — 'he has no son'). The widow must not marry outside (lo tihyeh hachutsah le'ish zar — 'shall not go outside to a stranger'). The brother-in-law's obligation (yevamah yavo aleiha — 'her levir shall go to her') preserves the dead brother's name and estate. Ruth and Boaz's story illustrates a broader application of this principle.
6. The firstborn from the levirate union yaqum al shem achiv hammet ('shall stand upon the name of his dead brother') — legally considered the dead brother's son for purposes of inheritance and lineage. The fear is that his name would be erased: velo yimmacheh shemo miYisra'el ('his name shall not be wiped out from Israel'). In a culture where family name continuity was linked to ongoing covenantal membership, name-erasure was a form of social death.
7. The refusal clause: im lo yachpots ha'ish ('if the man does not desire'). The widow has legal standing to bring a public complaint before the elders at the gate. Her accusation — me'en yevami lehaqim le'achiv shem beYisra'el ('my levir refuses to raise up a name for his brother in Israel') — reframes his personal preference as a failure of family obligation.
8. The elders' intervention creates a judicial hearing — they summon the man (veqare'u lo — 'they shall call him'), speak with him (vedibru elav — 'they shall speak to him'), presumably urging him to fulfill his obligation. Only after this mediation, if he remains adamant (ve'amad ve'amar — 'he stands and says'), does the chalitzah ceremony proceed.
9. The chalitzah ('removal') ceremony has three symbolic acts: removing his sandal (vechaltsah na'alo — sandal-removal signified transfer of rights, as in Ruth 4:7-8), spitting in his face (veyarqah befanav — public shaming for his refusal), and a verbal proclamation. The act publicly shames the man for prioritizing self-interest over family obligation. The phrase asher lo yivneh et bet achiv ('who will not build up his brother's house') equates his refusal

with allowing a family line to die.

10. The lasting social consequence: *bet chaluts hanna'al* ('the house of the removed sandal') becomes the man's family designation — a permanent mark of shame. His refusal to build his brother's house results in a degraded name for his own house. The stigma is generational: his descendants carry the label of a family that failed its covenant obligation.
11. The highly specific case involves a wife intervening in a fight (*lehatsil et ishah* — 'to rescue her husband') by seizing the attacker's genitals (*hechezqah bimevushav* — 'she seized his private parts'). The scenario addresses a woman using a man's vulnerability as a weapon. The specificity suggests this case arose in actual legal practice and required a formal ruling.
12. The penalty — *veqatsotah et kappah* ('you shall cut off her hand') — is the only instance of mutilation as punishment in Deuteronomy's legal code. Some scholars interpret *kappah* ('her palm, her hand') metaphorically as a fine paid 'from her hand' (i.e., her resources), noting that the *lex talionis* elsewhere in Deuteronomy functions as proportional rather than literal punishment. The phrase *lo tachos einekha* ('your eye shall not pity') repeats from 19:13, 21.
13. The prohibition against even *va'even* ('stone and stone' — two different weights) addresses commercial fraud. Stone weights were used on balance scales to measure commodities for sale. Having two sets — a heavy one for buying (paying less) and a light one for selling (charging more) — was a common form of marketplace deception. The idiom 'stone and stone' means two weights that differ when they should be identical.
14. The parallel prohibition extends from weights (v 13) to volume measures: *efah ve'efah* ('ephah and ephah' — two different dry measures). The ephah was a standard dry measure (approximately 22 liters). Having two different ephah containers — one for buying grain and another for selling it — was another form of commercial fraud. The law demands consistency between the measure used to purchase and the one used to sell.
15. The positive command: *even shelemah vatsedeq* ('a complete and righteous weight') and *efah shelemah vatsedeq* ('a complete and righteous measure'). The adjective *tsedeq* ('just, righteous') applied to weights and measures means accurate, honest, fair. The reward for commercial integrity is the same as for honoring parents: *lema'an ya'arikhu yamekha* ('so that your days may be long'). Economic justice and national longevity are linked — a society built on fraud cannot endure.
16. Commercial dishonesty receives Deuteronomy's strongest condemnation: *to'avat YHWH* ('detestable to the LORD'). The expansion *kol oseh avel* ('everyone who does injustice') broadens the principle from specific weights-and-measures fraud to all forms of economic dishonesty. The paragraph marker (pe) after this verse creates a strong break before the Amalek remembrance.
17. The command *zakhor* ('remember') opens the Amalek remembrance, the final unit of the Deuteronomic law code. The exodus road (*baderekh betse'tkhem miMitsrayim* — 'on the way when you came out of Egypt') refers to the attack described in Exodus 17:8-16. Amalek's assault on a vulnerable, newly freed people makes them the paradigmatic enemy of Israel.
18. Amalek's cowardice is exposed: *vayezannev bekha kol hannecheshalim acharekha* ('he cut off your tail — all the weak ones trailing behind you'). The verb *zinnev* ('attack the rear, cut off the tail') describes targeting the most vulnerable — the elderly, the sick, the children who could not keep pace. The moral judgment: *velo yare Elohim* ('he did not fear God'). Attacking the defenseless reveals the absence of any moral restraint. This is not military aggression but predatory cruelty.
19. The command *timchek et zekher Amaleq mittachat hashamayim* ('blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven') is paradoxically self-contradictory: remembering to forget. The concluding *lo tishkach* ('do not forget') creates a permanent obligation. King Saul's failure to complete this mandate (1 Samuel 15) cost him his kingdom. The Amalek remembrance closes the Deuteronomic law code proper — what follows in chapters 26-28 are ceremonies and blessings/curses.

26

Summary: Moses prescribes the firstfruits liturgy — a confession beginning 'my father was a wandering Aramean' — and the tithe declaration, then concludes with a mutual covenant declaration between God and Israel.

*What Makes This Remarkable: The firstfruits confession (vv. 5-9) is the earliest creed in Israel — a narrative summary of salvation history recited by every farmer at the sanctuary. It begins with *arami oved avi* ('my father was a wandering Aramean' or 'an Aramean was destroying my father'), and each verb marks a stage: went down, became a nation, was oppressed, cried out, was brought out. The chapter closes with the covenant's most intimate formula (vv. 17-18): God declares Israel His treasured people (*am segullah*) and Israel declares the LORD their God — a mutual pledging.*

*Translation Friction: The phrase *arami oved avi* (v. 5) is famously ambiguous: 'a wandering Aramean was my father' (Jacob the nomad) or 'an Aramean was destroying my father' (Laban threatened Jacob). The verb *oved* can mean 'perishing,' 'wandering,' or 'destroying.' We rendered it 'my father was a wandering Aramean' and noted both readings. The Passover Haggadah builds its entire exposition on this verse.*

Connections: The firstfruits creed (vv. 5-9) is recited at Passover to this day. The phrase yad chazaqah uzero'a netuyah ('powerful hand and outstretched arm,' v. 8) echoes 4:34 and 5:15. The am segullah declaration (v. 18) closes the circle opened in 7:6 and Exodus 19:5. Paul echoes the 'zealous for good works' language of v. 18 in Titus 2:14.

¹When you enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you take possession of it and settle in it, ²you must take some of the first of all the produce of the ground that you harvest from the land the LORD your God is giving you. Place it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for His name. ³You will go to the priest who is serving at that time and say to him, 'I declare today to the LORD your God that I have entered the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.' ⁴The priest will take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. ⁵Then you will respond and say before the LORD your God: 'My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt and lived there as a foreigner with only a few people, but there he became a great, powerful, and numerous nation. ⁶The Egyptians treated us harshly, oppressed us, and imposed brutal forced labor on us. ⁷So we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors. The LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, our hardship, and our oppression. ⁸The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a powerful hand and an outstretched arm, with overwhelming terror, and with signs and wonders. ⁹He brought us to this place and gave us this land — a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground that you, LORD, have given me.' You will set it before the LORD your God and bow down in worship before the LORD your God. ¹¹Then you will celebrate all the good things that the LORD your God has given to you and your household — you, the Levite, and the foreigner living among you. ¹²When you have finished setting aside the full tenth of your produce in the third year — the year of the tithe — and have given it to the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be satisfied, ¹³then you will say before the LORD your God: 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house. I have also given it to the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow, exactly as you commanded me. I have not violated your commandments, and I have not forgotten them. ¹⁴I have not eaten any of it while in mourning. I have not removed any of it while ritually impure. I have not offered any of it to the dead. I have listened to the voice of the LORD my God and have done everything you commanded me. ¹⁵Look down from your holy dwelling place, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground you have given us — just as you swore to our ancestors — a land flowing with milk and honey.' ¹⁶Today the LORD your God is commanding you to follow these statutes and ordinances. You must keep and observe them with all your heart and with all your being. ¹⁷You have declared today that the LORD is your God, and that you will walk in His ways, keep His statutes, His commandments, and His ordinances, and listen to His voice. ¹⁸And the LORD has declared today that you are His treasured people, just as He promised you, and that you must keep all His commandments. ¹⁹He will set you high above all the nations He has made — for praise, for renown, and for glory — and you will be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verse opens with a temporal clause (ki tavo — 'when you enter') that assumes successful conquest. Three sequential verbs describe the progression: tavo ('enter'), yerishtah ('take possession'), and yashavta ('settle, dwell'). The term nachalah ('inheritance, hereditary possession') signals that the land is not merely territory but a covenantal bequest — a divine grant to be held across generations. This verse provides the heading for the entire firstfruits ritual.
2. The term reshit ('first, beginning, choicest') denotes the initial portion of the harvest — the firstfruits offered before the rest is consumed. The tene ('basket') is a woven container used specifically for produce transport; it reappears in verse 4 when the priest takes it. The phrase leshakken shemo sham ('to cause His name to dwell there') is Deuteronomy's distinctive formula for the central sanctuary — God's 'name' represents His accessible presence without limiting His cosmic transcendence.
3. The verb higgadti ('I have declared, I have announced') opens a formal public statement — this is legal testimony, not casual conversation. The phrase asher yihyeh bayyamim hahem ('who will be in those days') acknowledges that the priesthood will change across generations, but the ritual persists regardless of which priest serves. The oath to the ancestors (nishba laavotenu) ties the present moment of harvest to the patriarchal promises — every basket of fruit is proof that God kept His word.
4. The priest serves as mediator: he receives the basket (tene) from the worshiper's hand (miyadekha — 'from your hand,' emphasizing the personal transfer) and places it before the altar. The verb hinnicho ('he will set it down, deposit it') suggests a deliberate, ceremonial placement — not tossing the basket aside but positioning it in the presence of God. The altar is the meeting point between the worshiper's gratitude and God's provision.

5. The phrase *arami oved avi* is one of the most debated in the Hebrew Bible. *Oved* can mean 'perishing, lost, wandering, destitute.' The Aramean is Jacob, whose family connections trace to Aram (Paddan-aram). This three-word confession — 'a wandering Aramean was my father' — became the liturgical foundation of the Passover Haggadah. The entire creed (vv 5-9) compresses centuries of history into a single recitation: from one homeless ancestor to a mighty nation, from Egyptian bondage to divine deliverance, from wilderness to a land flowing with milk and honey. The verb *vayagar* ('he sojourned, lived as an alien') marks Jacob's status in Egypt as a resident foreigner with no land rights — the same word used of Abraham in Canaan.
6. Three verbs escalate the oppression: *vayyare'u* ('they treated us badly, they did evil to us'), *vay'annunu* ('they afflicted, oppressed us' — the same root as the 'affliction' God later sees in v 7), and *vayyittenu* ('they placed upon us'). The term *avodah qashah* ('hard labor, harsh servitude') echoes Exodus 1:14 where the Egyptians made Israel's lives bitter with 'hard labor.' The creed does not dwell on specific events but compresses decades of suffering into a single devastating sentence.
7. The turning point of the creed: Israel cries and God responds. The verb *vanitsa'aq* ('we cried out') is a cry of desperation, not a polite prayer. God's response is described with three sensory verbs and their objects: *vayishma* ('He heard') our voice, *vayyar* ('He saw') our *onyenu* ('affliction, misery'), *amalenu* ('toil, hardship'), and *lachatsenu* ('oppression, pressure'). Each noun carries a distinct shade of suffering: *oni* is material deprivation, *amal* is exhausting toil, and *lachats* is the crushing weight of external force.
8. Five prepositional phrases describe the means of deliverance — each introduced by the prefix *be* ('with'). The *yad chazaqah* ('strong hand') and *zero'a netuyah* ('outstretched arm') are classic exodus language, depicting God as a warrior whose arm reaches across nations. The *mora gadol* ('great terror') refers to the dread God struck into the Egyptians. The *otot* ('signs') and *mofetim* ('wonders') encompass the plagues and the sea-crossing. This verse is a compressed theology of the exodus: God acts with power (hand/arm), psychological force (terror), and supernatural demonstration (signs/wonders).
9. The creed concludes with arrival and gift. 'This place' (*hamaqom hazzeh*) may refer either to the central sanctuary or to the promised land itself. The phrase *erets zavat chalav udevash* ('a land flowing with milk and honey') is the classic description of Canaan's abundance — milk from pastoral herds and honey (likely date syrup, *devash*) from orchards. The formula appears over twenty times in the Torah and always points back to God's original promise. The worshiper standing with his basket of firstfruits is living proof that the promise was fulfilled.
10. The spoken creed (vv 5-10a) ends with *ve'attah hinneh heveti* ('and now, look — I have brought'), connecting the grand sweep of salvation history directly to the basket of fruit in the worshiper's hands. The logic is: because God brought us out and brought us in, I now bring this offering. The shift from first-person speech ('I have brought') to second-person instruction ('you will set it down... you will bow') marks the transition from the recited creed back to the ritual instructions. The verb *hishtachavita* ('bow down in worship') is a full prostration — the physical expression of gratitude and submission.
11. The verb *vesamachta* ('you will rejoice, celebrate') makes joy a commandment — gratitude is not optional but a required covenant response to God's generosity. The celebration is inclusive: it extends to your household (*ulveitekha*), the Levite (who has no territorial inheritance and depends on community support), and the *ger* ('foreigner, resident alien'). Deuteronomy consistently insists that Israel's worship include the economically vulnerable. The sectional marker (*samekh*) in the Hebrew text closes the firstfruits legislation.
12. The third-year tithe (*ma'aser* — a tenth) is distinguished from the regular annual tithe. In years one, two, four, and five of the seven-year cycle, the tithe was consumed at the central sanctuary. In the third year (and sixth year), the entire tithe remained local, distributed to four categories of vulnerable people: the Levite (landless clergy), the *ger* (foreigner), the *yatom* (orphan, fatherless), and the *almanah* (widow). The verb *vesaw'u* ('and they will be satisfied, filled') makes the purpose explicit — this is not token charity but provision to the point of fullness.
13. The tithe confession (*viddui ma'aser*) begins here and runs through verse 15. The verb *bi'arti* ('I have removed, I have purged') treats the sacred tithe as something that must not remain in the house beyond its appointed time — retaining what belongs to the vulnerable is a form of defilement. The two negative declarations — *lo avarti* ('I have not transgressed, violated') and *lo shakhachti* ('I have not forgotten') — cover both intentional disobedience and negligent omission. The worshiper accounts for both will and memory.
14. Three more negative declarations (*lo akhalti, lo vi'arti, lo natati* — 'I have not eaten, I have not removed, I have not given') specify what could contaminate the sacred tithe. Eating *be'oni* ('in my mourning, in my grief') would associate the sacred portion with death-impurity. Handling it *betamei* ('in a state of ritual impurity') would violate its consecrated status. Giving it *lamet* ('for the dead') likely refers to funerary offerings or meals for the dead — a practice common in surrounding cultures but forbidden in Israel. These three prohibitions guard the boundary between the holy and the impure, between legitimate worship and pagan custom. The confession closes with a positive affirmation: *shamati beqol* ('I have listened to the voice of') — obedience summarized as attentive hearing.
15. The confession concludes with a prayer — a rare shift from declaration to petition. The verb *hashqifah* ('look down, gaze from above') asks God to direct His attention from His cosmic dwelling (*me'on qodshekha* — 'your holy habitation') in heaven toward His people below. The request is twofold: bless the people (*et ammekha et yisra'el*) and bless the land (*ve'et ha'adamah*). The closing phrase *erets zavat chalav udevash* ('a land flowing with milk and honey') echoes verse 9, forming a literary bracket around the entire ritual. The sectional marker (*samekh*) closes the tithe confession.
16. The final section (vv 16-19) shifts from specific ritual instructions to the overarching covenant framework. The phrase *hayyom hazzeh* ('this day, today') gives the commandments urgency — not ancient history but present obligation. The pairing of *chuyim* ('statutes' — prescribed regulations) and *mishpatim* ('ordinances, judgments' — case-law decisions) covers the full spectrum of covenant legislation. The phrase *bekhol levavekha uvekhol nafshekha* ('with all your heart and with all your being') demands total engagement — not grudging compliance but wholehearted devotion. The term

nefesh here means the whole self, not merely the 'soul' in a Greek philosophical sense.

17. The rare verb *he'emarta* (*hifil of amar* — 'you have caused to say, you have declared, you have affirmed') appears only here and in verse 18 in the entire Hebrew Bible. Its precise meaning is debated: 'you have declared,' 'you have affirmed,' or 'you have acknowledged.' The effect is a public, binding statement — Israel formally declares YHWH to be their God, with five accompanying commitments: walking in His ways, keeping statutes (*chuvav*), commandments (*mitsvotav*), ordinances (*mishpatav*), and listening to His voice (*lishmo'a beqolo*). This is Israel's side of the mutual covenant declaration.
18. The reciprocal declaration: in verse 17, Israel declared God; now God declares Israel. The verb *he'emirka* ('He has declared you') mirrors *he'emarta* ('you have declared'). The term *am segullah* ('treasured people, prized possession') is one of the most significant covenant designations in the Torah, first used at Sinai (Exodus 19:5). It describes Israel not as a servant-nation but as a king's personal treasure — chosen, valued, and guarded. The condition attached (*velishmor kol mitsvotav* — 'and to keep all His commandments') reminds Israel that the treasured status carries obligations.
19. The chapter closes with the highest covenant promise: Israel set *elyon* ('high, supreme') above all nations. The three purpose phrases — *lithillah* ('for praise'), *uleshem* ('for renown, for a name'), *uletifaret* ('for glory, splendor') — describe not Israel's self-glorification but their role as God's display of covenant faithfulness to the watching world. The final phrase *am qadosh laYHWH* ('a holy people belonging to the LORD') echoes Exodus 19:6 and Deuteronomy 7:6, forming a theological bracket around the entire book's legislation. The closing *ka'asher dibber* ('just as He has spoken') grounds everything in God's prior word — His promise precedes and guarantees Israel's destiny. The paragraph marker (*pe*) closes the chapter.

27

Summary: *Moses and the elders command Israel to set up plastered stones inscribed with the Law on Mount Ebal after crossing the Jordan. Six tribes stand on Gerizim for blessing, six on Ebal for curse, and the Levites pronounce twelve curses.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The twelve curses (vv. 15-26) target sins committed in secret — idolatry behind closed doors, moving boundary stones at night, misleading the blind, perverting justice for the vulnerable, and sexual violations. The structure assumes that public law enforcement will miss these offenses; the curse ceremony transfers accountability to God. Each curse ends with 'and all the people will say: Amen' — the community collectively ratifies divine judgment on hidden sin.*

Translation Friction: *The word arur (v. 15, 'condemned/cursed') is performative speech — pronouncing the curse activates it. We rendered it 'condemned' rather than 'cursed' to avoid the magical connotation while preserving the judicial force. The final curse (v. 26) is sweeping: 'condemned is the one who does not uphold the words of this instruction by carrying them out.' Paul quotes this in Galatians 3:10 as the curse from which Christ redeems.*

Connections: *The Ebal ceremony is executed in Joshua 8:30-35. The plastered-stone inscription connects to ancient Near Eastern treaty practice. Paul's citation of v. 26 in Galatians 3:10 makes this verse pivotal to the theology of law and grace. The twelve-curse structure parallels the twelve-tribe organization of blessing in chapter 33.*

¹Moses, together with the elders of Israel, gave the people this charge: 'Guard every commandment that I am laying upon you today.' ²On the day you cross the Jordan into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you must set up large stones and coat them with plaster. ³You must inscribe on them all the words of this instruction once you have crossed over, so that you may enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you — a land flowing with milk and honey — just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you. ⁴When you have crossed the Jordan, you must erect these stones that I am commanding you about today on Mount Ebal, and coat them with plaster. ⁵There you must build an altar to the LORD your God — an altar of stones. You must not use any iron tool on them. ⁶You must construct the altar of the LORD your God from whole, uncut stones, and on it you will present burnt offerings to the LORD your God. ⁷You will also sacrifice fellowship offerings there, eat the meal, and celebrate in the presence of the LORD your God. ⁸You must write on the stones all the words of this instruction, making them very clear. ⁹Then Moses and the Levitical priests addressed all of Israel: 'Be silent and listen, Israel! On this day you have become the people of the LORD your God.' ¹⁰You must therefore listen to the voice of the LORD your God and carry out His commandments and His statutes that I am charging you with today. ¹¹That same day Moses instructed the people as follows: ¹²These tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim to pronounce blessing over the people once you have crossed the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. ¹³And these will stand on Mount

Ebal for the pronouncement of curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. ¹⁴The Levites will then declare to every person of Israel in a raised voice: ¹⁵'Condemned is the person who crafts a carved or cast idol — something the LORD detests — the product of a craftsman's hands, and sets it up in a hidden place.' And all the people will respond: 'Amen.' ¹⁶'Condemned is the one who treats his father or mother with contempt.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.' ¹⁷'Condemned is the one who moves his neighbor's boundary marker.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.' ¹⁸'Condemned is the one who leads a blind person astray on the road.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.' ¹⁹'Condemned is the one who distorts justice for the foreigner, the orphan, or the widow.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.' ²⁰'Condemned is the one who sleeps with his father's wife, for he has violated his father's marriage.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.' ²¹'Condemned is the one who has sexual relations with any animal.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.' ²²'Condemned is the one who sleeps with his sister, whether his father's daughter or his mother's daughter.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.' ²³'Condemned is the one who sleeps with his mother-in-law.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.' ²⁴'Condemned is the one who strikes down his neighbor in secret.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.' ²⁵'Condemned is the one who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.' ²⁶'Condemned is the one who does not uphold the words of this instruction by carrying them out.' And all the people will say: 'Amen.'

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *shamor* ('guard, keep watch over') conveys more than mere obedience — it implies vigilant, ongoing protection of the commandment, as a watchman guards a post. The singular *mitsvah* ('commandment') used collectively for the entire body of instruction suggests the covenant obligation is a unified whole, not a disconnected list. Moses shares authority with the elders (*ziquei Yisra'el*) for this charge, signaling that covenant responsibility will outlast his leadership.
2. The command to erect *avanim gedolot* ('large stones') and coat them with *sid* ('lime plaster, whitewash') describes an ancient Near Eastern practice of creating a smooth writing surface on rough stone. Egyptian and Mesopotamian parallels show that lime-plastered stelae were used for public display of royal decrees and treaty texts. The immediacy of *bayyom asher* ('on the day that') — the very day of crossing — signals that covenant inscription is the first act of possession, establishing the land under God's written terms before any settlement begins.
3. The phrase *divrei hattorah hazot* ('the words of this instruction') raises the question of scope: does 'this torah' refer to the entire Deuteronomic law code, a summary of it, or the blessings and curses of chapters 27-28? The phrase *erets zavat chalav udevash* ('a land flowing with milk and honey') is a fixed formula appearing over twenty times in the Pentateuch — *chalav* ('milk') represents pastoral abundance and *devash* ('honey,' likely date syrup rather than bee honey) represents agricultural sweetness. The land's character is defined by its covenant promise: *ka'asher dibber* ('just as He spoke/promised').
4. The location *behar Eival* ('on Mount Ebal') is theologically significant: Ebal is the mountain of cursing (v 13), not the mountain of blessing. The Samaritan Pentateuch reads 'Mount Gerizim' here instead, reflecting the Samaritan-Jewish dispute over the legitimate cult site. The placement of the inscribed law on the mountain of curse may suggest that the written torah serves as a witness against covenant violation — a permanent warning monument rather than a celebratory marker.
5. The prohibition *lo tanif aleihem barzel* ('you must not swing iron upon them') forbids shaping the altar stones with metal tools. The verb *tanif* ('swing, wave, wield') specifically describes the motion of lifting a tool to strike. The requirement for unworked stone (cf. Exodus 20:25) preserves the natural state of God's creation — human craftsmanship would impose human artistry on a structure meant to represent divine encounter. Iron (*barzel*) may also carry associations with weaponry, making the prohibition a statement that the altar is a place of peace, not violence.
6. The term *avanim shelemot* ('whole, complete, uncut stones') uses the same root as *shalom* ('peace, wholeness') — the stones must be *shalem*, intact as God made them. The *olot* ('burnt offerings, ascending offerings') are sacrifices entirely consumed by fire; nothing is retained by the worshiper. The verb *he'elita* ('you will cause to ascend') describes the smoke rising upward — the offering 'ascends' to God. The burnt offering on uncut stone at the covenant's inauguration establishes the pattern of total consecration at the moment of national commitment.
7. Unlike the *olah* (burnt offering) of verse 6, the *shelamim* ('fellowship offerings, peace offerings') are shared meals — portions go to God (fat burned on the altar), to the priest, and to the worshiper. The sequence *zavachta... akhalta... samachta* ('you will sacrifice... eat... rejoice') moves from ritual act to communal meal to emotional response. The covenant ceremony is not solely solemn — it includes feasting and joy (*simchah*) in God's presence. This combination of sacrifice, shared eating, and celebration characterizes covenant-making throughout the ancient Near East.
8. The phrase *ba'er hetev* ('making clear, explaining well') uses the verb *ba'ar* ('to make distinct, to engrave clearly, to elucidate'). This is not merely legible handwriting but a demand for clarity of meaning — the same root appears in Deuteronomy 1:5 where Moses 'explains' (*be'er*) the torah. The law must be both physically readable and intellectually accessible. The *setumah* paragraph marker after this verse separates the stone-inscription instructions (vv 1-8) from the covenant ceremony that follows (vv 9-26).

9. The rare verb *hasket* ('be silent, pay close attention') appears only here and in Deuteronomy 27:9 in the entire Hebrew Bible — it demands a quality of attention beyond ordinary hearing: stop everything and absorb what follows. The declaration *nihyeta le'am laYHWH* ('you have become a people belonging to the LORD') is performative — the statement itself constitutes the event. This is covenant formation language: Israel's identity as God's people is being established in this moment. Moses now shares authority with *hakkohanim haleviyim* ('the Levitical priests'), signaling the transition of covenant guardianship to the priestly class.
10. The two categories of obligation — *mitsvotav* ('His commandments,' specific directives) and *chuqqotav* ('His statutes,' fixed decrees) — together encompass the full range of covenant requirements. The verb *shamata* ('you shall hear/obey') carries the double sense of hearing and doing that is characteristic of Hebrew covenantal language — to truly hear God's voice is to act on it. The *setumah* marker closes this brief section (vv 9-10) in which Moses and the priests establish Israel's new identity before the tribal ceremony begins.
11. The phrase *bayyom hahu* ('on that day, that same day') anchors the tribal assignment ceremony to the same occasion as the preceding commands. The verb *vayetsav* ('he commanded, he charged') signals a shift from the general covenant declaration (vv 9-10) to specific ceremonial instructions for the tribes. This brief transitional verse introduces the liturgical arrangement of verses 12-26.
12. The six blessing tribes on Har Gerizim ('Mount Gerizim') are all sons of Rachel and Leah — the two primary wives of Jacob. The verb *levarekh* ('to bless') positions them as channels of divine favor. Mount Gerizim, the southern mountain overlooking Shechem, is the fertile, well-watered slope — geographically suited to represent blessing. The tribal division is not random: Simeon, Levi, Judah, and Issachar are Leah's sons; Joseph and Benjamin are Rachel's sons. The tribes of the two full wives stand for blessing; the tribes of the two concubines (Bilhah and Zilpah) stand for curse on Ebal.
13. The six tribes on Ebal include four sons of the concubines Bilhah and Zilpah (Gad, Asher, Dan, Naphtali), plus Reuben — who lost his firstborn status by sleeping with Bilhah (Genesis 35:22) — and Zebulun, Leah's youngest. The phrase *al haqqelalah* ('for the curse, upon the curse') positions these tribes not as cursed themselves but as witnesses to the covenant's negative sanctions. The geographic arrangement — two mountains with a valley between them — creates a natural amphitheater where the antiphonal recitation of blessings and curses would resonate across the assembled tribes.
14. The verb *ve'anu* ('they will answer, they will respond') suggests the Levites are responding to a prior statement or liturgical cue — the curse recitation is part of a structured call-and-response ceremony. The phrase *qol ram* ('a raised voice, a loud voice') indicates public proclamation — the curses must be heard by all. The Levites serve as the mediating voice between God and Israel: they stand on Gerizim for blessing (v 12) yet also pronounce the curses (here), functioning as neutral covenant administrators rather than partisans of either mountain.
15. The first of twelve *arur* ('condemned, cursed') declarations. Two types of idol are specified: *pesel* ('carved image,' from wood or stone) and *massekha* ('molten image,' cast metal). The phrase *to'avat YHWH* ('an abomination to the LORD, something the LORD detests') marks idolatry as the supreme covenant violation. Crucially, the idol is placed *bassater* ('in secret, in a hidden place') — this curse targets private, concealed sin that escapes human detection. The entire twelve-curse series (vv 15-26) addresses offenses committed in secret, beyond the reach of courts and witnesses. The communal response *ve'anu khol ha'am ve'amru Amen* ('and all the people will answer and say Amen') makes each individual personally ratify the curse — the Amen is a self-imprecation, binding oneself to the consequences. This liturgical pattern transforms the congregation from passive listeners into active participants in covenant enforcement.
16. The participle *maqlah* ('one who makes light of, treats with contempt') is the opposite of *kavod* ('honor, give weight to') — the fifth commandment demands that parents be given weight, and this curse targets those who make them lightweight, treating them as insignificant. The verb *qalah* means to diminish, trivialize, or curse — it covers a range from verbal abuse to material neglect. Like all twelve curses, this addresses behavior that could be hidden from public view: private mistreatment of aging parents within the household.
17. The participle *massig* ('one who moves, displaces') with *gevul* ('boundary, border, landmark') describes the covert relocation of property boundary stones — a crime committed under cover of darkness that steals land incrementally. In an agrarian society where land was the primary form of wealth and was understood as God's covenantal allotment to each family, moving a boundary stone was not mere theft but an assault on the divine distribution of inheritance. This offense also appears in the wisdom tradition (Proverbs 22:28, 23:10) and in prophetic condemnation (Hosea 5:10).
18. The participle *mashgeh* ('one who causes to go astray, one who misleads') with *ivver* ('a blind person') describes deliberate exploitation of someone's physical vulnerability. The phrase *baddarekh* ('on the road') makes it concrete — misdirecting a blind traveler. However, the principle extends beyond literal blindness: Leviticus 19:14 pairs 'do not curse the deaf' with 'do not place a stumbling block before the blind,' suggesting a broader ethic of protecting the vulnerable from exploitation they cannot detect. The secrecy theme continues: the victim cannot see the perpetrator.
19. The verb *matteh* ('bends, distorts, perverts') with *mishpat* ('justice, legal judgment') describes corruption of the judicial process to disadvantage those who lack social power. The triad *ger-yatom-ve'almanah* ('foreigner, orphan, widow') represents the three most vulnerable categories in Israelite society — those without the protection of a male head of household or clan membership. Deuteronomy returns to their protection repeatedly (10:18, 14:29, 16:11, 24:17, 26:12-13). The textual note at the end records uncertainty in the Aleppo Codex about whether a paragraph break (*setumah*) belongs here.
20. The metaphor *gilah kenaf aviv* ('he has uncovered his father's wing/covering') uses *kanaf* ('wing, edge of garment, protective covering') to describe marital rights and protection. To spread one's garment over a woman was to claim her as wife (Ruth 3:9); to uncover a father's 'wing' is to violate the protective covering of his marriage. The offense is not merely sexual — it is an assault on paternal authority and family structure. This likely refers to a stepmother (*eshet aviv* — 'his father's wife'), a situation that could arise after a father's death when a son might claim the father's widow.

- 21.** The phrase *shokhev im kol behemah* ('one who lies with any animal') prohibits bestiality in absolute terms — *kol* ('any, every') allows no exceptions. This violation crosses the creation boundary between human and animal that Genesis 1 established. The offense would by nature occur in secret (fields, barns, remote areas), fitting the chapter's pattern of sins committed beyond the reach of witnesses and courts. Parallel legislation appears in Exodus 22:19 and Leviticus 18:23, 20:15-16.
- 22.** The prohibition covers both full sisters (*bat aviv* — 'his father's daughter' and *bat immo* — 'his mother's daughter' being the same person) and half-sisters (sharing only one parent). The explicit mention of both paternal and maternal half-sisters closes any loophole — in a society that practiced polygamy, half-siblings from different mothers might not grow up in the same household, making such unions easier to conceal. The patriarchal narratives themselves record this as once permitted (Abraham and Sarah were half-siblings, Genesis 20:12), but the Levitical and Deuteronomic codes prohibit it.
- 23.** The term *chotanto* ('his mother-in-law') designates a relationship created by marriage rather than blood — sleeping with one's mother-in-law violates the network of trust and obligation that marriage establishes between families. Leviticus 20:14 prescribes execution by burning for this offense, placing it among the most severe sexual violations. The curse here supplements the legal penalty by addressing cases that escape detection: where no witnesses exist, the covenant curse stands as the enforcement mechanism.
- 24.** The participle *makkeh* ('one who strikes, one who kills') with *re'ehu* ('his neighbor, his fellow') *bassater* ('in secret') describes covert violence — assassination, ambush, or murder without witnesses. The word *bassater* ('in secret') appears here for the second time in the curse series (first in v 15 with the hidden idol), making the secrecy theme explicit. Where human courts cannot reach — because the crime is hidden — the covenant curse functions as divine prosecution. The legal system requires witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15); the curse system does not.
- 25.** The phrase *loqeach shochad* ('one who takes a bribe') with *lehakkot nefesh dam naqi* ('to strike down the life of innocent blood') describes contract killing — accepting payment to murder someone who has done nothing to deserve death. The term *dam naqi* ('innocent blood') is a recurring Deuteronomic concern (19:10, 13; 21:8-9); shedding innocent blood pollutes the land and brings collective guilt. The bribe (*shochad*) adds corruption of the justice system to murder — this curse targets hired assassins and corrupt judges who condemn the innocent to death for payment.
- 26.** The final curse is comprehensive: *asher lo yaqim et divrei hattorah hazot* ('who does not uphold/establish the words of this instruction'). The verb *yaqim* ('uphold, establish, make stand') implies active sustaining — not merely refraining from violation but positively maintaining the covenant. This twelfth curse functions as a catch-all: any obligation not specifically covered by the previous eleven is included here. The Apostle Paul quotes this verse in Galatians 3:10 as evidence that the law brings curse rather than justification. The *petuchah* paragraph marker closes the entire curse liturgy. By saying Amen to all twelve curses, every Israelite has personally accepted the covenant's enforcement mechanism — they have invoked divine judgment upon themselves should they violate these terms in secret.

28

Summary: *Moses pronounces the blessings for obedience (vv. 1-14) and the curses for disobedience (vv. 15-68), beginning with agricultural abundance or failure and escalating to siege, cannibalism, and exile. The chapter closes with the covenant made in Moab.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The blessings occupy 14 verses; the curses occupy 54. The asymmetry is the point — the consequences of disobedience are described in relentless, escalating detail that reads like a preview of Israel's actual history. The siege description (vv. 49-57) matches the Babylonian and Roman sieges with uncanny specificity. The chapter ends where it began — 'back to Egypt in ships' (v. 68), the ultimate reversal of the Exodus, and no one will buy them as slaves because even that degradation will be denied.*

Translation Friction: *The opening intensified infinitive *shamoa tishma* (v. 1, 'if you truly listen') sets a condition no generation fully meets. The *qere/ketiv* in verse 30 — where the written text (*ketiv*) uses the vulgar *yishgalenah* and the read text (*qere*) substitutes the euphemistic *yishkavenah* — is one of the Torah's most sensitive textual notes. We followed the WLC convention: *ketiv* in brackets, *qere* in parentheses.*

Connections: *The curses describe Israel's actual history: Assyrian deportation (2 Kings 17), Babylonian siege (2 Kings 25), and conditions matching Lamentations. The 'back to Egypt in ships' (v. 68) reverses the Exodus promise. The covenant formula (v. 69/29:1) transitions to the Moab covenant renewal in chapter 29. Jesus alludes to the siege conditions in Luke 19:43-44.*

1If you truly listen to the voice of the LORD your God, carefully observing all His commandments that I am commanding you today, then the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. **2**All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you, when you listen to the voice of the LORD your God. **3**You will be blessed in the city, and you will be blessed

in the field. ⁴Blessed will be the fruit of your womb, the produce of your soil, and the offspring of your livestock — the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. ⁵Blessed will be your basket and your kneading bowl. ⁶You will be blessed when you come in, and blessed when you go out. ⁷The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be struck down before you. They will advance against you from one direction and flee from you in seven directions. ⁸The LORD will command blessing upon you in your storehouses and in everything you undertake. He will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ⁹The LORD will establish you as His holy people, just as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. ¹⁰All the peoples of the earth will see that the name of the LORD is called over you, and they will stand in awe of you. ¹¹The LORD will make you overflow with prosperity — in the fruit of your womb, in the offspring of your livestock, and in the produce of your soil — on the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give you. ¹²The LORD will open for you His rich storehouse — the heavens — to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow. ¹³The LORD will make you the head and not the tail. You will always be on top and never on the bottom — if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by carefully following them. ¹⁴You must not turn aside from any of the words that I am commanding you today, to the right or to the left, to follow other gods and serve them. ¹⁵But if you do not listen to the voice of the LORD your God by carefully observing all His commandments and statutes that I am commanding you today, then all these curses will come upon you and overtake you. ¹⁶You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the field. ¹⁷Cursed will be your basket and your kneading bowl. ¹⁸Cursed will be the fruit of your womb, the produce of your soil, the calves of your herds, and the lambs of your flocks. ¹⁹You will be cursed when you come in, and cursed when you go out. ²⁰The LORD will send against you confusion, turmoil, and rebuke in everything you undertake, until you are destroyed and perish quickly — because of the evil of your deeds, for you will have abandoned Me. ²¹The LORD will make pestilence cling to you until it has consumed you from the land you are entering to possess. ²²The LORD will strike you with wasting disease, with fever, with inflammation, with scorching heat, with drought, with blight, and with mildew. They will pursue you until you perish. ²³The sky above your head will become bronze, and the ground beneath you will become iron. ²⁴The LORD will turn the rain of your land into dust and powder. It will come down on you from the sky until you are destroyed. ²⁵The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will advance against them from one direction and flee from them in seven directions. You will become an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ²⁶Your corpses will become food for all the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth, and no one will frighten them away. ²⁷The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with festering sores, and with an itch from which you cannot be healed. ²⁸The LORD will strike you with madness, blindness, and confusion of mind. ²⁹You will grope at noon as a blind person gropes in darkness. You will not succeed in anything you do. You will be nothing but oppressed and robbed continually, with no one to rescue you. ³⁰You will become engaged to a woman, but another man will take her. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not enjoy its fruit. ³¹Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat any of it. Your donkey will be seized right in front of you and not returned. Your flock will be given to your enemies, and no one will rescue you. ³²Your sons and daughters will be given to another people. Your eyes will watch for them and waste away with longing for them all day long, but you will be powerless to do anything. ³³A people you do not know will consume the produce of your land and all your labor. You will be nothing but oppressed and crushed continually. ³⁴You will be driven mad by what your eyes must witness. ³⁵The LORD will strike you on the knees and legs with painful boils that cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the top of your head. ³⁶The LORD will bring you and the king you have set over yourself to a nation that neither you nor your ancestors have known, and there you will serve other gods — gods of wood and stone. ³⁷You will become an object of horror, a cautionary tale, and a taunt among all the peoples where the LORD drives you. ³⁸You will carry much seed out to the field, but you will gather little, because locusts will devour it. ³⁹You will plant vineyards and tend them, but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will consume them. ⁴⁰You will have olive trees throughout your territory, but you will not anoint yourself with oil, because your olives will drop off before ripening. ⁴¹You will father sons and daughters, but they will not remain yours, because they will go into captivity. ⁴²Swarming insects will take over all your trees and the produce of your land. ⁴³The foreigner living

among you will rise higher and higher above you, while you sink lower and lower. ⁴⁴He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him. He will be the head, and you will be the tail. ⁴⁵All these curses will come upon you, pursuing you and overtaking you until you are destroyed, because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD your God by keeping His commandments and statutes that He commanded you. ⁴⁶They will be signs and warnings upon you and your descendants permanently. ⁴⁷Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart when you had abundance of everything, ⁴⁸you will serve your enemies — whom the LORD will send against you — in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in total deprivation. He will place an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you. ⁴⁹The LORD will raise up against you a nation from far away, from the ends of the earth, swooping down like an eagle — a nation whose language you will not understand, ⁵⁰a fierce-faced nation that shows no respect for the elderly and no mercy to the young. ⁵¹They will consume the offspring of your livestock and the produce of your soil until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, no new wine, no olive oil, no calves from your herds, and no lambs from your flocks — until they have annihilated you. ⁵²They will besiege you at all your gates until your high, fortified walls — in which you trusted — come crashing down throughout your land. They will lay siege to you at all your gates, throughout the land that the LORD your God has given you. ⁵³You will eat the fruit of your own womb — the flesh of your sons and daughters whom the LORD your God has given you — during the siege and the desperate straits in which your enemy will press you. ⁵⁴The most refined and gentle man among you will look with hostility at his own brother, at the wife he embraces, and at the children he has left, ⁵⁵refusing to share with any of them the flesh of his children that he is eating, because he has nothing else left, during the siege and the desperate straits in which your enemy will press you at all your gates. ⁵⁶The most refined and delicate woman among you — who would not even venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her daintiness and sensitivity — will look with hostility at the husband she embraces, at her own son, and at her own daughter, ⁵⁷begrudging even the afterbirth that comes from between her legs and the children she bears, because she will eat them secretly in her total deprivation, during the siege and the desperate straits in which your enemy will press you at your gates. ⁵⁸If you do not carefully observe all the words of this instruction that are written in this book, so as to revere this glorious and awesome name — the LORD your God — ⁵⁹then the LORD will bring extraordinary afflictions upon you and your descendants — severe and lasting afflictions, and terrible and chronic diseases. ⁶⁰He will bring back upon you all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded, and they will cling to you. ⁶¹Even every disease and every affliction not written in this book of instruction, the LORD will bring upon you until you are destroyed. ⁶²You will be left few in number, though you were once as numerous as the stars of the sky — because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD your God. ⁶³Just as the LORD took delight in doing good for you and in making you numerous, so the LORD will take delight in causing your ruin and in destroying you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. ⁶⁴The LORD will scatter you among all the peoples, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will serve other gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known — gods of wood and stone. ⁶⁵Among those nations you will find no rest, and your foot will find no resting place. The LORD will give you there an anxious heart, failing eyes, and a despairing soul. ⁶⁶Your life will hang in suspense before you. You will live in dread night and day, with no confidence in your own survival. ⁶⁷In the morning you will say, 'If only it were evening!' and in the evening you will say, 'If only it were morning!' — because of the dread in your heart and the sights your eyes must see. ⁶⁸The LORD will bring you back to Egypt in ships, by the route about which I said to you, 'You shall never see it again.' There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you. ⁶⁹These are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant He made with them at Horeb.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The infinitive absolute *shamoa tishma* ('listening you shall listen' — truly listen) opens the chapter with an intensified demand for obedience. The conditional structure (*im... venatanekha* — 'if... then He will set you') establishes the entire chapter as covenant consequences: blessings for obedience (vv 1-14), curses for disobedience (vv 15-68). The word *elyon* ('high, supreme') positions Israel at the apex of the nations — not through military power but through covenant faithfulness.

2. The verb *hissigukha* ('overtake you, catch up to you') personifies blessings as pursuers — they chase the obedient person and catch them. The image is striking: you cannot escape God's blessing when you walk in His ways. The blessings are not distant rewards but active forces that pursue and find the faithful.
3. The blessing formulas of verses 3-6 use *barukh* ('blessed') as a declaration of divine favor covering every sphere of life. The city-field pair encompasses all inhabited space — urban and rural, commerce and agriculture. The parallelism is characteristic of Hebrew blessing language: comprehensive coverage through paired opposites.
4. Three domains of fertility are blessed: human reproduction (*peri vitnekha* — 'fruit of your womb'), agricultural yield (*peri admatekha* — 'fruit of your ground'), and animal husbandry (*peri behemtekha* — 'fruit of your livestock'). The rare terms *shegar alafekha* ('increase of your cattle' — the calving of your herds) and *ashterot tsonekha* ('offspring of your flocks' — possibly related to the goddess Ashtoreth's fertility associations, here stripped of pagan context) specify the two main branches of animal agriculture.
5. The *tan'akha* ('your basket' — used for gathering produce) and *mish'artekha* ('your kneading trough' — used for making bread) represent the beginning and end of the food-production process: harvest and preparation. Together they mean blessed from field to table — abundance at every stage.
6. The coming-in/going-out pair (*bevo'ekha/betsetekha*) covers all movement: leaving home and returning, departing for war and coming back safely, entering a city and exiting it. The merism (two extremes representing the whole) means blessing accompanies every transition, every journey, every venture.
7. The military blessing uses a striking numerical contrast: enemies attack from one direction (*bederekh echad* — 'in one road') but scatter in seven directions (*uveshiv'ah derakhim* — 'in seven roads'). Seven represents completeness — the enemy rout is total. This reversal pattern (one becoming seven) reappears inverted in the curses (v 25): Israel will attack from one direction and flee in seven.
8. God 'commands' (*yetsav*) blessing — the same verb used in Leviticus 25:21 for commanding the land's abundance. Blessing is not accidental but sovereignly dispatched. The phrase *uvkhol mishlach yadekha* ('in everything your hand is sent to' — everything you undertake) extends the blessing beyond agriculture to commerce, craftsmanship, and every human endeavor.
9. The term *am qadosh* ('holy people') echoes the foundational declaration of Exodus 19:6 and Deuteronomy 7:6. The verb *yeqimekha* ('He will establish you, He will raise you up') suggests permanence and public visibility — God will make Israel's holiness evident to the world. The condition is twofold: keeping commandments (obligation) and walking in His ways (character).
10. The phrase *shem YHWH niqra alekha* ('the name of the LORD is called over you') describes a claim of ownership and protection — like a king's name placed on his city. Israel bears God's name; their flourishing or failure reflects on Him. The response of the nations is *yir'ah* ('awe, fear, reverence') — not terror but recognition that Israel stands under divine protection.
11. The verb *hotirkha* ('He will make you overflow, He will give you abundance') suggests surplus beyond need. The triad of fertility (womb, livestock, soil) repeats from verse 4, now explicitly connected to the ancestral promise (*nishba laavotekha* — 'He swore to your fathers'). The blessings of Deuteronomy 28 are fulfillments of the Abrahamic covenant.
12. The heavens are called God's *otsaro hattov* ('His good storehouse') — rain is a treasure that God dispenses from His cosmic supply room. The economic consequence of agricultural abundance is financial independence: lending to nations (*vehilvita goyim rabbim*) without needing to borrow (*ve'attah lo tilveh*). The lending/borrowing dynamic becomes a metaphor for national sovereignty and dependence.
13. The head/tail and above/below pairs are vivid metaphors for national standing: leadership versus subjugation, dominance versus subordination. The conditional *ki tishma* ('if you obey') is restated, reinforcing that these are covenant blessings — conditional on faithfulness, not automatic entitlements.
14. The blessings section closes with a warning: the boundary is strict adherence to the covenant without deviation (*lo tasur* — 'you shall not turn aside'). The right/left metaphor describes any departure from the commanded path. The ultimate form of turning aside is idolatry — following other gods (*lalekhet acharei elohim acherim*). The paragraph marker (*pe*) closes the blessings section. What follows is almost four times longer.
15. The curse section begins with an exact structural mirror of verse 1 — the same conditional formula, now negated (*im lo tishma* — 'if you do not listen'). The same verb *hissigukha* ('overtake you') used for blessings in verse 2 now describes curses pursuing and catching the disobedient. The symmetry is deliberate: the same covenant that empowers blessing also activates curse.
16. Verses 16-19 mirror verses 3-6 exactly, replacing *barukh* ('blessed') with *arur* ('cursed'). The same comprehensive pairs — city/field, womb/soil/livestock, basket/kneading bowl, coming in/going out — are now domains of curse rather than blessing. The structural parallelism makes the reversal devastating: everything that could have been blessed is now cursed.
17. The reversal of verse 5. The same daily items — the harvest basket and the bread-making vessel — become sites of scarcity rather than abundance.
18. The reversal of verse 4. The three domains of fertility — human, agricultural, and animal — all fall under curse. The barrenness and crop failure implied here would have been experienced as a direct divine statement about the broken covenant.
19. The reversal of verse 6. Every movement, every transition, every venture is now under curse. The mirrored blessings-and-curses section (vv 3-6 / vv 16-19) ends here. What follows (vv 20-68) has no blessing counterpart — the curses expand far beyond the blessings in scope and intensity.

- 20.** Three terms of divine judgment: me'erah ('curse'), mehumah ('confusion, panic, turmoil'), and mig'eret ('rebuke, frustration'). The phrase asher azavtani ('for you have abandoned Me') shifts to first-person divine speech — God speaks directly as the one abandoned. The curses are not arbitrary punishment but relational consequences: Israel abandons God, and God withdraws His protecting presence.
- 21.** The verb yadbeq ('make cling, attach') is the same root used for the marriage bond in Genesis 2:24 ('a man shall cling to his wife'). Here it describes pestilence (dever) adhering to Israel — an anti-marriage, an intimate and inescapable attachment to disease.
- 22.** Seven afflictions are named — the number of completeness applied to destruction. The first four are diseases of the body (shachefet — wasting/consumption, qaddachat — burning fever, dalleqet — inflammation, charchur — scorching heat). The last three are environmental disasters (cherev — drought/sword, shiddafon — blight from hot east wind, yeraqon — mildew/yellowing of crops). The verb uredafukha ('they will pursue you') reverses verse 7 where enemies fled; now afflictions are the pursuers.
- 23.** A vivid cosmic reversal: the heavens that should pour rain (v 12) become impenetrable bronze (nechoshet), and the earth that should yield produce becomes unyielding iron (barzel). The two elements of creation that sustain life — sky and soil — become hostile. This image reverses the blessing of verse 12 where God opened the heavens as His storehouse.
- 24.** Instead of rain, dust and powder fall from the sky — a surreal inversion of natural order. The Hebrew avaq ve'afar ('powder and dust') describes the fine particulate matter of drought and dust storms. Where the heavens should send water, they send arid destruction.
- 25.** The exact inversion of verse 7: there, enemies attacked from one direction and fled in seven; here, Israel attacks from one direction and flees in seven. The word za'avah ('horror, trembling, object of terror') describes Israel's reputation among the nations — not the awe of verse 10 but revulsion and dread. Israel becomes a cautionary tale rather than a model.
- 26.** Unburied corpses consumed by scavengers is one of the most horrifying images in the ancient Near East — denial of burial was considered a curse beyond death. The phrase ve'ein macharid ('and there is no one to frighten them away') adds helplessness: not even the basic act of shooing scavengers from the dead will be possible.
- 27.** The shechin mitsrayim ('boils of Egypt') directly recalls the sixth plague (Exodus 9:8-12) — the very afflictions God sent upon Egypt will now fall on disobedient Israel. The diseases escalate: boils (shechin), tumors (ofalim — possibly hemorrhoids or bubonic swellings), festering sores (garav), and chronic itch (chares). The final clause asher lo tukhal lehirafe ('from which you cannot be healed') removes hope of recovery.
- 28.** Three mental afflictions parallel the physical diseases of verse 27: shiga'on ('madness, derangement'), ivvaron ('blindness' — possibly metaphorical), and timhon levav ('bewilderment of heart, confusion of mind'). The progression moves from body (v 27) to mind (v 28) — the curse is total, affecting every dimension of human experience.
- 29.** The image of groping at noon (memashesh batshohorayim) in broad daylight as if in total darkness is a powerful metaphor for spiritual and intellectual disorientation. The phrase ve'ein moshia ('and there is no one to save') is devastating — the absence of a deliverer. This echoes the pre-exodus condition when Israel cried out and God heard (Exodus 2:23-25), but now the rescue does not come.
- 30.** Three life milestones are described and then denied: marriage (ishah te'ares — you will become betrothed), homeownership (bayit tivneh — you will build a house), and viticulture (kerem titta — you will plant a vineyard). These are the same three exemptions from military service in Deuteronomy 20:5-7 — the very blessings that war cannot be allowed to interrupt will be stolen by the curse. The textual note [yishkavenah/yishgalenah] reflects a qere/ketiv variation where the written text uses a cruder verb (shagal — 'ravish') while the read text softens it (shakhav — 'lie with').
- 31.** The cruelty of the curses intensifies: the person must witness the destruction or theft of their property (le'einekha — 'before your eyes,' milefanekha — 'from before your face'). The forced witnessing adds psychological torment to material loss. The phrase ve'ein lekha moshia ('no one to rescue you') echoes verse 29.
- 32.** The loss of children — given to another people (presumably as captives or slaves) — is the deepest personal curse. The phrase ve'einekha ro'ot vekhalot aleihem ('your eyes watching and failing/wasting away with longing for them') describes the unending grief of a parent separated from children, watching and hoping for their return. The final phrase ve'ein le'el yadekha ('there is no power in your hand') describes absolute helplessness.
- 33.** The produce of the land (peri admatekha) and the fruit of labor (yegi'akha) are consumed by strangers (am asher lo yada'ta — 'a people you have never known'). The anonymity of the oppressor adds to the horror — exploitation by unknown foreigners. The terms ashuq ('oppressed') and ratsuts ('crushed') describe systemic, unrelenting subjugation.
- 34.** The verse is devastating in its brevity: meshugga ('driven mad, insane') from the sight of what comes (mimar'eh einekha — 'from the sight of your eyes'). The accumulated horrors of verses 30-33 — stolen wife, lost home, seized livestock, captive children, consumed labor — produce madness. The curse attacks the mind itself.
- 35.** The shechin ra ('painful/evil boil') recalls both the Egyptian plague (v 27) and Job's affliction (Job 2:7). The phrase mikfaf raglekha ve'ad qodqodekha ('from the sole of your foot to the top of your head') means total bodily coverage — no part of the person is spared. The incurable nature (lo tukhal lehirafe) makes the condition permanent.
- 36.** Exile is now explicit: God Himself brings (yolekh — 'will cause to go') Israel and their king to a foreign nation. The phrase elohim acherim ets va'even ('other gods — wood and stone') is bitterly ironic: Israel abandoned the living God to worship idols, and now in exile they will serve the lifeless objects they chose. The punishment fits the crime.

37. Three terms describe Israel's degraded reputation: *shammah* ('horror, desolation'), *mashal* ('proverb, cautionary example' — the kind of story told to warn others), and *leshinah* ('taunt, byword, sharp saying'). Israel's story will be told not as an inspiration but as a warning. This reverses verse 10 where the nations stood in awe.
38. Agricultural futility: abundant sowing (*zera rav*) yields minimal harvest (*me'at te'esof*). The *arbeh* ('locust') is the agent of destruction — the same creature that devastated Egypt in the eighth plague (Exodus 10). The irony is pointed: the plagues God sent against Israel's enemies now target Israel itself.
39. The pattern of verses 38-42 is consistent: maximum effort (planting, tending) yields nothing (no wine, no harvest) because of some agent of destruction (locusts, worms, blight). Each verse names the human labor and the divine frustration of that labor.
40. Olive oil was essential for cooking, lighting, medicine, and personal care. The verb *yishal* ('will drop, will cast off') describes premature fruit drop — the olives fall from the tree before they can be harvested and pressed. Olive trees throughout the territory (*bekhol gevulekha*) but no usable oil: abundance of trees without produce.
41. The loss of children to captivity (*shevi*) echoes verse 32. The brutal brevity of *ki yelkhu bashshevi* ('for they will go into captivity') states the loss without elaboration — no explanation, no comfort, just the fact.
42. The *tselatsal* ('buzzing/chirping insect' — possibly a cicada or cricket variety) completes the agricultural devastation: trees and crops alike are consumed. The root *ts-l-ts-l* is onomatopoeic — the word sounds like the buzzing of the insect swarm.
43. The social inversion is complete: the *ger* ('foreigner, resident alien'), who was dependent on Israelite protection, now surpasses the Israelite. The intensified forms *ma'lah ma'lah* ('higher and higher') and *mattah mattah* ('lower and lower') describe accelerating divergence — not a momentary reversal but a progressive collapse.
44. The exact reversal of verses 12-13: Israel was to lend and not borrow, to be head and not tail. Now the foreigner lends and Israel borrows; the foreigner leads and Israel follows. The inversion of every blessing into its opposite demonstrates the systematic nature of the covenant curses.
45. This verse serves as a summary and transition, restating the cause-and-effect logic of the covenant. The pursuit language (*uredafukha vehissigukha* — 'pursuing you and overtaking you') echoes both verse 2 (blessings overtaking) and verse 15 (curses overtaking). The curses are not random misfortune — they are covenant consequences for covenant breach.
46. The curses become *ot umofet* ('sign and wonder') — the same terms used for God's mighty acts in Egypt (Deuteronomy 4:34, 6:22). In Egypt, signs and wonders demonstrated God's power for Israel's salvation; now they demonstrate His power in judgment. The phrase *ad olam* ('permanently, to the farthest horizon') extends the consequences beyond the current generation to all descendants.
47. This verse identifies the root cause with startling specificity: not merely failure to serve God but failure to serve Him *besimchah uvetuv levav* ('with joy and gladness of heart'). Joyless obedience is not enough — God expects His people to find delight in covenant faithfulness. The phrase *merov kol* ('from the abundance of everything') specifies the context: Israel had everything and still did not worship with joy.
48. The contrast with verse 47 is devastating: instead of serving God 'with abundance of everything' (*merov kol*), Israel will serve enemies 'in total deprivation' (*uvechoser kol* — 'in lack of everything'). The iron yoke (*ol barzel*) on the neck is a metaphor for oppressive servitude — compare Jeremiah 28:13-14 where Nebuchadnezzar's domination is described as an iron yoke.
49. The invading nation is characterized by distance (*merachok miqtseh ha'arets* — 'from afar, from the end of the earth'), speed (*ka'asher yid'eh hannasher* — 'as an eagle swoops down'), and foreignness (*lo tishma leshono* — 'you will not understand its language'). The eagle simile evokes predatory speed and unstoppable descent. Many interpreters see this as prophetically describing Assyria (722 BCE) or Babylon (586 BCE), whose languages (Akkadian, Aramaic) were foreign to Hebrew speakers.
50. The phrase *az panim* ('fierce of face, hard-faced') describes a people without compassion. Their ruthlessness is expressed through the society's most vulnerable: the elderly (*zaqen*) and children (*na'ar*). A nation that spares neither the old nor the young has no moral restraints — the total war that follows (*vv 51-57*) will be without quarter.
51. The invader consumes everything — the same triad of agricultural produce (*dagan, tirosh, yitshar* — 'grain, new wine, olive oil') and livestock categories (*shegar alafekha ve'ashterot tsonekha* — 'calves and lambs') that were blessed in verse 4 are now stripped away. The repetition of *ad hishamdekha / ad ha'avido otakh* ('until you are destroyed / until they have annihilated you') frames the verse with finality.
52. The siege (*hetsar lekha* — 'he will press you, besiege you') targets the city gates (*she'arekha*) — the points of entry and commerce. The ironic phrase *asher attah boteach bahen* ('in which you trusted') exposes misplaced trust: Israel trusted in walls rather than in God. The final phrase — 'the land that the LORD your God has given you' — reminds that the very land being devastated was God's gift.
53. The most horrifying verse in the chapter: cannibalism of one's own children (*akhalta peri vitnekha, besar banekha uvenotekha* — 'you will eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters') during siege conditions. The phrase *asher natan lekha YHWH Elohekha* ('whom the LORD your God has given you') makes the horror worse — these children were God's gift, and starvation drives parents to devour them. This is recorded as historical reality during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 6:28-29, Lamentations 2:20, 4:10).
54. The irony is crushing: the most tender person (*ha'ish harakh* — 'the soft/refined man,' *he'anog me'od* — 'extremely delicate') becomes hostile toward his closest family members. The phrase *tera einav* ('his eye will be evil/hostile') describes jealous guarding of food against one's own spouse and surviving children. Starvation destroys the most intimate human bonds.

55. The horror continues: the refined man who is eating his own children's flesh refuses to share it with his surviving family. The phrase *mibeli hish'ir lo kol* ('because nothing at all remains for him') explains but does not excuse the scene. The text does not look away from the worst consequences of covenant breach.
56. The parallel now shifts to a woman: the most sheltered, pampered woman in Israel (*asher lo nishtah khaf raglah hatseg al ha'arets* — 'who has not tried to place the sole of her foot on the ground') — a woman so refined she has never walked barefoot — will become as hardened as the man in verse 54. The descriptive excess emphasizes the transformation: from extreme refinement to unspeakable degradation.
57. The most extreme verse in the Hebrew Bible: a mother consuming her afterbirth (*shilyatah* — 'her afterbirth, her placenta') and her newborn children (*uvevaneiha asher teled* — 'and her children whom she bears') in secret (*bassater* — 'in hiding'), driven by starvation during siege. The secrecy adds another dimension: shame survives even when all other human instincts have collapsed. The text does not euphemize or soften — it forces the reader to confront the ultimate consequences of national covenant breach.
58. A new subsection begins with a conditional (*im lo tishmor* — 'if you do not observe'). The object of reverence is not God directly but *hashsem hannikhbad vehanora hazeh* ('this glorious and awesome name') — the name YHWH itself is presented as an object of awe. The term *nikhbad* ('glorious, weighty, honored') shares its root with *kavod* ('glory, weight'), connecting the divine name to the weight-and-substance concept of *kavod*.
59. The verb *hifli* ('make extraordinary, make wonderful') is the same root used for God's 'wonderful' miracles — here applied to afflictions. God's power, which created wonders for Israel's salvation, will create wonders of destruction. The afflictions are *ne'emanot* ('lasting, persistent, faithful') — ironically, the same word used for God's faithfulness (*emunah*). The plagues are 'faithfully' persistent.
60. The Egyptian plagues that Israel witnessed and feared (*yagort mipneihem* — 'you dreaded before them') will now become Israel's own experience. The verb *davqu* ('they will cling') echoes verse 21 — diseases attach to Israel as intimately as a marriage bond. The exodus, which freed Israel from Egypt's afflictions, is here symbolically reversed.
61. This verse extends the curse beyond the specific afflictions listed — *asher lo khatuv besefer hattorah hazot* ('which is not written in this book of the law') means the list is not exhaustive. Any and every disaster, including ones not yet imagined, falls within the scope of covenant curse. The open-ended nature of this statement makes the warning comprehensive.
62. The Abrahamic promise of descendants as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5, 22:17) is directly referenced and reversed. The phrase *kekhokh'vei hashamayim larov* ('as the stars of the sky in multitude') echoes the original covenant promise — the very blessing God pledged to Abraham will be undone. *Few in number* (*bimtei me'at*) replaces the promise of countless descendants.
63. One of the most theologically challenging verses in the Hebrew Bible: God's joy (*sas* — 'rejoice, delight') in doing good is paralleled by God's joy (*yasis* — same verb) in destruction. The symmetry is disturbing and deliberate — the same divine energy that built Israel up will tear it down. The verb *venissachtem* ('you will be uprooted, torn away') uses agricultural language: Israel will be pulled from the land like a plant torn from soil.
64. The diaspora prophecy: *vehefitsekha YHWH bekhoh ha'ammim* ('the LORD will scatter you among all the peoples'). The phrase *miqtseh ha'arets ve'ad qtseh ha'arets* ('from one end of the earth to the other') describes total global dispersion. The worship of wood and stone gods (*ets va'even*) echoes verse 36 — exile leads to the idolatry that caused the exile in the first place. The punishment becomes a trap.
65. Three afflictions of the inner person in exile: *lev raggaz* ('a trembling/anxious heart'), *khilyon einayim* ('failing/wasting eyes' — eyes that wear out from watching and hoping), and *da'avon nafesh* ('despair of soul, languishing of the inner self'). The phrase *lo thargia* ('you will find no ease') and *lo yihyeh manoach lekhaft raglekha* ('there will be no rest for the sole of your foot') describe perpetual displacement — the wandering exile who never settles.
66. The phrase *chayyekha telu'im lekha minneged* ('your life will be hanging before you from opposite') describes life suspended in uncertainty — visible but unreachable, always in danger of falling. The total loss of security (*lo ta'amin bechayyekha* — 'you will not trust in your life') is the ultimate psychological consequence: not even the continued existence of the self can be assumed.
67. The day-night cycle becomes a trap: morning brings dread of the coming day's horrors; evening brings dread of the coming night's terrors. The phrase *mi yitten erev / mi yitten boqer* ('who will give evening / who will give morning' — 'if only it were...') expresses desperate longing for time to pass, for the present moment to end. Every moment is unbearable; every future moment threatens to be worse.
68. The chapter ends with the ultimate reversal: return to Egypt (*vehishivekha YHWH Mitsrayim* — 'the LORD will bring you back to Egypt'). The exodus is undone — Israel returns to the place of bondage from which God rescued them. The irony of *ba'oniyot* ('in ships') contrasts with the original exodus through the sea on dry land. The final horror is not slavery but rejection: *vehitmakkartem sham le'oyevkha la'avadim velishfachot ve'ein qoneh* ('you will offer yourselves for sale as slaves, but no one will buy you'). Israel becomes so degraded that they are worthless even as slaves. This is the nadir of the covenant curses.
69. This verse is numbered as 28:69 in the Hebrew text (29:1 in English Bibles). It serves as a colophon — a closing summary that identifies the entire preceding section (chapters 27-28) as *divrei haberit* ('the words of the covenant'). The covenant at Moab is explicitly distinguished from the Horeb (Sinai) covenant (*milvad haberit asher karat ittam beChorev* — 'in addition to the covenant He made with them at Horeb'), establishing that Deuteronomy represents a covenant renewal, not merely a repetition.

29

Summary: *Moses renews the covenant in Moab with all Israel — leaders, tribes, women, children, foreigners, and future generations not yet present. He warns against hidden idolatry and declares that 'the hidden things belong to the LORD, but the revealed things belong to us.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The covenant's scope is breathtaking: 'not with you alone' but 'with whoever is standing here with us today and with whoever is not here with us today' (vv. 14-15). Every future generation is bound. The closing verse (v. 28) is one of the most quoted in Jewish theology: 'the hidden things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever.' The distinction between divine mystery and human responsibility defines the boundary of theological inquiry.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase *shoresh poreh rosh vela'anah* (v. 18, 'a root sprouting poison and wormwood') uses botanical metaphor for hidden idolatry — the poisonous root grows unseen underground. We rendered *rosh* as 'poison' rather than the plant name because the danger, not the botany, is the point. The verse numbering follows Hebrew: 29:1 in our text is 29:2 in KJV (Hebrew 28:69 = KJV 29:1).*

Connections: *Hebrews 12:15 alludes to the 'root of bitterness' from verse 18. The hidden/revealed distinction (v. 29) grounds the rabbinic principle that Torah addresses what humans can act on, not divine secrets. The covenant-with-future-generations concept reappears in the Passover Haggadah's 'in every generation, each person must see themselves as having come out of Egypt.'*

¹Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: You yourselves witnessed everything the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt — to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to his entire land. ²You saw the great trials with your own eyes — those mighty signs and wonders. ³Yet the LORD has not given you a mind to comprehend, eyes to truly see, or ears to truly hear — until this very day. ⁴I led you through the wilderness for forty years. Your clothing did not wear out on you, and your sandals did not wear out on your feet. ⁵You ate no ordinary bread and drank no wine or fermented drink, so that you would recognize that I am the LORD your God. ⁶When you arrived at this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan marched out to fight us, and we defeated them. ⁷We seized their land and assigned it as a permanent inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. ⁸Guard the terms of this covenant and carry them out, so that you will succeed in everything you undertake. ⁹All of you stand today before the LORD your God — your leaders, your tribal heads, your elders, your officials, every man of Israel, ¹⁰along with your children, your wives, and the foreigners within your camp — from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water. ¹¹So that you may enter into the covenant of the LORD your God and into His sworn oath, which the LORD your God is making with you today. ¹²In order to establish you today as His own people, and so that He will be your God — just as He promised you, and as He swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. ¹³It is not with you alone that I am making this covenant and this sworn oath, ¹⁴but with whoever stands here with us today before the LORD our God, and equally with whoever is not here with us today. ¹⁵For you yourselves know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we passed through the midst of the nations you traveled among. ¹⁶You saw their repulsive things and their worthless idols made of wood, stone, silver, and gold that they had. ¹⁷Take care that there is no man, woman, family, or tribe among you whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations — that there is no root among you sprouting poison and wormwood. ¹⁸When such a person hears the words of this sworn oath and blesses himself in his heart, thinking, 'I will be fine even though I walk in the stubbornness of my own heart' — thereby sweeping away the well-watered land along with the dry, ¹⁹the LORD will refuse to forgive him. Instead, the LORD's anger and jealousy will smolder against that person, and every curse written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will erase his name from under the heavens. ²⁰The LORD will single him out for disaster from among all the tribes of Israel, in accordance with all the covenant curses written in this book of instruction. ²¹The future generation — your descendants who rise up after you, along with the foreigner who arrives from a distant land — will see the afflictions of that land and the diseases the LORD has inflicted on it, ²²and they will see the entire land reduced to

sulfur, salt, and scorched earth — nothing sown, nothing sprouting, not a single plant growing in it — like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and fury. ²³All the nations will ask, 'Why did the LORD do this to this land? What caused this tremendous burning anger?' ²⁴And the answer will come: 'Because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt.' ²⁵They went and served other gods, bowing down to them — gods they had never known and that He had never assigned to them. ²⁶So the LORD's anger blazed against that land, bringing upon it every curse written in this book. ²⁷The LORD uprooted them from their land in anger, in fury, and in tremendous wrath, and hurled them into another land — where they remain to this day. ²⁸The hidden things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever — so that we may carry out all the words of this instruction.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Hebrew 29:1 corresponds to KJV 29:2 due to versification offset (Hebrew 28:69 = KJV 29:1). The rendering follows the Hebrew text. The verb *vayyiqra* ('he called, he summoned') opens this covenant-renewal address with a formal assembly. The phrase *le'eineikhem* ('before your eyes') stresses firsthand witness — the generation standing at Moab had seen God's acts in Egypt as children or young adults. Moses grounds the covenant renewal in lived experience, not secondhand tradition.
2. The term *massot* ('trials, tests, ordeals') refers to the plagues and events in Egypt that tested both Egypt and Israel. The phrase *ra'u einekha* ('your eyes saw') repeats the eyewitness emphasis from verse 1. The pairing of *otot umofetim* ('signs and wonders') is the standard Deuteronomic formula for God's interventions in Egypt (cf. 4:34, 6:22, 7:19). These were not mere historical events but demonstrations of divine power meant to produce recognition.
3. This is one of the most theologically striking statements in Deuteronomy. The triad of *lev ladaat* ('a heart to know/understand'), *einayim lir'ot* ('eyes to see'), and *oznayim lishmo'a* ('ears to hear') describes the full capacity for spiritual perception. God withheld this capacity — not as punishment but as a statement about the process of spiritual maturity. The phrase *ad hayyom hazzeh* ('until this very day') implies that today, at the covenant renewal, a new possibility of understanding opens. The verse creates a paradox: they saw (v 2) yet did not truly see (v 3).
4. The first-person speech (*va'olekh* — 'I led') shifts to God speaking through Moses — a characteristic Deuteronomic blurring of speaker identity. The miraculous preservation of *salmoteikhem* ('your garments') and *na'alkha* ('your sandals') over forty years of desert travel is cited as evidence of ongoing divine provision. The verb *balu* ('wore out, became old') describes natural decay that supernaturally did not occur. These mundane details — clothes and shoes — ground God's faithfulness in daily, tangible experience.
5. The absence of *lechem* ('bread' — ordinary food) and *yayin veshekhar* ('wine and strong drink') during the wilderness period means Israel subsisted on manna and water — divine provision rather than human agriculture. The purpose clause *lema'an ted'u* ('so that you would know') reveals the pedagogical intent: the wilderness was designed to teach dependence on God. The verb *ted'u* ('you would know/recognize') connects back to verse 3 — what they lacked capacity for then, they are now invited to grasp.
6. The historical review culminates in the Transjordanian victories. The verb *vayyetse* ('he came out') with *liqratenu* ('to meet us, against us') describes the kings' aggressive initiative — they initiated the conflict. The verb *vanakkem* ('and we struck them down') uses the first-person plural, including Moses and the people together in the military victory. Sihon and Og represent the last major military obstacles before crossing the Jordan, making their defeat direct evidence of God's power to fulfill the land promise.
7. The term *nachalah* ('inheritance, permanent allotment') is a technical term for divinely assigned land — not a temporary holding but a permanent tribal territory. The three Transjordanian groups (Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh) received land east of the Jordan as described in Numbers 32. This territorial distribution serves as concrete proof that God's promises of land are already being fulfilled, providing grounds for covenant confidence.
8. The verse transitions from historical review (vv 1-7) to covenant obligation. The verb *ushmartem* ('guard, keep, observe') paired with *va'asitem* ('and do/carry out') describes both vigilant attention and active performance — covenant faithfulness is not passive. The result clause *lema'an taskilu* ('so that you will succeed/prosper/act wisely') uses a verb (*s-k-l*) that means both 'to prosper' and 'to act with insight' — obedience produces both success and wisdom. The paragraph break (pe) in the Hebrew text marks this as the end of the historical prologue section.
9. The covenant assembly scene opens with *nitsavim* ('standing, stationed, positioned') — a deliberate, formal posture, not casual gathering. This verb gives the weekly Torah portion its name (Parashat Nitsavim). The list of attendees descends from top leadership (*rosheikhem* — 'your heads/chiefs') through tribal structure (*shivteikhem* — 'your tribes'), institutional authority (*ziqueikhem* — 'your elders,' *shotreikhem* — 'your officials/officers'), to the broadest category (*kol ish Yisrael* — 'every man of Israel'). The entire social hierarchy is present.
10. The covenant assembly expands beyond the men of Israel (v 9) to include *tapekhem* ('your little ones/children'), *nesheikhem* ('your wives'), and the *ger* ('foreigner, resident alien') within the camp. The merism *mechotev etsekha ad sho'ev meimekha* ('from the chopper of your wood to the drawer of your water') encompasses the entire social spectrum, from the lowest-status laborers to those already named. The wood-choppers and water-drawers represent the most menial roles in the community, yet they too are covenant partners. No one is excluded from the covenant assembly.

- 11.** The purpose of the assembly is stated: le'ovrekha ('so that you may pass into/enter into') the berit ('covenant') and alato ('His oath/imprecation'). The verb avar ('pass, cross over') with berit is a technical covenant-making idiom, likely originating from the ritual of passing between split animals (cf. Genesis 15:10, 17; Jeremiah 34:18). The term alah ('oath, sworn curse') is the self-imprecation that accompanies the covenant — the curses one accepts should one break faith. The verb koret ('cutting') in koret immekha is the standard idiom for covenant-making (literally 'cutting a covenant'), again reflecting the animal-splitting ritual.
- 12.** The covenant formula is stated: haqim otkha lo le'am ('to establish you for Himself as a people') and vehu yihey lekha le'lohim ('and He will be your God'). This reciprocal formula — 'you will be My people / I will be your God' — is the core declaration of Israelite covenant theology (cf. Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:12, Jeremiah 31:33). The phrase ka'asher nishba la'avotekha ('as He swore to your ancestors') anchors the Moab covenant in the Abrahamic promises, creating a chain of covenant continuity from Abraham through Sinai to the present moment.
- 13.** The emphatic negation velo ittkhem levaddekhem ('not with you alone') prepares for the remarkable expansion in verse 14. The first-person anokhi koret ('I am cutting/making') identifies God as the covenant-maker — the covenant is not a human agreement but a divine initiative that the people are invited to enter. The pairing of berit and alah ('covenant and oath') again emphasizes both the relationship and its binding consequences.
- 14.** The covenant's reach extends beyond the present assembly to ve'et asher einenu poh immanu hayyom ('whoever is not here with us today'). This includes future generations not yet born and any Israelites absent from the assembly. The covenant is not limited to a single moment or a single group — it binds all who belong to Israel across time. Rabbinic tradition understood this as including converts and all future Jewish generations. The theological implication is profound: covenant identity is inherited, not merely chosen.
- 15.** The phrase ki attem yedatem ('for you yourselves know') appeals again to lived experience. The verb yashavnu ('we dwelt/lived') describes the long Egyptian sojourn, while avarnu ('we passed through') describes the wilderness journey through other nations' territories. The shift between first-person plural ('we passed through') and second-person plural ('you traveled through') reflects the fluid speaker identity in Deuteronomy, where Moses speaks both as participant and as teacher addressing the next generation.
- 16.** Two derogatory terms for foreign worship objects: shiqqutsehem ('their detestable things, their abominations' — from the root sh-q-ts, associated with ritual impurity) and gilulehem ('their dung-idols' — a term of contempt, possibly derived from galal, 'dung,' used exclusively in polemical contexts to mock idols). The material catalogue — ets va'even kesef vezahav ('wood and stone, silver and gold') — ranges from cheap to precious, showing that idolatry is worthless regardless of the material's value. This sets up the warning in verse 17.
- 17.** The warning cascades through social units: ish ('man'), ishah ('woman'), mishpachah ('family/clan'), shevet ('tribe') — apostasy can begin with a single individual and corrupt an entire tribe. The phrase levavo foneh ('whose heart turns') uses the participle to describe an ongoing inner orientation, not a single act. The metaphor shoresh poreh rosh vela'anah ('a root producing poison and wormwood') is vivid: apostasy is a hidden root system that produces toxic fruit. The term rosh here means 'poisonous plant' (not 'head'), and la'anah ('wormwood') is a bitter, toxic herb. The root is underground and invisible; its effects are devastating. Hebrews 12:15 directly alludes to this image.
- 18.** The self-deceived person hears the covenant curses (divrei ha'alalah — 'the words of the oath/imprecation') but responds with internal self-blessing (vehitbarekh bilvavo — 'and he blesses himself in his heart'). The phrase shalom yihey li ('peace/wholeness will be mine') is the core delusion: immunity from consequences. The term sherirut libbi ('the stubbornness/hardness of my heart') describes willful obstinacy. The final phrase lema'an sefot haravah et hattsmeh ('to sweep away the watered with the dry') is proverbial and debated — most likely it means the self-deluded person's sin will bring destruction on the innocent ('well-watered') along with the guilty ('parched'), or that total indiscriminate ruin will follow.
- 19.** The verb lo yo'veh ('He will not be willing, He will refuse') makes the refusal emphatic and personal — God actively chooses not to forgive the self-deluded apostate. The image ye'eshan af YHWH veqin'ato ('the anger and jealousy of the LORD will smoke') describes divine wrath as a smoldering fire. The verb ravetsa ('crouch, lie down upon') pictures the curses like a predatory animal lying in wait upon (bo — 'upon him') the offender. The ultimate punishment is name erasure: umachah YHWH et shemo mittachat hashamayim ('the LORD will blot out his name from under the heavens') — total removal from memory and from the community of the living.
- 20.** The verb vehivdilo ('He will separate him, single him out') uses the same root (b-d-l) as God's separating light from darkness in creation (Genesis 1:4) and Israel from the nations (Leviticus 20:24). Here the separation is lera'ah ('for harm, for disaster') — a dark inversion of election. The phrase alot habberit ('the curses of the covenant') identifies the curses of chapter 28 as integral to the covenant structure, not separate from it. The term sefer hattorah hazeh ('this book of instruction') refers to the Deuteronomic scroll being read at the assembly.
- 21.** The perspective shifts to future witnesses: haddor ha'acharon ('the last/future generation') and hannokhri ('the foreigner') from me'erets rechoqah ('a distant land'). Two types of observers will assess the devastation — Israel's own descendants and outside observers. The land itself is personified as sick: makkot ha'arets ('the blows/afflictions of the land') and tachalueiha ('its diseases'). The verb chillah ('He made sick') treats the land as a living patient struck with illness by God — the covenant curses damage the land itself, not merely its inhabitants.
- 22.** Three elements of total desolation: gofrit ('sulfur/brimstone'), melach ('salt'), and serefeh ('burning'). The triad of negations — lo tizzara ('it will not be sown'), lo tatsmich ('it will not sprout'), lo ya'aleh ('nothing will grow') — describes complete agricultural death. The comparison to Sodom's overthrow (kemahpekat Sedom) invokes the paradigmatic judgment of Genesis 19. Four destroyed cities are named: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim (cf. Genesis 14:2, 8; Hosea 11:8). The Ketiv (written form) reads (utsviyyim) while the Qere (read form) is (uTsevoyim) — the alternate spelling reflects regional pronunciation variation of this city name, with the Qere preserving the more traditional vocalization.

23. The question shifts from the eyewitness report (vv 21-22) to international reaction: kol haggoyim ('all the nations') respond to the devastation. Their two questions — al meh ('why?') and meh chori ha'af haggadol hazzeh ('what is this great burning anger?') — presuppose knowledge of YHWH as the cause. The phrase chori ha'af ('burning of anger' — literally 'the heat of the nostril') is an anthropomorphic metaphor for intense divine wrath. The nations recognize that this level of destruction is not natural but divine judgment.
24. The answer (ve'amru — 'and they will say') is given by the nations themselves — the reason for devastation is internationally recognizable. The verb azvu ('they abandoned, they forsook') describes deliberate departure from berit YHWH ('the covenant of the LORD'). The covenant is identified as belonging to Elohei avotam ('the God of their ancestors') and tied to the exodus (behotsi'o otam me'erets Mitsrayim — 'when He brought them out of the land of Egypt'). Even the nations can identify the logic: the God who rescued this people from slavery imposed conditions on that rescue, and those conditions were violated.
25. The nations' explanation continues: Israel vayelkhu ('went') — actively chose to leave God — and served (va'ya'avdu) and worshipped (vayyishtachavu — literally 'prostrated themselves before') foreign gods. Two disqualifications of these gods are stated: asher lo yeda'um ('whom they had never known' — no prior relationship or revelation) and velo chalaq lahem ('and He had not allotted/assigned to them'). The verb chalaq ('allot, portion out') may reference the idea that YHWH assigned nations to various heavenly beings (cf. Deuteronomy 4:19, 32:8) but kept Israel for Himself — these gods were never Israel's portion.
26. The verb vayyichar af ('His anger burned, blazed') describes the ignition of divine wrath — the same expression used for God's anger at the golden calf (Exodus 32:10). The result is the activation of kol haqqelalah ('every curse') that is hakketuvah bassefer hazzeh ('written in this book'). The verse creates a tight logical chain: covenant abandoned (v 24) idolatry committed (v 25) anger ignited curses deployed (v 26). The prophecy is written as past-tense narrative, as if the future destruction has already occurred — a common prophetic device that underscores certainty.
27. The verb vayyitteshem ('He uprooted them, He tore them out') uses the root n-t-sh, which describes uprooting a plant — the people are torn from their soil (admatam — 'their ground') like vegetation ripped from the earth. Three terms for divine anger pile up in escalating intensity: af ('anger'), chemah ('fury, heat'), and qetsef gadol ('great wrath'). The verb vayyashlikhem ('He hurled them, He flung them') describes violent ejection — not a gentle relocation but a forceful casting away. The phrase kayyom hazzeh ('as on this day, to this day') either reflects a later editorial perspective or functions as prophetic certainty — the exile is as sure as if it had already happened.
28. One of the most celebrated verses in the Hebrew Bible. The contrast between hannistarot ('the hidden things') and hanniglot ('the revealed things') draws a boundary between divine mystery and human responsibility. What God has not disclosed remains His domain; what He has revealed through Torah belongs to Israel for action and obedience. The Masoretic text uniquely marks the words lanu ulevanenu ad ('to us and to our children forever') with extraordinary dots (puncta extraordinaria) above each letter — one of only a few places in the Hebrew Bible where this occurs. Rabbinic interpretations of these dots vary: some suggest the dotted words were uncertain in the scribal tradition, others that they carry a hidden meaning, and still others that they emphasize collective responsibility. The setumah marker (samekh) closes this section of the covenant-renewal address.

30

Summary: Moses promises that after exile, God will circumcise Israel's heart so they can love Him, restore them to the land, and set before them life and death — urging them to choose life.

What Makes This Remarkable: The chapter opens by assuming the curses will come (v. 1, 'when all these things have come upon you'). Exile is not hypothetical but inevitable — and beyond exile, God will act on their hearts directly. The phrase umal YHWH Elohekha et levavekha (v. 6, 'the LORD your God will circumcise your heart') promises what 10:16 commanded — God will do what Israel could not. The choice set before Israel (v. 19) — 'life and death, blessing and curse' — is the most distilled statement of covenantal theology in the Bible.

Translation Friction: The verb shuv (v. 2, 'return/repent') anchors the chapter — it appears seven times, creating a literary structure built on turning. We preserved each occurrence consistently. The claim that the commandment is 'not in heaven... not across the sea... but very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart' (vv. 12-14) is cited by Paul in Romans 10:6-8, applying it to faith rather than Law.

Connections: Paul interprets vv. 12-14 christologically in Romans 10:6-8. The heart circumcision promise connects to Jeremiah 31:33 (new covenant written on the heart) and Ezekiel 36:26 (heart of stone replaced with heart of flesh). The choose-life command (v. 19) becomes the title and theme of Jewish ethical teaching across centuries.

1When all these things have come upon you — the blessing and the curse that I have placed before you — and you take them to heart among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, 2and you return to the LORD your God and obey

His voice — according to everything I am commanding you today, you and your children — with all your heart and with all your being, ³then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you. He will return and gather you from all the peoples among whom the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴Even if you have been banished to the farthest edge of the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. ⁵The LORD your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it again. He will make you prosper and multiply you beyond your ancestors. ⁶The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your being — so that you may live. ⁷The LORD your God will place all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you — who persecuted you. ⁸You will return and obey the voice of the LORD, doing all His commandments that I am commanding you today. ⁹The LORD your God will give you abundance in everything you undertake — in the fruit of your womb, the offspring of your livestock, and the produce of your soil — for good. For the LORD will again rejoice over you for your good, as He rejoiced over your ancestors. ¹⁰when you obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping His commandments and statutes written in this book of the Law — when you return to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your being. ¹¹For this commandment that I am giving you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it beyond your reach. ¹²It is not in heaven, so that you would need to say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us and bring it down to us, so we can hear it and do it?' ¹³Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you would need to say, 'Who will cross the sea for us and bring it back to us, so we can hear it and do it?' ¹⁴The word is very near to you — in your mouth and in your heart — so that you can do it. ¹⁵See — I have placed before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶For I am commanding you today: love the LORD your God, walk in His ways, and keep His commandments, statutes, and ordinances, so that you may live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you will not listen, and you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today that you will certainly perish. You will not have long life in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today: I have placed before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live — ²⁰by loving the LORD your God, obeying His voice, and holding fast to Him — for He is your life and the length of your days — so that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The chapter opens with a startling assumption: both the blessing and the curse will come. Moses does not present them as hypothetical alternatives but as sequential certainties — Israel will experience both prosperity and exile. The phrase *vahashevota el-levavekha* ('you take them to heart,' literally 'you return them to your heart') describes a moment of reflection in exile: surrounded by foreign nations, Israel remembers what God said. The Deuteronomic vision looks beyond judgment to the possibility of restoration.
2. The verb *shavta* ('you return') is from *shuv* — the root of *teshuvah* ('repentance, return'). Return to God is the first movement in the restoration sequence. The return is total: *bekhol-levavekha uvekhol-nafshekha* ('with all your heart and all your being') — the same language as the Shema (6:5). The repentance that restores must be as complete as the love that was originally commanded. The multigenerational scope continues: 'you and your children' return together.
3. The wordplay is deliberate and untranslatable: *veshav YHWH* ('the LORD will return') echoes *veshavta* ('you return') in v2. Israel returns to God; God returns to Israel. The verb *shuv* is applied to both parties — repentance is a mutual turning. The phrase *et-shevutkha* ('your captivity/fortunes') is debated: it may mean 'turn your captivity' (end your exile) or 'restore your restoration' (bring about your return). Both meanings coexist. God's compassion (*richamekha* — from *rechem*, 'womb') is the motive force: maternal, visceral, unconditional compassion drives the restoration.
4. The scope of God's reach: *biqtseh hashamayim* ('the edge of the heavens') — the most remote imaginable location. No exile is too distant for God to reverse. The verbs *yeqabbetsekha* ('will gather you') and *yiqqachekha* ('will take you, will fetch you') are active and personal — God does not merely permit return; He goes to the ends of the earth to retrieve His people. The passage envisions a post-catastrophic future with confidence: exile is not the end of the story.
5. The restoration exceeds the original: *veheitbekha vehirbekha me'avotekha* ('He will make you prosper and multiply you beyond your ancestors'). The post-exile future is not merely recovery but surpassing. God does not restore to the baseline — He goes beyond it. The land is identified as the ancestral inheritance (*asher yarshu avotekha*), reconnecting the restored exiles to the patriarchal promise of Genesis 12-15.
6. *Umal YHWH Elohekha et-levavekha* ('the LORD your God will circumcise your heart') is the theological climax of Deuteronomy. Circumcision (*milah*) — the sign of the covenant since Abraham (Gen 17) — is now applied to the inner person by God's own act. The purpose clause is the Shema itself: *le'avahah et-YHWH Elohekha bekhol-levavekha uvekhol-nafshekha* ('to love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your being'). What

was commanded in 6:5 is now promised in 30:6 — God will create the capacity for the very obedience He requires. The final phrase lema'an chayekha ('so that you may live') links the heart-change to life itself: the circumcised heart is the path to true living.

7. A reversal of the covenant curses of chapter 28: what fell on Israel in exile will now fall on their persecutors. The curses do not disappear — they are redirected. God's justice is not canceled by restoration; it is reapplied to those who oppressed His people. The verb redafukha ('who pursued/persecuted you') echoes the language of relentless pursuit that characterized Israel's suffering among the nations.
8. The fifth occurrence of shuv in this chapter: ve'attah tashuv ('and you will return'). After God's heart-circumcision (v6), obedience becomes natural rather than forced — 'you will return' is a statement of confidence, not a command. The post-restoration Israel obeys not because they fear punishment but because their hearts have been transformed. The commandments of 'today' (hayyom) remain the same; what changes is the capacity to keep them.
9. Three categories of blessing — children (peri vitnekha), livestock (peri vehemtekha), land (peri admatekha) — mirror the three categories of curse in 28:18. Every dimension of life that was cursed in exile will be blessed in restoration. The most striking phrase: yashuv YHWH lasus alekha letov ('the LORD will again rejoice over you for good'). God's joy — not merely His favor but His actual delight — is restored. The verb sus ('to rejoice, to delight') applied to God describes the divine pleasure in Israel's well-being. God enjoys His people's flourishing.
10. The seventh and final occurrence of shuv: ki tashuv ('when you return'). The verb is rendered 'when' rather than 'if' — after v6's promise of heart-circumcision, the return is assured. The reference to sefer hattorah hazzeh ('this book of the Torah') makes Deuteronomy self-aware as a written text that will persist beyond Moses. The full-hearted, full-being return echoes both 6:5 and 30:2, binding the chapter's argument together: the Shema's command will be fulfilled through God's transforming act.
11. The tone shifts from future promise (v1-10) to present reality (v11-14). Lo-niflet hi mimmekha ('it is not too wondrous/difficult for you') — the verb pala means 'to be extraordinary, beyond capacity.' Moses insists: the commandment is within human reach. It does not require superhuman ability or esoteric knowledge. Paul will cite v11-14 in Romans 10:6-8, reinterpreting the nearness of the commandment as the nearness of Christ. The passage's power lies in its accessibility theology: God does not command what cannot be done.
12. The first of two rhetorical denials: the commandment is not in heaven (lo vashamayim hi). No celestial expedition is required. The Talmud (Bava Metzia 59b) uses this verse in the famous 'Oven of Akhnai' story to argue that the Torah, once given, belongs to earth — even a voice from heaven cannot override the interpretation of scholars. The verse establishes an accessibility principle: divine revelation is not reserved for the spiritually elite who can ascend to heaven. It has been given and is available.
13. The second denial: the commandment is not me'ever layyam ('across the sea'). No oceanic voyage is required. Heaven (vertical inaccessibility) and the sea (horizontal inaccessibility) together represent every possible dimension of distance. The commandment is not far in any direction. The parallel structure (v12 and v13 are nearly identical in form) creates a rhetorical completeness: nowhere is it absent, nowhere must it be fetched.
14. The positive answer to v12-13's rhetorical questions: ki-qarov elekha haddavar me'od ('the word is very near to you'). Three locations of the word: befikh ('in your mouth' — you can speak it), uvilevavekha ('in your heart' — you can understand it), la'asoto ('so that you can do it' — you can enact it). Mouth, heart, action — the entire chain from reception to expression to obedience is available. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10:8 as 'the word of faith that we proclaim.' The passage asserts that obedience to God's commandment requires no heroic journey; it requires only the engagement of what is already within reach.
15. The two-way choice is starkly presented: chayyim vatov ('life and good') versus mavet vara ('death and evil'). These are not four separate items but two paired realities: life-with-good and death-with-evil. The verb natatti ('I have placed') puts the responsibility squarely on the listener — the options are on the table, and the choice must be made. Moses will not make it for them. The simplicity of the formulation is its power: the covenant reduces to life or death.
16. The 'life' option is defined concretely: love God, walk in His ways, keep His commandments. Three verbs, three dimensions of covenant faithfulness: affection (ahavah), conduct (halakh), and obedience (shamar). The result — vechayyita veravita ('you will live and multiply') — echoes the creation blessing of Genesis 1:28 ('be fruitful and multiply'). Obedience to the covenant reconnects Israel to the original blessing of creation itself.
17. The 'death' option begins with the heart: im-yifneh levavekha ('if your heart turns away'). The first movement toward death is internal — the heart turns before the body follows. The progression is psychologically precise: turned heart refusal to listen being drawn away (niddachta — passive, as though pulled by a force) worship of other gods serving them. Apostasy is not a single dramatic act but a gradual sequence that begins with inward resistance.
18. The intensified verb avod tovedu ('you will certainly perish') — the infinitive absolute driving home the certainty. Moses is not threatening but warning: this is what will happen. The phrase lo ta'arikhun yamim ('you will not have long days') reverses the promise of long life attached to the commandments (5:16, 6:2). The land across the Jordan — so close, so longed for — will be lost if the heart turns away. Proximity to the promise does not guarantee possession.
19. Heaven and earth (hashamayim ve'et ha'arets) are summoned as cosmic witnesses — the most permanent, enduring witnesses imaginable. In ancient Near Eastern treaties, gods were invoked as witnesses; Moses invokes creation itself. The climactic imperative — uvacharta bachayyim ('choose life!') — is the theological center of the entire book. The verb bachar ('to choose') is the same word used for God's choice of Israel (7:6-7). Now Israel is called to choose in return. The covenant is mutual choosing: God chose Israel; Israel must choose God. The purpose clause — lema'an tichyeh attah vezar'ekha ('so that you and your descendants may live') — extends the consequences across generations.

20. The chapter's final verse defines what 'choosing life' means concretely: le'ahavah ('loving'), lishmo'a ('obeying'), uledavqah-bo ('holding fast to Him'). Three verbs, three dimensions of faithful relationship: affection, response, and attachment. The ultimate declaration: ki hu chayyekha ve'orekh yamekha ('for He is your life and the length of your days'). God is not merely the source of life — He is life itself. To choose life is to choose God; to choose God is to choose life. The chapter ends where Deuteronomy always ends: with the patriarchal promise and the land. The oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob runs through every chapter as the theological bedrock beneath all the law, all the warning, and all the promise.

31

Summary: Moses, at 120 years old, transfers leadership to Joshua, writes down the Torah and entrusts it to the Levites, and is told by God that Israel will break the covenant. He teaches them a witness-song.

What Makes This Remarkable: God's prediction of Israel's future apostasy (vv. 16-18) is devastating in its certainty: 'this people will rise and whore after foreign gods... and they will forsake Me and break My covenant.' Moses writes the Torah knowing it will be violated. The verb histarti fanai (v. 17, 'I will hide My face') introduces hester panim — the theological concept of divine hiddenness that runs through the prophets, the psalms, and post-biblical theology. God's silence is not absence but judgment.

Translation Friction: The phrase vayelekh Mosheh ('and Moses went,' v. 1) gives this Torah portion its name but raises a question: went where? The Hebrew simply says he went and spoke — some read it as a departure, others as a formal procession. We rendered it literally. The word yetser (v. 21, 'inclination') carries theological weight far beyond its simple meaning — it becomes the rabbinic yetser hara ('evil inclination'), the internal force driving disobedience.

Connections: Joshua's commissioning fulfills Numbers 27:18-23. The hester panim theology appears in Isaiah 8:17, 45:15, Micah 3:4, and defines the theological crisis of Esther (where God's name never appears). The Torah-deposit with the Levites (v. 26) is recovered in 2 Kings 22:8 during Josiah's reforms.

1Then Moses went out and addressed the entire assembly of Israel with these words. 2He told them, "I am now one hundred and twenty years old. I can no longer lead you in going out and coming back. Moreover, the LORD has declared to me, 'You will not cross this Jordan.'" 3The LORD your God — He is the one who crosses over ahead of you. He will annihilate these nations from your path so that you will dispossess them. Joshua is the one who will cross over at your head, just as the LORD promised. 4The LORD will deal with them exactly as He dealt with Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites, and with their territory — He completely destroyed them. 5When the LORD delivers them over to you, you must deal with them in full accordance with the instructions I have given you. 6Be strong and stand firm! Do not be afraid or terrified of them, because the LORD your God is the one who goes alongside you. He will never weaken His grip on you or abandon you. 7Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in front of the entire assembly of Israel, "Be strong and stand firm, because you are the one who will accompany this people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors to give them, and you will distribute it to them as their inheritance." 8The LORD Himself is the one who goes ahead of you. He will be with you. He will not loosen His hold on you or leave you behind. Do not be afraid and do not lose heart. 9Moses wrote down this Law and entrusted it to the priests — the descendants of Levi who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD — and to all the elders of Israel. 10Moses gave them this command: "At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time during the sabbatical year, during the Festival of Shelters, 11when all Israel comes to present themselves before the LORD your God at the place He will choose, you must read this Law aloud in the hearing of all Israel. 12Assemble the people — men, women, children, and the foreigners living in your towns — so that they may listen, learn, revere the LORD your God, and carefully follow every word of this Law. 13Their children, who do not yet know it, will also listen and learn to revere the LORD your God throughout the days you live on the soil you are crossing the Jordan to possess. 14The LORD said to Moses, "The time of your death is drawing near. Summon Joshua, and both of you present yourselves at the Tent of Meeting so that I may commission him." So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the Tent of Meeting. 15The LORD appeared at the Tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood positioned above the entrance of the Tent. 16The LORD said to Moses, "You are about to lie down with your ancestors. After that, this people will rise up and prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the

land they are entering. They will abandon Me and shatter the covenant I made with them. ¹⁷My anger will burn against them on that day. I will abandon them and conceal My face from them. They will become prey, and countless disasters and hardships will strike them. On that day they will say, 'Isn't it because our God is no longer present among us that these disasters have found us?' ¹⁸And I will completely conceal My face on that day because of all the evil they have committed by turning to other gods." ¹⁹Now then, write down this song for yourselves and teach it to the Israelites. Place it in their mouths so that this song will serve as My witness against the Israelites. ²⁰For when I bring them into the land I swore to their ancestors — a land flowing with milk and honey — and they eat their fill and grow fat, they will turn to other gods and worship them. They will treat Me with contempt and shatter My covenant. ²¹When countless disasters and hardships strike them, this song will confront them as a witness, because it will never be forgotten from the mouths of their descendants. For I know the inclination they are already forming, even now, before I have brought them into the land I swore to give. ²²So Moses wrote down this song on that very day and taught it to the Israelites. ²³Then He commissioned Joshua son of Nun and said, "Be strong and stand firm, because you will bring the Israelites into the land I swore to give them, and I Myself will be with you." ²⁴When Moses had finished writing the words of this Law in a scroll, completing them in full, ²⁵Moses commanded the Levites who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD, saying, ²⁶"Take this scroll of the Law and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God. It will remain there as a witness against you. ²⁷For I know your rebellious nature and your stubbornness. If you have been defiant toward the LORD while I am still alive among you today, how much worse will it be after my death? ²⁸Bring together before me all the elders of your tribes and your officials so that I can speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth as witnesses against them. ²⁹For I know that after my death you will act with total corruption and stray from the path I commanded you. Disaster will overtake you in the days to come, because you will do what is evil in the LORD's sight, provoking Him to anger through the products of your hands." ³⁰Then Moses recited the words of this song from beginning to end in the hearing of the entire assembly of Israel.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *vayelekh* ('and he went') gives this chapter its traditional name in the Torah reading cycle (Parashat Vayelekh). The phrase *el kol Yisra'el* ('to all Israel') signals a public address to the entire assembled nation — Moses' final words before transferring leadership. The narrative transition marks the shift from Moses' third discourse (chs 29-30) to his farewell actions.
2. Moses offers two reasons for the leadership transition: physical limitation (*lo ukhal od latset velavo* — 'I can no longer go out and come in,' an idiom for military and administrative leadership, not mere walking ability) and divine prohibition (*lo ta'avur et haYarden* — 'you will not cross this Jordan'). The number 120 (*me'ah ve'esrim*) represents a full life in Deuteronomic terms — Moses' faculties are not diminished (cf. 34:7, 'his eye was not dim'), but God has set the boundary. The demonstrative 'this Jordan' (*haYarden hazzeh*) points to the river visible from Moab, making the prohibition concrete and immediate.
3. The emphatic pronoun *hu* ('He') appears three times — stressing divine agency first (*YHWH hu over lefanekha* — 'the LORD, He is the one crossing before you'), then Joshua's role as the visible human counterpart (*Yehoshua hu over lefanekha* — 'Joshua, he is the one crossing before you'). The verb *yashmid* ('He will annihilate, destroy completely') is covenant warfare language. Moses assures the people that both the divine commander and the human commander are already appointed — the transition is not a crisis but a plan.
4. Moses cites recent, living memory as proof of God's future action: the victories over Sihon (king of Heshbon, Numbers 21:21-30) and Og (king of Bashan, Numbers 21:33-35) are evidence that God will do the same to the Canaanite nations. The verb *hishmid* ('He destroyed, He annihilated') uses the Hiphil stem — God is the causative agent of their destruction. The phrase *ule'artsam* ('and to their land') extends the destruction from the kings personally to their entire territory.
5. The verb *unetanam* ('and He will give them') treats the nations as objects handed over by God — the victory is divine before it is military. The phrase *kekhol hammitsvah asher tsivviti* ('according to all the commandment I have commanded') refers to the warfare regulations of Deuteronomy 7:1-5 and 20:10-18, which mandate complete removal of Canaanite religion. Moses shifts to first person (*tsivviti* — 'I commanded'), reinforcing his authority even as he transfers power.
6. The paired imperatives *chizqu ve'imtsu* ('be strong and be firm') form one of the most recognized phrases in the Hebrew Bible, repeated in verse 7 (to Joshua), verse 23 (God to Joshua), and prominently in Joshua 1:6-9. The verb *chazaq* means 'be strong, seize firmly' and *emats* means 'be resolute, be firm.' The two prohibition verbs — *al tir'u* ('do not fear') and *al ta'artsu* ('do not be terrified, do not tremble') — address both ordinary fear and paralyzing dread. The promise *lo yarbekha velo ya'azvekka* ('He will not let go of you and He will not abandon you') uses two verbs of relational abandonment: *raphah* ('release, slacken, let go') and *azav* ('forsake, leave behind'). The *setumah* paragraph marker indicates a section break.

7. The public commissioning (le'einei khol Yisra'el — 'before the eyes of all Israel') is critical: Joshua's authority must be visibly established before the nation. The charge chazaq ve'emats ('be strong and be firm') now shifts from plural (v6, to Israel) to singular (to Joshua personally). The verb tavo ('you will enter/accompany') in the Qal form means 'you will go in with' this people — a collaborative role. The verb tanchilennah ('you will cause them to inherit it') uses the Hiphil of nachal, placing the responsibility for land distribution on Joshua. The ancestral oath (nishba YHWH la'avotam — 'the LORD swore to their ancestors') connects Joshua's mission to the Abrahamic promise.
8. Moses reassures Joshua with the same promise given to the nation in verse 6, now personalized with singular pronouns. The emphatic YHWH hu ('the LORD — He') stresses divine identity as the true leader. Two pairs of prohibitions bookend the verse: God's commitment (lo yarbekha velo ya'azvekka — 'He will not release you or forsake you') and Joshua's response (lo tira velo techat — 'do not fear and do not be shattered'). The verb tachat means 'be broken, be shattered, be dismayed' — it addresses the inner collapse that can follow overwhelming responsibility.
9. The verb vayikhtov ('and he wrote') is a pivotal action: Moses inscribes the Torah (hattorah hazot — 'this instruction/teaching') as a physical document. The dual recipients are the Levitical priests (hakkohanim benei Levi — 'the priests, sons of Levi') who carry the Ark, and the elders (ziqunei Yisra'el) who serve as civil authorities. This dual custody — priestly and civil — ensures both religious and political accountability for preserving the text. The phrase aron berit YHWH ('Ark of the Covenant of the LORD') identifies the Ark as the primary repository for covenant documents, following ancient Near Eastern treaty practice where copies were deposited in sanctuaries.
10. The timing is specified with three nested markers: the seven-year cycle (miqqets sheva shanim — 'at the end of seven years'), the sabbatical year (shenat hashemittah — 'the year of release,' when debts are canceled per Deuteronomy 15:1-2), and the specific festival (chag hasSukkot — the Festival of Booths/Shelters, the autumn harvest celebration). The convergence of debt release and Torah reading creates a powerful social moment: the economically liberated community gathers to hear the covenant that established their freedom.
11. The phrase lera'ot et penei YHWH ('to see the face of the LORD' — traditionally vocalized as the Niphal 'to appear before the LORD') describes the pilgrimage obligation. The verb tiqra ('you shall read aloud, you shall proclaim') makes the Torah a public oral event, not a private document. The phrase neged kol Yisra'el be'ozneihem ('opposite all Israel, in their ears') specifies audible, communal reception — every Israelite must hear the words personally. The unnamed place (bamaqom asher yivchar — 'in the place He will choose') is the centralized sanctuary formula characteristic of Deuteronomy.
12. The imperative haqhel ('assemble!') gives this ceremony its traditional name: Hakhel ('the Assembly'). The inclusivity is remarkable for the ancient world: men, women, children (ha'anashim vehanashim vehattaf), and resident foreigners (gerekha asher bish'arekha — 'your foreigner who is within your gates') — all four social categories must be present. The four-part purpose clause establishes a pedagogical sequence: listen (yishme'u), learn (yilmedu), revere (yare'u), and practice (shameru la'asot). Hearing leads to learning, learning leads to reverence, and reverence leads to obedience.
13. The intergenerational purpose is explicit: uveneihem asher lo yade'u ('and their children who have not known') targets the next generation who were not present at Sinai and have no direct experience of the covenant events. The septennial cycle ensures each generation encounters the Torah during childhood. The phrase kol hayyamim asher attem chayyim ('all the days that you are alive') extends the obligation across the full life of the community. The pe (open paragraph marker) signals the close of the Hakhel legislation.
14. God initiates the formal transfer: hen qarevu yamekha lamut ('look, your days to die have drawn near') uses hen as a solemn attention-marker rather than a casual interjection. The divine commissioning (va'atsavvennu — 'and I will commission him/charge him') shifts the authority source from Moses to God directly. The ohel mo'ed ('Tent of Meeting') is the place where God communicates with Moses (Exodus 33:7-11) — the venue itself signals that this is a direct divine appointment, not merely Moses' personal recommendation. The Hitpaal vehityatsevu ('present yourselves') indicates formal, standing presentation before the divine presence.
15. The theophany (vayera YHWH — 'the LORD appeared') manifests as the amud anan ('pillar of cloud'), the same visible sign of divine presence that led Israel through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22) and descended on Sinai (Exodus 19:9). The pillar's position al petach ha'ohel ('above the entrance of the Tent') marks the threshold between divine and human space. This visual manifestation before both Moses and Joshua publicly validates the leadership transfer with divine authorization visible to any observers.
16. The euphemism shokey im avotekha ('lying down with your ancestors') is the standard idiom for death. The verb zana ('to prostitute, to commit sexual infidelity') is the prophetic metaphor for idolatry — Israel's covenant with God is framed as a marriage, and worship of other gods is adultery. The phrase elohei nekhar ha'arets ('the foreign gods of the land') identifies the specific threat: indigenous Canaanite deities. The sequence — abandonment (azavani — 'they will forsake Me') followed by covenant violation (hefer et beriti — 'they will break My covenant') — presents apostasy as a relational betrayal before it is a legal breach.
17. The phrase vehistarti fanai mehem ('and I will hide My face from them') introduces the theological concept of hester panim — the hiding or concealment of God's face, one of the most consequential ideas in Jewish theology. When God hides His face, divine protection and providence are withdrawn — not as petty punishment but as the natural consequence of the broken relationship. The people's response (halo al ki ein Elohai beqirbi — 'is it not because my God is not in my midst?') shows partial recognition of the cause, but verse 18 reveals this self-diagnosis is insufficient. The verb le'ekhol ('to be consumed, to become prey') treats the unprotected people as food for predators.
18. The intensified construction haster astir panai ('hiding I will hide My face' — the infinitive absolute with finite verb) makes the concealment emphatic and total. The people's partial repentance in verse 17 ('our God is not among us') is not enough — the divine withdrawal continues because the root cause (ki fanah el elohim acherim — 'because he turned to other gods') has not been addressed. The theological sequence is precise: Israel turns their face toward other gods (fanah — 'he turned'), so God turns His face away from them (astir panai — 'I will hide My face'). The relational symmetry is devastating.

- 19.** God commands the composition of hashirah hazot ('this song') — the poem of chapter 32 (the Song of Moses / Ha'azinu). The triple instruction is pedagogically layered: write it (kitvu — preserve it in text), teach it (lamedah — transmit it through instruction), and place it in their mouths (simah befishim — make it memorized and recited). The song's purpose is legal: le'ed ('as a witness') — it will testify against Israel when they break the covenant, because they cannot claim ignorance of a song they have memorized. The plurals kitvu lakhem ('write for yourselves') may address both Moses and Joshua, or Moses and the elders.
- 20.** God predicts the precise mechanism of apostasy: prosperity leads to forgetfulness. The progression is physical and spiritual: akhala ('they will eat'), save'a ('they will be satisfied'), dashen ('they will grow fat/prosperous'). The same progression appears in Deuteronomy 32:15 (the Song itself): 'Jeshurun grew fat and kicked.' The verb ni'atsuni ('they will treat Me with contempt, they will spurn Me') is stronger than mere neglect — it implies active disdain. The land zavav chalah udevash ('flowing with milk and honey') — God's gift — becomes the very context for covenant betrayal.
- 21.** The song's endurance is guaranteed: lo tishkach mippi zar'ot ('it will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring') — the memorized song persists across generations, ensuring the witness endures. The word yitsro ('his inclination, his impulse') is significant — it is cognate with the later rabbinic concept of yetser hara ('evil inclination'). God knows Israel's formative tendency (asher hu oseh hayom — 'which he is forming/doing today') before the sin occurs. The phrase beterem avi'enu ('before I have brought them') indicates God enters the covenant with full knowledge that it will be violated — the covenant is not naive but informed.
- 22.** Moses immediately obeys the divine command of verse 19: vayyikhtov Mosheh ('and Moses wrote') matches the command kitvu ('write'). The phrase bayyom hahu ('on that day') emphasizes immediacy — there is no delay between divine instruction and prophetic action. The verb vaylamedah ('and he taught it') fulfills the second part of the command. The song referenced is Ha'azinu (Deuteronomy 32:1-43).
- 23.** The speaker here is God (not Moses), as indicated by the first person nishba'ti ('I swore') and anokhi ehyeh immakh ('I Myself will be with you') — only God swore the land oath to the ancestors. This is the third occurrence of chazaq ve'emats in the chapter: v6 (Moses to Israel, plural), v7 (Moses to Joshua), v23 (God to Joshua). The progression from human commission to divine commission completes the transfer. Notably, God uses tavi ('you will bring' — Hiphil causative) where Moses used tavo ('you will come/accompany' — Qal) in verse 7 — God's charge gives Joshua a stronger, more active leadership role than Moses' charge did.
- 24.** The phrase kekhalot Mosheh likhtov ('when Moses completed writing') marks the physical document's completion. The term sefer ('scroll, book, document') refers to a written scroll — the material object that will be deposited alongside the Ark. The phrase ad tummam ('until their completion' — from tamam, 'to be complete, to be finished') emphasizes that the Torah document is a complete, finished text, not a partial draft. This verse establishes the physicality and finality of the written Torah.
- 25.** The Levites are identified by their physical function: nos'ei aron berit YHWH ('carriers of the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD'). They are the custodians of the Ark and therefore the appropriate recipients of the Torah scroll that will be placed beside it. The Levites here may overlap with the Levitical priests of verse 9 or constitute a broader group responsible for sanctuary transport.
- 26.** The instruction places the Torah scroll mitsad aron berit YHWH ('at the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD') — not inside the Ark (which contains the stone tablets per Deuteronomy 10:1-5) but alongside it. This distinction reflects ancient Near Eastern treaty practice: treaty documents were deposited in sanctuaries near the deity's image or symbol. The Torah scroll serves as le'ed ('a witness') — a legal document that testifies to the terms of the covenant. The phrase bekha ('against you') makes Israel the defendant and the Torah the prosecution's evidence.
- 27.** Moses' candid assessment names two character flaws: meryekha ('your rebellion, your defiance') and orpekha haqqashah ('your stiff neck' — literally 'your hard back-of-the-neck,' the image of an ox that refuses to turn when pulled). The qal vachomer argument (kal vahomer — 'light and heavy,' an a fortiori inference) is a classic rabbinic reasoning form: if they rebel while Moses is alive and present (be'odeni chai immakhem — 'while I am still living with you'), how much more (ve'af ki — 'and even more so') after his restraining influence is removed. Moses has no illusions about the people he has led.
- 28.** Moses summons the leadership — ziqnei shivtekhem veshotrekhem ('the elders of your tribes and your officials') — for the song's formal recitation. The verb haqhilu ('assemble!' — Hiphil imperative of qahal) echoes the Hakhel command of verse 12, but here the audience is the leadership specifically. The cosmic witness formula — va'a'idah bahem et hashamayim ve'et ha'arets ('I will call heaven and earth as witnesses against them') — invokes the created order as permanent, enduring witnesses to the covenant, a convention from ancient Near Eastern treaty practice where gods and natural elements served as treaty guarantors.
- 29.** The infinitive absolute hashchet tashchitun ('corrupting you will corrupt' — 'you will completely corrupt yourselves') uses the emphatic doubled-verb construction to express certainty and totality. The phrase vesartem min hadderekh ('you will turn aside from the path') uses the standard Deuteronomic metaphor of covenant life as a path or road. The temporal phrase be'acharit hayyamim ('in the latter days, in the end of days') looks beyond the immediate future to an eschatological horizon. The phrase bema'aseh yedekhem ('through the work of your hands') refers to idols — handmade objects of worship — the ultimate provocation (lehakh'iso — 'to provoke Him to anger').
- 30.** The verse frames the recitation: be'oznei kol qahal Yisra'el ('in the ears of the entire assembly of Israel') emphasizes audible, communal reception — every person hears. The phrase ad tummam ('until their completion') indicates Moses recited the song in its entirety — no abbreviation, no summary. The qahal ('assembly') is the same word from which Hakhel (v12) derives, linking this first recitation to the future septennial readings. The pe (open paragraph marker) signals the close of the narrative frame, setting the stage for the Song itself in chapter 32.

32

Summary: *The Song of Moses (Ha'azinu) — a poem calling heaven and earth as witnesses, recounting God's faithfulness and Israel's rebellion, promising judgment on the nations and vindication of His people. God then tells Moses to ascend Mount Nebo to die.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The song's central metaphor is God as tsur ('Rock,' vv. 4, 15, 18, 30, 31) — stable, immovable, trustworthy — set against Israel's fickleness. The poem's most theologically daring lines describe God's emotions: 'the LORD saw and spurned, provoked by His sons and daughters' (v. 19); 'I will hide my face from them... for they are a crooked generation' (v. 20). The final stanza (v. 43) promises that God will 'make atonement (kipper) for His land and His people' — the only place in the Torah where God Himself performs kippur for the nation.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase esh dat (v. 2, 'a fire of law' or 'fiery law') in Moses's blessing introduction is textually uncertain — dat is a Persian loanword that seems anachronistic here, and some scholars emend the text. We rendered it as given in the Masoretic text and noted the difficulty. The verb yesovevenhvu (v. 10, 'He encircled him') uses a rare verbal form that emphasizes God's protective surrounding of Israel in the wilderness.*

Connections: *Heaven-and-earth as witnesses echoes 4:26 and 30:19. The Rock metaphor recurs across the Psalms (18:2, 31, 46; 62:2, 6) and Isaiah (26:4, 44:8). God's jealousy provoked by a 'no-god' and a 'no-people' (v. 21) is cited by Paul in Romans 10:19. The ascent to Nebo (vv. 48-52) fulfills Numbers 27:12-14.*

¹Listen, O heavens, and I will speak;
hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

²May my teaching fall like rain,
my words descend like dew —
like gentle showers on new grass,
like steady rain on tender plants.

³For I proclaim the name of the LORD —
ascribe greatness to our God!

⁴The Rock — His work is perfect,
for all His ways are justice.
A God of faithfulness, without injustice;
righteous and upright is He.

⁵They have acted corruptly toward Him —
they are not His children, but their own defect.
A crooked and twisted generation!

⁶Is this how you repay the LORD,
you foolish and senseless people?
Is He not your Father who created you —
who made you and established you?

⁷Remember the days of old;
consider the years of generation after generation.
Ask your father, and he will tell you;
your elders, and they will explain it to you.

⁸When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,
when He divided the human race,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
according to the number of the children of Israel.

⁹For the LORD's own portion is His people;
Jacob is His allotted inheritance.

¹⁰He found him in a desert land,
in a desolate, howling wasteland.
He encircled him, He cared for him,
He guarded him as the pupil of His eye.

¹¹Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
that hovers over its young,
He spread His wings and caught them,
He carried them on His pinions.

¹²The LORD alone guided him;
no foreign god was beside Him.

¹³He made him ride on the heights of the land
and fed him the produce of the fields.
He nourished him with honey from the rock
and oil from the flinty cliff.

¹⁴with curds from the herd and milk from the flock,
with the fat of lambs, with rams of Bashan and goats,
with the finest of the wheat —
and you drank the foaming blood of the grape.

¹⁵But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked —
you grew fat, bloated, and gorged.
He abandoned the God who made him
and scorned the Rock of his salvation.

¹⁶They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods;
with detestable things they angered Him.

¹⁷They sacrificed to demons — not God —
to gods they had never known,
new ones that arrived recently,
whom your ancestors never dreaded.

¹⁸You neglected the Rock who fathered you
and forgot the God who gave you birth.

¹⁹The LORD saw and rejected them,
provoked by His own sons and daughters.

²⁰He said, 'I will hide My face from them;
I will see what becomes of them.
For they are a perverse generation —
children with no faithfulness in them.'

²¹They made Me jealous with what is no god;
they provoked Me with their worthless idols.
So I will make them jealous with what is no people;
with a foolish nation I will provoke them.

²²For a fire has been kindled by My anger;
it burns to the depths of the grave.
It devours the earth and its produce
and sets ablaze the foundations of the mountains.

²³I will heap disasters upon them;
I will exhaust My arrows against them.

²⁴Wasted by famine, consumed by plague,
and cut down by bitter pestilence —
I will send the fangs of wild beasts against them,
with the venom of creatures that crawl in the dust.

²⁵Outside, the sword will bereave;
inside, there will be terror —
for young man and young woman alike,
for nursing infant and gray-haired elder.

²⁶I considered scattering them entirely,
blotting out their memory from humanity —

²⁷but I feared the provocation of the enemy,
that their foes would misunderstand,
that they would say, 'Our hand has triumphed —
the LORD did not do all this.'

²⁸For they are a nation devoid of counsel;
there is no understanding in them.

²⁹If only they were wise — if they could understand this,
if they could discern what awaits them!

³⁰How could one pursue a thousand,
and two put ten thousand to flight,
unless their Rock had sold them
and the LORD had handed them over?

³¹For their rock is not like our Rock —
even our enemies can judge that.

³²For their vine comes from the vine of Sodom,
from the terraces of Gomorrah.
Their grapes are grapes of poison;
their clusters are bitter.

³³Their wine is the venom of serpents,
the deadly poison of cobras.

³⁴Is this not stored up with Me,
sealed in My treasuries?

³⁵Vengeance is Mine, and recompense,
for the time when their foot will slip.
For the day of their calamity is near,
and what awaits them rushes upon them.

³⁶For the LORD will vindicate His people
and have compassion on His servants,
when He sees that their strength is gone
and no one remains — neither bond nor free.

³⁷Then He will say, 'Where are their gods —
the rock in whom they took shelter?

³⁸Who ate the fat of their sacrifices
and drank the wine of their drink offerings?
Let them rise up and help you!
Let them be a shelter over you!

³⁹See now that I — I am He,
and there is no god besides Me.
I put to death and I bring to life;
I wound and I heal,
and no one can deliver from My hand.

⁴⁰For I raise My hand to heaven
and declare: As I live forever —

⁴¹when I sharpen My flashing sword
and My hand takes hold of judgment,
I will return vengeance on My adversaries
and repay those who hate Me.

⁴²I will make My arrows drunk with blood,
and My sword will devour flesh —
blood of the slain and the captive,
from the shaggy heads of the enemy.

⁴³Rejoice, O nations, with His people!
For He will avenge the blood of His servants;

He will return vengeance on His adversaries
and make atonement for His land and His people.

⁴⁴Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people — he and Hoshea son of Nun. ⁴⁵When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, ⁴⁶he said to them, 'Take to heart all the words with which I am warning you today, so that you may command your children to observe carefully all the words of this instruction. ⁴⁷For this is no empty word for you — it is your very life. Through this word you will live long on the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.' ⁴⁸The LORD spoke to Moses on that very day, saying: ⁴⁹Go up to this mountain of the Abarim range — Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, facing Jericho — and look out over the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel as a possession. ⁵⁰Die on the mountain that you are ascending, and be gathered to your people, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people. ⁵¹Because you both acted unfaithfully against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin — because you did not treat Me as holy in the presence of the children of Israel. ⁵²You will see the land from a distance, but you will not enter it — the land that I am giving to the children of Israel.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Song of Moses (Ha'azinu) opens by summoning heaven and earth as witnesses — the same cosmic witnesses invoked in Deuteronomy 4:26 and 30:19. This is standard ancient Near Eastern treaty practice: the cosmos itself witnesses the covenant. The bicolon (two-line unit) establishes the poetic structure that will govern the entire song: parallel lines where the second restates, develops, or contrasts the first.
2. Four rain images describe Moses's teaching: matar ('rain'), tal ('dew'), se'irim ('light rain, drizzle'), and revivim ('showers, steady rain'). The verb ya'arof ('drip, fall gently') from the root 'l-r-f suggests something that percolates and soaks in — the teaching is meant to penetrate, not run off the surface. The progression from rain to dew to drizzle to showers covers every form of moisture, suggesting that the teaching saturates completely.
3. The verb eqra ('I proclaim, I call out') is a public declaration of the divine name. The response havu godel ('ascribe greatness') is an imperative — Moses calls on the audience to respond to God's name with acknowledgment of His greatness (godel — 'greatness, magnitude'). This verse functions as a call to worship before the theological declaration that follows.
4. This verse is the theological thesis of the entire Song: God is perfect, just, faithful, and upright. Every attribute is relational: tamim po'olo ('His work is perfect' — complete, without defect), mishpat ('justice' — right judgment), emunah ('faithfulness' — covenant reliability), tsaddiq ('righteous' — fulfilling His obligations), yashar ('upright' — straight, without deviation). The title haTsur ('the Rock') becomes the defining divine epithet of this chapter, appearing six times (vv 4, 15, 18, 30, 31, 37).
5. One of the most textually difficult verses in Deuteronomy. The Hebrew shichet lo lanav mumam is disputed: some read 'they have corrupted themselves; they are not His children — their blemish' while others read 'He has corrupted; no — His children, their blemish.' The rendering follows the majority reading: Israel has acted corruptly, and their corruption (mumam — 'their blemish, their defect') disqualifies them as God's children. The terms iqqesh ('crooked, twisted') and petaltol ('tortuous, winding') describe moral distortion.
6. The rhetorical question halaYHWH tigmelu zot ('is this what you repay the LORD?') establishes the charge: ingratitude. The terms naval ('foolish, senseless') and lo chakham ('not wise') describe Israel's moral stupidity — not intellectual deficiency but the failure to recognize what should be obvious. Three verbs describe God's relationship to Israel: qanekha ('acquired you, created you'), asekhah ('made you'), and yekhonenkha ('established you, prepared you'). God is simultaneously Father, Creator, and Sustainer.
7. The Song shifts to historical reflection. Four sources of knowledge are invoked: memory (zekhor — 'remember'), understanding (binu — 'consider, discern'), paternal tradition (she'al avikha — 'ask your father'), and elder wisdom (zeqenekha — 'your elders'). The transmission of covenant history is a communal, intergenerational project — knowledge of God's faithfulness passes from generation to generation.
8. This verse describes a primordial divine ordering of the world: God (Elyon — 'the Most High') assigned each nation its territory and arranged the entire world's geography around Israel. The phrase lemispar benei Yisra'el ('according to the number of the children of Israel') suggests that the number of nations was calibrated to match Israel's tribal structure. A Dead Sea Scrolls variant (4QDeutj) reads benei Elohim ('sons of God') instead of benei Yisra'el, suggesting each nation was assigned a divine patron, while Israel was reserved for God Himself (v 9).
9. While other nations received their territories and presumably their divine patrons (v 8), God chose Israel as His own cheleq ('portion, share'). The word chevel ('allotment, measured portion, territory') describes a specific, measured inheritance — God didn't inherit Israel by chance but by deliberate selection. The parallel between 'His people' (ammo) and 'Jacob' (Ya'aqov) identifies the covenant community by its ancestral name.
10. God's care for Israel in the wilderness is described through four verbs: yimtsa'ehu ('He found him'), yesovevenhu ('He encircled him, He surrounded him'), yevonenhu ('He gave him understanding, He cared for him'), and yitsrenhu ('He guarded him, He preserved him'). The final phrase ke'ishon eino ('as the pupil of His eye') is one of the Bible's most intimate images — the pupil is the most sensitive, carefully protected part of the body. God guards Israel with the same instinctive protectiveness with which the body guards the eye.

11. The eagle metaphor describes God's parenting: ya'ir qinno ('stirs up its nest' — forcing the young to fly by disrupting their comfort), yerachef ('hovers' — the same verb used for the Spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2), yifros kenafav ('spreads its wings'), yiqqachehu ('catches them'), and yissa'ehu al evrato ('carries them on its pinions'). The image combines tough love (pushing them out) with unfailing protection (catching and carrying them). The eagle does not merely protect — it teaches flight.
12. The word badad ('alone, by Himself') emphasizes exclusivity — God needed no help, no partner, no supporting deity. The phrase ve'ein immo el nekhar ('no foreign god was with Him') can be read two ways: no foreign god helped God (He did it alone), or no foreign god was alongside Israel (they had no other deity). Both readings reinforce the same point: Israel's salvation and sustenance came from God exclusively.
13. Three images of extravagant provision: riding on the heights (yarkivehu al bamotei arets — conquest and dominion), eating field produce (tenubot sadai — agricultural abundance), and extracting sweetness from stone (devash misela, shemen mechalamish tsur — honey from rock, oil from flint). The last image is the most striking: getting nourishment from what should be barren and unyielding. God makes even stone produce sweetness for Israel.
14. A catalog of abundance: dairy (chem'at baqar, chalev tson — curds and milk), prime meat (chelev karim ve'eilim — fat lambs and rams, benei Bashan — the renowned cattle of Bashan), and the finest grain (chelev kilyot chittah — literally 'the kidney-fat of wheat,' meaning the richest, best part). The climactic image dam enav tishte chamet ('you drank the foaming blood of the grape') describes wine so rich it froths. Every category of food reaches its superlative: the fattest, the finest, the richest.
15. Jeshurun (Yeshurun — from the root y-sh-r, 'upright') is an honorific name for Israel, used with bitter irony here: the 'upright one' has become anything but upright. Three words describe the gorging: shamanta ('you grew fat'), avita ('you became thick, bloated'), and kasita ('you were covered/stuffed'). The abundance of verses 13-14 led directly to the rebellion of verse 15: prosperity produced complacency, then contempt. The verb yenabel ('scorned, treated as foolish') applied to tsur yeshu'ato ('the Rock of his salvation') is devastating — Israel treated their Savior-Rock as worthless.
16. Two parallel lines: jealousy (yaqni'uhu — from qin'ah, the same jealousy God claims in Exodus 20:5) provoked by zarim ('foreign things, strange gods'), and anger (yakh'isuhu) provoked by to'evot ('detestable things, abominations'). God's jealousy is not petty envy but the righteous indignation of a covenantal partner betrayed.
17. The objects of Israel's worship are exposed: shedim ('demons, malevolent spirits' — a term borrowed from Akkadian shedu), lo Eloha ('not God'), elohim lo yeda'um ('gods they had never known'), chadashim miqqarov ba'u ('new ones that came from nearby/recently'). The progressive debunking strips the false gods of all legitimacy: they are demons, they are not God, they are unknown, they are newcomers. Israel's ancestors never se'arum ('shuddered at them, feared them').
18. Two stunning parental images for God: tsur yeladekha ('the Rock who bore/fathered you') and El mechollekha ('the God who writhed in labor with you'). The verb cholet can mean 'to bring forth in labor' — God's relationship to Israel is described with both paternal (yalad) and maternal (cholet) birthing language. The verbs teshi ('you neglected, you weakened') and tishkach ('you forgot') describe a child's abandonment of the parent who gave them life.
19. God's response to Israel's rebellion begins. The verb yinats ('rejected, spurned, abhorred') marks the turning point of the Song from grace to judgment. The provocation comes mikka'as banav uvenotav ('from the provocation of His sons and daughters') — the familial language continues. These are not strangers who offend God but His own children.
20. God's judgment takes the form of withdrawal: astirah fanai ('I will hide My face'). The hidden face of God (hester panim) is one of the most powerful theological concepts in the Hebrew Bible — God does not actively destroy but withdraws His protection and presence, leaving Israel exposed to the consequences of their own choices. The final phrase banim lo emun bam ('children in whom there is no emun') uses the root alef-mem-nun (the same root as emunah from verse 4): God is emunah; His children have no emun. The contrast is the theological core of the Song.
21. The punishment mirrors the crime in precise poetic symmetry: they provoked God with lo el ('no-god'), so God will provoke them with lo am ('no-people'); they angered God with haveiheim ('their vanities/worthless things'), so God will anger them with goy naval ('a foolish/worthless nation'). The apostle Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10:19 to explain God's inclusion of the Gentiles — the 'no-people' become God's means of provoking Israel to jealousy.
22. The fire of God's anger spans the entire vertical axis of creation: from She'ol tachtit ('the lowest depths of the grave') through the earth's surface (erets vivulah — 'the earth and its produce') up to mosdei harim ('the foundations of the mountains'). Nothing is beyond the reach of divine judgment — the fire penetrates downward to the underworld and upward to the mountain roots.
23. God becomes a warrior: aspeh ra'ot ('I will heap calamities') and chitsai akalleh bam ('I will spend/exhaust My arrows on them'). The image of God emptying His quiver against Israel is terrifying — He will not stop until all His arrows are spent. The implication is also that the arrows will eventually run out — God's judgment is severe but not infinite.
24. The arrows of verse 23 are now identified: famine (mezei ra'av — 'the emaciated ones of hunger'), plague (lechumei reshaf — 'consumed by burning fever/pestilence'), destruction (qetev meriri — 'bitter destruction/plague'), wild animals (shen behemot — 'teeth of beasts'), and venomous serpents (chamat zochalei afar — 'venom of those that crawl in the dust'). The threats come from every domain: disease, beasts, and reptiles — the natural world turned hostile.

25. No space is safe: the sword operates outside (michutz) and terror operates inside (mechadarim — 'from the inner rooms'). No person is exempt: young men (bachur), young women (betulah), nursing infants (yoneq), and the elderly (ish seviah). The merism covers every age group — from the youngest to the oldest, no one escapes.
26. God contemplates total annihilation: af'eihem ('I would scatter them to the corners/edges') and ashbitah me'enosh zikhram ('I would cause their memory to cease from humankind'). This is the most extreme possible divine action — not just destruction but erasure from history. The verse sets up the reason God restrains Himself (v 27).
27. God's restraint is motivated not by mercy toward Israel but by concern for His own reputation among the nations. If God destroys Israel completely, the enemy nations would credit the victory to their own power (yadenu ramah — 'our hand is raised/has triumphed') rather than to divine judgment (velo YHWH pa'al kol zot — 'and not the LORD has done all this'). God's name and sovereignty must be vindicated — He will not allow human arrogance to claim credit for His judicial actions.
28. The referent is ambiguous — 'they' could be Israel (who lack the wisdom to see where their rebellion leads) or the enemy nations (who lack the wisdom to see that God, not their own power, is at work). Many interpreters read verses 28-33 as referring to the enemies, while others see Israel. The ambiguity may be intentional — both Israel and the nations lack true understanding.
29. The optative lu ('if only, would that') expresses divine longing for wisdom in the people. Three wisdom verbs are chained: chakhmu ('were wise'), yaskilu ('would comprehend'), and yavinu ('would understand'). The object of understanding is acharitam ('their end, their latter destiny'). The tragedy is not just rebellion but blindness — they cannot see where their path leads.
30. The supernatural ratio — one enemy routing a thousand Israelites, two routing ten thousand — can only be explained by divine abandonment. The rhetorical question im lo ki ('unless') points to the only possible explanation: tsuam mekharam ('their Rock sold them'). God is called 'their Rock' even in the act of judgment — He remains their Rock, but He has withdrawn His protection. The verb hisgir ('handed over, delivered up, shut in') means God actively transferred Israel into enemy hands.
31. A moment of theological clarity within the lament: ketsurenu tsuam ('their rock is not like our Rock'). The lowercase 'rock' (tsur) refers to the gods of the enemy nations; the uppercase 'Rock' refers to Israel's God. Even the enemies themselves (oyeveinu pelilim — 'our enemies are the judges') can see the difference. The gods of the nations cannot compare to Israel's God — which makes Israel's abandonment of Him all the more incomprehensible.
32. The enemies (or Israel — the referent continues to be debated) are compared to the produce of Sodom and Gomorrah — the quintessential symbols of divine judgment. Their vine produces rosh ('poison') and merorot ('bitterness') — moral corruption described as toxic agriculture. If this refers to Israel, the image is stunning: the people God planted as His vineyard (cf. Isaiah 5:1-7) now produce the fruit of Sodom.
33. The vine metaphor concludes: their wine (yeinam) is chamat tanninim ('venom of serpents') and rosh petanim akhzar ('cruel/deadly poison of cobras'). What should nourish (wine) destroys (venom). The word tanninim can mean 'serpents,' 'sea monsters,' or 'dragons' depending on context; here the parallel with petanim ('cobras, vipers') confirms the serpent reading.
34. God reveals that the enemies' wickedness is not unnoticed: kamus immadi ('stored up with Me'), chatum be'otsrotai ('sealed in My treasuries'). The metaphor is of a treasury or archive where debts are recorded and sealed for future collection. Divine justice is patient but precise — nothing is forgotten, everything is accounted for.
35. Li naqam veshillem ('To Me belongs vengeance and repayment') is quoted by Paul in Romans 12:19 and by the author of Hebrews 10:30. The image of the slipping foot (tamut raglam — 'their foot will totter/slip') suggests that the wicked stand on unstable ground — their fall is not a matter of if but of when. The phrase ve'chash atidot lamo ('what is destined for them hastens') personifies destiny as a runner racing toward the wicked.
36. The turning point of the Song: God shifts from judgment to restoration. The verb yadin ('will judge/vindicate') here means to act on behalf of, not to condemn. The verb yitnecham ('will have compassion, will relent') from the root n-ch-m describes God's emotional turn toward His people. The condition for this turn is Israel's complete helplessness: azlat yad ('strength is gone'), efes atsur ve'azuv ('no one remains, neither confined nor free'). God acts when human resources are exhausted — when Israel can no longer save themselves.
37. God challenges the false gods Israel chose: ei eloheimo ('where are their gods?') — the same taunt used against foreign gods in Judges 10:14. The word tsur ('rock') is used with bitter irony: Israel's chosen 'rock' (lowercase — the false gods) is now exposed as absent and powerless, in contrast to ha'Tsur ('the Rock') — God Himself — who never abandoned His essential character even during judgment.
38. The challenge continues with escalating sarcasm: Israel's false gods consumed the best portions of their offerings (chelev zevacheimo — 'the fat of their sacrifices,' yein nesikhham — 'the wine of their libations'). Now let those gods demonstrate their power: yaqumu ve'ya'zerukhem ('let them rise and help you'), yehi aleikhem sitrah ('let them be a shelter over you'). The silence of the false gods answers the challenge.
39. The supreme divine self-declaration: ani ani hu ('I, I am He') — an emphatic claim of unique, exclusive deity. Three paired actions demonstrate absolute sovereignty: amith va'achayye ('I kill and I make alive'), machatseti va'ani erpa ('I wound and I heal'). God holds both sides of every axis of power — destruction and creation, injury and restoration. The closing ve'ei miyadi matzil ('no one delivers from My hand') is an absolute claim of irresistible power.
40. God swears an oath by Himself — raising the hand to heaven (essa el shamayim yadi) is a gesture of oath-taking. Since there is no one greater to swear by, God swears by His own eternal life: chai anokhi le'olam ('I live forever'). This divine oath guarantees the promises of vengeance and restoration that follow.

41. God as divine warrior: shanoti beraq charbi ('I sharpen the lightning-flash of My sword') — the sword is described as beraq ('lightning, flash'), connecting heavenly warfare with storm imagery. God's enemies (tsarai — 'My adversaries,' mesan'ai — 'those who hate Me') are Israel's oppressors, but the language is broad enough to encompass all who oppose God's purposes.
42. The divine warrior imagery reaches its climax: arrows drunk on blood (ashkir chitsai middam) and a sword that devours flesh (ve'charbi tokhal basar). The phrase mero'sh par'ot oyev ('from the head of the enemy's wild-haired leaders') may describe enemy warriors with flowing battle hair, or it may refer to the chief (ro'sh — 'head, leader') of the enemy's retribution forces. The violence is not gratuitous — it is the execution of the covenant curses against Israel's oppressors.
43. The Song concludes with a universal call to celebration: harninu goyim ammo ('Shout for joy, O nations, with His people'). The same nations that were instruments of judgment are now called to rejoice in Israel's restoration. Three divine actions close the Song: dam avadav yiqqom ('He will avenge His servants' blood'), naqam yashiv letsarav ('He will repay His adversaries'), and kipper admato ammo ('He will atone for His land and His people'). The final verb kipper ('atone, make atonement') brings the entire covenantal drama to resolution — the same kippur that purifies the sanctuary (Leviticus 16) now purifies the land and the people. Judgment ends in restoration.
44. The narrative frame resumes. Joshua is called by his birth name Hoshea (meaning 'salvation') rather than Yehoshua/Joshua (meaning 'the LORD saves'). Moses recites the Song to the entire assembly. Joshua's presence signals the transition of leadership — he witnesses Moses's final teaching as the man who will carry it forward.
45. The phrase vayekhal Mosheh ('Moses finished') marks the formal conclusion of the Song's recitation. The emphasis on 'all' (kol hadevarim, kol Yisra'el) stresses completeness — every word was spoken, and the entire nation heard.
46. Moses's final charge before his death: simu levavkhem ('set your hearts' — pay attention with your whole being). The intergenerational dimension is explicit: asher tetsavvum et beneikhem ('which you shall command your children'). The Song is not merely a performance but a teaching instrument — it must be transmitted to future generations as a perpetual witness to the covenant.
47. The extraordinary claim: ki hu chayyeikhem ('for it is your life'). The Torah is not abstract religious teaching but the source of life itself. The word is not req ('empty, vain, worthless') — it carries weight, substance, and consequence. Obedience to this word is directly connected to survival on the land (ta'arikhu yamim al ha'adamah — 'you will prolong days on the soil'). Life in the land and faithfulness to the word are inseparable.
48. The phrase be'etsem hayyom hazeh ('on the bone/substance of this day' — on that very day) emphasizes immediacy. What follows is God's command for Moses to ascend Mount Nebo and die — the end of Moses's life is inseparable from the completion of his teaching.
49. The geography is precise: the Abarim range east of the Jordan, specifically Mount Nebo (har nevo), in Moabite territory, facing (al penei) Jericho across the Jordan valley. Moses will see (ure'eh) the land but not enter it. The command to look (re'eh) at the promised land is both a gift (he gets to see it) and a judgment (he will never set foot in it). The verb noten ('I am giving') uses the present participle — the gift is in process, happening now, but Moses will not be its recipient.
50. The command umut bahar ('die on the mountain') is stark — God commands death as directly as He once commanded mission. The phrase he'asef el ammekha ('be gathered to your people') is the standard Hebrew expression for death understood as reunion with ancestors — it presupposes continued existence beyond physical death. Aaron's death on Mount Hor (Numbers 20:22-29) provides the parallel: both brothers die on mountaintops, both are 'gathered to their people,' and neither enters the promised land.
51. The reason for Moses's exclusion from the land is restated: me'altem bi ('you acted unfaithfully against Me') at Meribah-kadesh (Numbers 20:1-13), where Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it. The phrase lo qiddashtem oti ('you did not sanctify Me, you did not treat Me as holy') identifies the core failure: Moses failed to uphold God's holiness before the people. The plural 'you both' (me'altem) includes Aaron, who has already died under the same judgment.
52. The chapter and Moses's public ministry end with this sentence of profound sorrow: minneged tir'eh et ha'arets ('from opposite/across you will see the land') — he will see it but not enter it. The word shamah ('there') followed by lo tavo ('you will not come') creates a permanent barrier between Moses and the promise. Yet the verse is not entirely judgment — God still says ani noten ('I am giving'), present tense. The promise to Israel stands; only Moses's personal entry is denied. The land awaits.

33

Summary: *Moses blesses the twelve tribes of Israel before his death — a poem framing each tribe's destiny within a theophanic hymn that opens and closes with God as king and protector.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The blessing opens with a theophany (vv. 2-5) — God coming from Sinai, Seir, and Mount Paran with ten thousands of holy ones and a fiery law (esh dat). The order and content of the tribal blessings differ significantly from Jacob's blessings in Genesis 49: Simeon is missing entirely, Joseph receives the longest blessing, and Levi is praised rather than cursed. The name Yeshurun (v. 5, 26), a poetic term for Israel from the root yashar ('upright'), appears only here and in 32:15 — it is God's affectionate name for what Israel is meant to be.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase esh dat (v. 2) remains one of the most debated expressions in the Torah — 'fire of law,' 'fiery law,' or a textual corruption. We preserved the Masoretic reading. Several tribal blessings contain rare vocabulary: Zebulun's 'treasures hidden in the sand' (v. 19), Dan as a 'lion's cub leaping from Bashan' (v. 22), and Asher's 'iron and bronze' bolts (v. 25). Each required balancing literal translation with intelligible English.*

Connections: *The tribal blessings parallel Genesis 49 (Jacob's blessings) but reflect changed historical circumstances. The theophanic opening (vv. 2-5) echoes Judges 5:4-5, Psalm 68:7-8, and Habakkuk 3:3. The closing declaration 'there is none like the God of Jeshurun' (v. 26) is echoed in the incomparability formula of Exodus 15:11, 2 Samuel 7:22, and Psalm 86:8.*

¹This is the blessing
that Moses, the man of God,
pronounced over the people of Israel
before his death.

²He declared:
The LORD came from Sinai,
He dawned upon them from Seir,
He blazed forth from Mount Paran.
He arrived from the myriads of holy ones —
from His right hand, a fire of law for them.

³Indeed, He loves the peoples;
all His consecrated ones are in Your hand.
They gathered at Your feet,
each one receiving Your instructions.

⁴Moses charged us with the Law —
the inheritance of the assembly of Jacob.

⁵He became king in Jeshurun
when the leaders of the people assembled,
the tribes of Israel gathered as one.

⁶Let Reuben live and not perish;
let his people not dwindle in number.

⁷And this is for Judah. He said:
 Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah,
 and bring him back to his people.
 Let his hands fight for him,
 and be his help against his enemies.

⁸Of Levi he said:
 Your Thummim and Your Urim
 belong to the one loyal to You —
 the one You tested at Massah,
 the one You contended with at the waters of Meribah.

⁹The one who said of his father and mother,
 'I do not regard them' —
 who did not acknowledge his brothers
 or recognize his own children.
 For they kept Your word
 and guarded Your covenant.

¹⁰They teach Your ordinances to Jacob,
 Your instruction to Israel.
 They place incense before You
 and whole offerings on Your altar.

¹¹O LORD, bless his strength
 and take pleasure in the work of his hands.
 Crush the backs of those who rise against him,
 and of those who hate him — so they never rise again.

¹²Of Benjamin he said:
 The beloved of the LORD
 will dwell securely beside Him.
 He shelters him all day long,
 and between his ridges He makes His home.

¹³Of Joseph he said:
 Blessed by the LORD is his land —
 with the finest gifts of heaven, with dew,
 and with the deep waters crouching below,

¹⁴with the finest crops ripened by the sun,
 and the finest yield drawn out by the moon,

¹⁵with the best of the ancient mountains,
 and the finest gifts of the enduring hills,

¹⁶with the finest gifts of the earth and all it holds,
 and the favor of the One who dwelt in the bush —
 let all this come upon the head of Joseph,

upon the crown of the one set apart among his brothers.

¹⁷His firstborn bull — majesty belongs to him;
his horns are the horns of a wild ox.
With them he gores the nations,
all of them, to the ends of the earth.
These are the myriads of Ephraim;
these are the thousands of Manasseh.

¹⁸Of Zebulun he said:
Rejoice, Zebulun, in your ventures abroad,
and Issachar, in your tents.

¹⁹They will summon peoples to the mountain;
there they will offer righteous sacrifices.
For they will draw from the abundance of the seas
and the hidden treasures of the sand.

²⁰Of Gad he said:
Blessed is the one who gives Gad wide territory!
Like a lioness he crouches,
tearing off arm and skull alike.

²¹He chose the best portion for himself,
for the commander's allotment was reserved there.
He marched at the head of the people,
carrying out the LORD's righteous purpose
and His judgments alongside Israel.

²²Of Dan he said:
Dan is a lion's cub
that leaps from Bashan.

²³Of Naphtali he said:
Naphtali — overflowing with favor,
filled with the blessing of the LORD —
take possession of the sea and the southland.

²⁴Of Asher he said:
Most blessed of sons is Asher;
let him be favored among his brothers,
and let him bathe his foot in oil.

²⁵Your bolts will be iron and bronze,
and your strength will last as long as your days.

²⁶There is no one like the God of Jeshurun,
who rides across the heavens to help you,
who rides the clouds in His majesty.

²⁷The God of old is your dwelling place,
and beneath you are the everlasting arms.
He drove the enemy out before you
and said, 'Destroy!'

²⁸So Israel dwells in safety,
the fountain of Jacob set apart
in a land of grain and new wine,
where even his skies drip with dew.

²⁹How fortunate you are, Israel!
Who is like you —
a people delivered by the LORD,
the shield of your protection,
the sword of your triumph?
Your enemies will cringe before you,
and you will trample their heights.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription frames the entire chapter as berakhah ('blessing') — a performative speech-act in which words carry real power to shape destiny. Moses is titled ish ha'Elohim ('the man of God'), a designation used elsewhere only for prophets like Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:18, 2 Kings 4:9). This title elevates Moses's final words beyond personal farewell to prophetic declaration. The phrase lifnei moto ('before his death') marks this as deathbed blessing — a genre well-established in Genesis (Jacob's blessings in Genesis 49) where the dying patriarch's words are irrevocable and prophetically charged.
2. This theophanic hymn traces God's approach from three locations moving northward: Sinai, Seir (Edom's mountain range), and Paran (the wilderness region between them). The verbs escalate: ba ('came'), zarach ('dawned, rose like the sun'), hofia ('shone forth, blazed out'). The Ketiv/Qere at the verse's end is significant: the Ketiv reads (eshdat) as a single word of uncertain meaning, while the Qere separates it into (esh dat — 'fire of law' or 'fiery law'). The rendering follows the Qere reading. The phrase merivevot qodesh ('from the myriads of holy ones') depicts God arriving with a vast angelic retinue — a divine warrior coming with His heavenly army.
3. This verse is among the most textually difficult in the Hebrew Bible. The verb chovev ('loving, embracing') is rare, appearing only here in this form. The word ammim ('peoples') is ambiguous — it could mean the tribes of Israel or the nations generally. The phrase kol qedoshav beyodekha ('all His holy ones are in Your hand') shifts from third person (He loves) to second person (Your hand), a common feature of Hebrew hymnic poetry. The verb tukku ('they sat down' or 'they were struck/directed') is disputed; it may come from the root t-k-k ('to be placed, to sit') describing the people positioned at God's feet as disciples receiving teaching.
4. This verse shifts from theophanic hymn to communal declaration — likely a congregational response or liturgical refrain. The word torah ('instruction, teaching, law') is presented not as burden but as morashah ('inheritance, possession') — something precious handed down from generation to generation. The term qehillat Ya'aqov ('assembly of Jacob') designates the gathered community as the corporate recipient and guardian of Torah. This verse became one of the most quoted in Jewish liturgy and education, crystallizing the idea that Torah belongs to the entire community, not to priests or scholars alone.
5. The identity of the 'king' is debated: it may refer to God Himself reigning over Israel, or to Moses functioning as a king-like figure during the wilderness period. The context of theophany (vv 2-4) favors God as the subject — He became melekh ('king') over Israel at Sinai when the nation assembled. The verb hit'assef ('gathered together') and the adverb yachad ('together, as one') emphasize the unity of the tribal assembly as the moment of God's coronation over His people.
6. Reuben's blessing is strikingly brief — the shortest of all the tribal blessings, reflecting the firstborn's diminished status (cf. Genesis 49:3-4, where Jacob rebukes Reuben for his transgression). The phrase yechi... ve'al yamot ('let him live and not die') is a plea for survival, not dominance. The second line vihi metav mispar ('let his men be a number') is ambiguous: it could mean 'let his men be numerous' (a positive wish) or, as some ancient versions read with the negative particle, 'let not his men be few' (a prayer against extinction). The brevity itself is eloquent — Reuben receives survival, not supremacy.
7. Judah's blessing is framed as intercessory prayer rather than declarative blessing — Moses asks God to hear Judah and assist him. The phrase ve'el ammo tevi'ennu ('bring him to his people') may reflect a situation where Judah fights at the vanguard, separated from the other tribes, and needs to be brought safely home. Yadav rav lo ('his hands contend/fight for him') asks that Judah's own strength be sufficient for battle. The final plea ezer mitsarav tihyeh ('be a help from his adversaries') asks for divine assistance specifically in military conflict. Notably, Simeon is omitted entirely from

this blessing — the only tribe not mentioned.

8. Levi's blessing is the longest, spanning four verses (8-11), reflecting the tribe's elevated priestly role. The Thummim and Urim (tummekha ve'urekha — note the reversed order from the usual 'Urim and Thummim') are the sacred lots used for divine consultation, here assigned to ish chasidekha ('the man loyal to You' — possibly referring to the tribe collectively or to Moses/Aaron specifically). The testing at Massah (Exodus 17:1-7) and the striving at Meribah (Numbers 20:1-13) are places where both the people and their leaders were tested. The Levites proved faithful when others did not.
9. This verse recalls the Levites' decisive action at the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:25-29), where they executed judgment without regard for family ties. The three negations — lo re'itiv ('I have not seen him' — regarding father and mother), lo hikkir ('did not acknowledge' — regarding brothers), lo yada ('did not know' — regarding children) — demonstrate absolute covenant loyalty over family loyalty. The verbs shamru ('they kept, observed') and yintoru ('they guarded, preserved') describe the Levites' fidelity to God's imratekha ('Your word, Your utterance') and beritekha ('Your covenant'). Tribal loyalty to God superseded kinship loyalty.
10. Two primary Levitical functions are named: teaching and worship. The verb yoru ('they teach, they direct') from the same root as torah connects the Levites' instructional role directly to Torah itself — they are the authorized interpreters. The parallelism mishpatekha ('Your ordinances') / toratekha ('Your instruction') covers the full scope of divine teaching. The worship function involves qetorah ('incense' — the aromatic offering burned on the golden altar) and kalil ('whole offering' — the completely consumed sacrifice on the bronze altar). The Levites stand at the intersection of divine word and divine worship.
11. The blessing concludes with a prayer for Levi that mirrors a warrior's petition. Barakh YHWH cheilo ('Bless, LORD, his strength/resources') asks for divine empowerment. The verb tirtsah ('accept, take pleasure in') asks God to find the Levites' po'al yadav ('work of his hands' — their priestly service) pleasing. The final lines turn aggressive: mechats motnayim qamav ('crush the loins/back of those who rise against him') uses violent imagery to protect the priestly tribe from its opponents — possibly reflecting historical conflicts over Levitical authority. The phrase min yequmun ('that they not rise again') is a prayer for decisive, permanent victory.
12. Benjamin's blessing is saturated with intimacy. The title yedid YHWH ('beloved of the LORD') uses the same root as David's name (d-v-d) and suggests deep, personal affection. The verb yishkon ('will dwell') and its repetition shaken ('He dwells/makes His home') create a picture of mutual indwelling — Benjamin dwells securely with God, and God dwells between Benjamin's ketepav ('his shoulders' — referring to the ridges or slopes of Benjamin's hill-country territory). Since the Jerusalem Temple was built on the border of Benjamin's territory, many interpreters see this as a prophetic allusion to God dwelling on Benjamin's hills.
13. Joseph's blessing (vv 13-17) is the longest and most lavish, rivaling the theophanic introduction in grandeur. The key word meged ('precious thing, finest gift, choice produce') appears five times across vv 13-16, creating a cascade of abundance. The blessing begins with cosmic sources: shamayim ('heaven') provides tal ('dew' — essential moisture in a land with dry summers), while the tehom ('the deep' — primordial subterranean waters, cf. Genesis 1:2) rovetset tachat ('crouches beneath') the surface, supplying springs and groundwater. The verb rovetset ('crouching, lying in wait') personifies the deep as a living force ready to nourish.
14. The celestial pair — shemesh ('sun') and yerachim ('moons, lunar months') — governs agricultural productivity. The sun's tevu'ot ('produce, crops, yield') refers to what grows under solar warmth, while geresh yerachim ('what the moon puts forth, drives out') likely refers to the monthly cycle of growth regulated by lunar phases. Ancient Near Eastern agriculture was closely tied to the lunar calendar, making this a concrete, practical blessing: Joseph's land will produce abundantly in every season and every month.
15. The blessing moves from celestial to terrestrial — from sky to the oldest features of the landscape. The phrase harrei qedem ('mountains of old, ancient mountains') evokes primordial geology, mountains that have stood since creation. The parallel giv'ot olam ('hills of eternity, enduring hills') reinforces the image of permanence. The rosh ('head, top, best') and meged ('finest gift') drawn from these ancient formations suggest mineral wealth, terraced agriculture, and the productive soil of long-weathered hillsides.
16. The cascade of meged ('finest gifts') reaches its climax: erets umlo'ah ('the earth and its fullness') encompasses everything the land contains. Then the blessing shifts from nature to divine favor: retson shokheni seneh ('the favor/goodwill of the One who dwelt in the bush') is an extraordinary reference back to the burning bush theophany of Exodus 3 — God is identified by His most intimate self-revelation to Moses. The blessings converge on rosh Yosef ('the head of Joseph') and qodqod nezir echav ('the crown of the one consecrated/separated among his brothers'). The word nazir ('consecrated one, separated one') recalls both Joseph's separation from his family and his elevated, set-apart status.
17. The animal imagery shifts Joseph's blessing from agricultural abundance to military power. The bekhore shoro ('firstborn of his bull') is an image of prime strength and vigor. The re'em ('wild ox' — probably the now-extinct aurochs, *Bos primigenius*, not 'unicorn' as KJV translates) was the largest and most powerful bovid in the ancient Near East. The verb yenagach ('he gores, he thrusts') depicts Joseph's tribes driving enemies to the afsei arets ('ends of the earth'). The blessing concludes by identifying the two Josephite sub-tribes: Ephraim receives rivevot ('myriads, ten-thousands') while Manasseh receives alfei ('thousands') — reflecting Ephraim's historical dominance despite being the younger brother (Genesis 48:19-20).
18. Zebulun and Issachar are paired in a single blessing (vv 18-19), as they occupied adjacent territories in the Galilee region. The contrast betse'tekha ('in your going out') versus be'ohalekha ('in your tents') distinguishes their economic roles: Zebulun engaged in commerce and maritime trade (going out), while Issachar was associated with settled agricultural and scholarly life (remaining in tents). The verb semach ('rejoice') covers both activities — both the outgoing trader and the tent-dwelling farmer find cause for celebration in their respective vocations.
19. The paired tribes host a pilgrimage: amim har yiqra'u ('they summon peoples to the mountain') likely refers to a regional sanctuary where Zebulun and Issachar invite others to worship. The zivchei tsedeq ('sacrifices of righteousness' — legitimate, proper offerings) are funded by two sources of

- wealth: shefa yamim ('abundance of the seas' — maritime commerce, fishing, possibly the murex snail used for purple dye) and sefunei temunei chol ('hidden things buried in sand' — perhaps glass-making from coastal sand, a known Phoenician industry in the region, or mineral deposits). The blessing envisions economic prosperity channeled into worship.
- 20.** Gad settled east of the Jordan and needed warrior strength to defend exposed borders. The phrase barukh marchiv Gad ('blessed is the one who enlarges Gad') celebrates the expansion of Gad's territory. The lion imagery — kelavi shaken ('like a lioness he crouches/dwells') — depicts Gad as a predator at rest but ready to strike. The violence of taraf zero'a af qodqod ('tears arm and even skull') describes devastating combat: the lion does not merely wound but rips off both the arm (zero'a — also 'strength, force') and the head. The lavi ('lioness') is chosen over aryeh ('lion') perhaps because the lioness is the more active hunter.
- 21.** Gad selected prime Transjordanian territory (reshit — 'the first, the best portion') where a chelqat mechoqeq ('portion of the commander/lawgiver') was safun ('reserved, hidden away'). The identity of the mechoqeq is debated — it may refer to Moses's burial place (hidden in Gad's territory) or to the leader's reserved portion. Despite choosing eastern territory, Gad fulfilled his obligation: vayyete rashei am ('he went/marched at the head of the people') crossing the Jordan to fight with the other tribes (cf. Numbers 32:20-27). The phrase tsidqat YHWH asah ('he executed the LORD's righteousness') describes Gad's military service as an act of covenant faithfulness.
- 22.** Dan's blessing is brief but vivid. The gur aryeh ('lion's cub') describes youthful, explosive power — not the mature lion at rest but the young predator bursting into action. The verb yezanneq ('leaps, springs forth') conveys sudden, powerful movement. The location min haBashan ('from Bashan') is geographically puzzling since Dan's original territory was in the southwest, but the tribe later migrated north near Bashan (Judges 18), and this blessing may reflect that northern settlement. Bashan was known for its lush pastureland and powerful bulls (Psalm 22:12), making it a fitting launchpad for a leaping lion.
- 23.** Naphtali's blessing is pure abundance. The phrase seva ratson ('satisfied/sated with favor') describes a state of complete divine goodwill — ratson is the pleasure and acceptance that God extends. The parallel male birkat YHWH ('full of the LORD's blessing') reinforces the image of overflowing bounty. The directive yam vedarom yerashah ('possess the sea and the south') defines Naphtali's territory: yam ('sea, west') likely refers to the Sea of Galilee (Naphtali's territory included its western shore), and darom ('south') indicates the fertile southern extension of the tribal allotment. Naphtali's territory was among the most agriculturally productive in Israel.
- 24.** Asher's blessing (vv 24-25) celebrates fertility and prosperity. The phrase barukh mibanim Asher ('blessed among sons is Asher') places Asher above the other tribes in this particular blessing. Retsuyi echav ('accepted/favored by his brothers') suggests both popularity and commercial importance — Asher's olive-rich territory made him a valued trading partner. The vivid image tovel bashemen raglo ('dipping his foot in oil') is hyperbolic: Asher's land produces so much olive oil that one could wade through it. Asher's coastal territory in the northwest (modern Lebanon border region) was indeed renowned for its olive groves.
- 25.** The word min'alekha is traditionally rendered 'your shoes/sandals' (from na'al — 'sandal'), but many modern scholars read it as 'your bolts/locks' (from the root n-'l — 'to bolt, to lock'), referring to the fortification of Asher's cities with iron and bronze bars. This reading better fits the military context: Asher's border cities needed strong defenses. The final phrase ukheyamekha dov'ekha is also debated: dov'ekha may mean 'your strength' (from d-b-' — an otherwise unattested root), 'your vigor,' or 'your abundance.' The rendering follows the traditional understanding: Asher's strength will endure throughout his lifetime, never diminishing.
- 26.** The grand doxology (vv 26-29) opens with a declaration of incomparability: ein ka'El Yeshurun ('there is no one like the God of Jeshurun'). The image of God as rokhev shamayim ('rider of the heavens') draws on ancient Near Eastern storm-god imagery — the deity who mounts the thunderclouds as a chariot (cf. Psalm 68:4, 104:3). But here the heavenly ride is be'ezrekha ('to your help, for your aid') — cosmic power deployed for Israel's benefit. The parallel uvega'avato shechaqim ('and in His majesty, the clouds') depicts God's splendor manifest across the sky (shechaqim — 'clouds, skies, the heights'). The poetic name Yeshurun returns from v 5, framing the blessing.
- 27.** One of the most beloved verses in the Hebrew Bible. The word me'onah ('dwelling place, refuge') from the root '-v-n ('to dwell') presents God Himself as the shelter — not a building or a fortress but the living God as the place where Israel lives. The phrase Elohei qedem ('God of old, God of the east, the ancient God') emphasizes God's eternity — He precedes all things. The image umittachat zero'ot olam ('and underneath are the arms of eternity') is staggeringly intimate: the everlasting arms hold Israel from below, supporting, carrying, and catching. The military conclusion — vayyegaresh ('He drove out') and vayyomer hashmed ('He said: Destroy!') — places this tender image within the context of conquest, where the God who gently holds also powerfully fights.
- 28.** The vision of Israel's settled life: yishkon Yisra'el betach badad ('Israel dwells securely, alone/apart') describes both safety and distinctiveness — Israel is protected and separate from the nations. The phrase ein Ya'aqov ('the fountain/eye of Jacob') is a poetic designation for the source of Israel's life — either the people themselves or their ancestral spring of blessing. The land is described by its products: dagan ('grain' — the staple crop) and tirosh ('new wine, fresh grape juice' — the luxury crop). The final image af shamav ya'arfu tal ('even his heavens drip dew') crowns the picture: the very sky above Israel's land weeps moisture for its fertility.
- 29.** The climactic verse of the entire blessing. The exclamation ashrekha Yisra'el ('how fortunate you are, Israel!' — ashrei expresses concrete, experienced happiness) opens the finale. The Yemenite scribal tradition notes an enlarged aleph (aleph gedolah) in ashrekha, visually marking this word as significant. The rhetorical question mi khamokha ('who is like you?') echoes the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:11: mi khamokha ba'elim YHWH — 'who is like You among the gods, LORD?'), but here the incomparability is applied to Israel itself: a people unmatched because their God is unmatched. God is both magen ('shield' — defensive protection) and cherev ('sword' — offensive power). The enemies yikkachashu ('cringe, submit, feign obedience' — from k-ch-sh, 'to deny, to cower'). Israel treads al bamoteimo ('upon their high places') — conquering the very sanctuaries and

strongholds of the defeated.

34

Summary: *Moses ascends Mount Nebo, sees the entire promised land from Dan to the Negev, and dies there at 120 years old. God buries him in an unknown grave. Joshua succeeds him, but the narrator declares that no prophet like Moses has risen since.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The final verse of the Torah is an epitaph: 'no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face' (panim el panim, v. 10). The phrase is not metaphorical — Exodus 33:11 and Numbers 12:8 established Moses's unique mode of divine communication. The narrator's voice in verse 10 ('has not risen since') implies distance in time — this postscript was written long after Moses by someone looking back across Israel's prophetic history.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase al-pi YHWH (v. 5, literally 'at the mouth of the LORD') led to the rabbinic tradition that Moses died by God's kiss — a tender reading of what could simply mean 'by God's command.' We rendered it 'at the LORD's command' and noted the tradition. Moses's undiminished vitality (v. 7, 'his eye was not dim, and his vigor had not fled') makes his death purely obedient — nature did not take him; God summoned him.*

Connections: *The land panorama (vv. 1-3) fulfills the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:7 and 13:14-17 — Moses sees what Abraham was promised. The unknown burial site prevented shrine-building, a decision with theological implications. Joshua's commissioning (v. 9) completes Numbers 27:18-23 and Deuteronomy 31:7-8. The 'face to face' claim (v. 10) echoes Exodus 33:11 and is qualified by 1 Corinthians 13:12.*

1Moses went up from the steppes of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the summit of Pisgah, which faces Jericho. There the LORD showed him the entire land — Gilead as far as Dan, 2all of Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, 3the Negev, the Jordan plain — the valley of Jericho, city of palms — as far as Zoar. 4The LORD said to him, "This is the land I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you will not cross over into it." 5Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the mouth of the LORD. 6He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, and no one knows his burial place to this day. 7Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eye had not grown dim, and his vitality had not faded. 8The Israelites wept for Moses in the steppes of Moab for thirty days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses came to an end. 9Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him. The Israelites obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. 10No prophet has arisen since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face — 11unmatched in all the signs and wonders the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt — against Pharaoh, all his officials, and his entire land — 12and in all the mighty power and all the great and awesome deeds that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Moses's final ascent reverses Abraham's first journey into the land. The verb vayya'al ('he went up') is the same used for pilgrimage to sacred sites. Mount Nebo rises about 2,600 feet above the Dead Sea, offering a panoramic view westward across the Jordan Valley. The phrase vayyar'ehu YHWH ('the LORD showed him') indicates this was more than natural sight — God granted Moses a vision of the entire promised territory, tribe by tribe, as a final gift.
2. The panorama sweeps from north (Dan, Naphtali) to central (Ephraim, Manasseh) to south (Judah), using tribal names that anticipate the future territorial divisions under Joshua. 'The western sea' (hayyam ha'acharon, literally 'the last sea' or 'the hinder sea') is the Mediterranean — the farthest boundary of the promised land. Moses sees Israel's future mapped out across the landscape before him.
3. The vision completes its sweep southward through the Negev and then down to the Jordan plain (kikkar), the fertile lowland near Jericho. 'City of palms' (ir hattermarim) is Jericho's epithet — the first city Israel will conquer. Zoar, at the southern end of the Dead Sea, was the small city where Lot fled from Sodom's destruction (Gen 19:22). The panoramic tour encompasses the entire promised land from every direction: north, west, south, and the Jordan Valley below.

4. God's final words to Moses are simultaneously a fulfillment and a withholding. The oath to the patriarchs (Gen 12:7, 26:3, 28:13) is confirmed — 'This is the land I swore' — but Moses himself will not enter. The phrase *her'itikha ve'einekha* (I have caused you to see it with your eyes) is tender and devastating: God gives Moses the fullest possible vision of what he cannot have. The reason for Moses's exclusion (Num 20:12, striking the rock) is not repeated here — at the end, the narrative does not revisit the failure but focuses on the intimacy of the moment: God and Moses, alone on a mountaintop, looking at the promise together.
5. The phrase *al-pi YHWH* (literally 'at/by the mouth of the LORD') is rendered 'according to the word' by most translations, but the Hebrew is more intimate. The rabbinic tradition interpreted this as death 'by the kiss of God' — God took Moses's life directly, gently. The epithet *eved-YHWH* ('servant of the LORD') is the highest title in the Hebrew Bible — used sparingly for Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. Moses dies not as a failed leader excluded from the land but as the faithful servant of the LORD.
6. The subject of 'buried' is ambiguous — the Hebrew *vayyiqbor oto* could mean 'He (God) buried him' or 'he (someone) buried him.' Most reading traditions understand God as the one who buries Moses — a final act of intimacy. The unknown grave prevents the burial site from becoming a shrine or object of worship. Beth-peor ('house of Peor') is where Israel's apostasy with Baal of Peor occurred (Num 25) — Moses is buried near the site of Israel's greatest failure under his leadership, a poignant irony. 'To this day' (*ad hayyom hazzeh*) is the narrator's own voice, writing from a later time.
7. Two physical details mark Moses's death as extraordinary: undimmed sight (*lo khahatah eino*) and undiminished vigor (*lo nas lechoho*). He did not waste away — his death was not from decline but from divine appointment. The 120 years divide neatly into three forties: 40 years in Egypt's court, 40 years in Midian, 40 years leading Israel. The Hebrew *lechoho* ('his moisture, vigor, freshness') refers to vital force — the sap of life had not dried up. Moses was fully alive when God took him.
8. Thirty days of mourning is the standard period for a national leader — Aaron received the same (Num 20:29). The phrase *vayyitemu yemei vekhi evel Mosheh* ('the days of weeping-mourning for Moses were completed') marks a definitive ending: the mourning period has a boundary. Israel must grieve and then move forward. The Pentateuch, which began with creation, now closes with a funeral.
9. The succession is orderly: Moses laid hands on Joshua (Num 27:18-23), transferring authority through physical contact. Joshua receives *ruach chokhmah* ('spirit of wisdom') — not Moses's prophetic spirit but the specific gift needed for leadership. The verb *shama* ('obeyed, listened') — the same word that opens the Shema (Deut 6:4) — now describes Israel's response to Joshua's authority. Yet the closing phrase is telling: Israel does 'as the LORD commanded Moses,' not 'as Joshua commanded.' Moses's authority continues to govern even after his death.
10. The eulogy that closes the Torah is written from a later perspective — 'no prophet has arisen since' (*velo-qam navi od*) presupposes a long period of history after Moses. The defining characteristic is not Moses's miracles (those come in v11-12) but his relationship: *asher yeda'o YHWH panim el panim* ('whom the LORD knew face to face'). The verb is *yada* ('knew') — God knew Moses, not merely Moses knew God. The intimacy is mutual. This echoes Exodus 33:11 ('the LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend') and Numbers 12:8 ('mouth to mouth I speak with him').
11. The eulogy shifts from relationship (v10) to action (v11-12). The signs and wonders (*otot umoftim*) refer to the ten plagues and the exodus — the largest concentration of divine power through a human agent in the Hebrew Bible. The verb *shlakho* ('sent him') emphasizes that Moses was God's commissioned agent, not an independent wonder-worker. The comprehensive targeting — Pharaoh, his officials, his entire land — recapitulates the scope of the exodus narrative.
12. The Torah ends with four final words: *le'einei kol-Yisrael* — 'before the eyes of all Israel.' The last image is not of Moses alone on a mountain but of Moses acting before his people. The 'mighty hand' (*hayyad hachazaqah*) is Deuteronomy's characteristic phrase for God's power in the exodus, here attributed to Moses as God's instrument. The 'great and awesome deeds' (*hamora haggadol*) — *mora* carries the sense of awe-inspiring, terrifying acts of power. The Pentateuch closes not with a period but with an open gesture: Moses's legacy is what Israel witnessed, and what they will carry into the land without him.