

Chapter Five

The Incomplete Life: Numbers, Deuteronomy

Numbers takes its title from the census with which it begins and that with which it ends. It opens in the wilderness of Sinai, in the second year after the Israelites had left Egypt, and closes at the edge of the Promised Land, 40 years later. In between is a long and sad record of the failure of Israel to believe in God's provision and power during the wanderings in the wilderness.

Numbers is a dramatic setting for what is perhaps the hardest lesson a Christian must learn--to trust God instead of his own reason. The book forms a commentary on two verses from the Proverbs. Proverbs 3:5 states, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding." That is the truth God had vividly taught His people in the book of Leviticus. But another verse in Proverbs describes the way the people actually responded. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Numbers is the record of the discipline of God in the life of those whom He deeply loves and continually cares for, but who stubbornly resist the way of spiritual progress and thus delay their experience of victory and the joy of fellowship with a living God.

The book easily falls into three divisions. The first 10 chapters summarize God's ample provision for Israel's guidance and warfare. The major part of the book, from chapters 11 through 21, is a description of the continual murmuring and rebelling of the people. The latter part, from chapters 22 through 36, is a remarkable record of the protection of Israel despite their failure.

GOD'S PROVISION

The book opens with the divine command to number from the 12 tribes, the men of war from 20 years old and upward and gives us a census of the fighting men of the nation. The total amounted to 603,550 (Num. 1:46). The Levites were omitted as being dedicated to the service of the Tabernacle. So their place was made up by dividing the tribe of Joseph into two tribes, named for Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. It is instructive that only those who had a clear pedigree could go forth to war. The lesson for the Christian is clear: only those who are certain they belong to the family of God can effectually do battle in the spiritual warfare to which we are called.

The camp is then set in order, with three tribes placed at each of the four points of the compass (chap. 2). The Levites gathered around the Tabernacle, which is clearly to be the center of everything in the national life. Every man had his own appointed place in the great army of Israel, just as the apostle Paul reminds us that each member of the Body of Christ is placed according to the mind and will of God.

In place of the firstborn of every family, whom God had claimed for Himself, the entire tribe of Levi is substituted. There were 22,000 acceptable Levites. But since there were 22,273 firstborn sons, for the extra 273 firstborn sons above the number of Levites, God accepted redemption money which went to maintain Aaron and his family (Num. 3:39-43). Though the Lord Jesus, centuries later, was not of the tribe of Levi He was a firstborn and so, according to the original provision, He was rightly a priest.

Each of the families of Levi is then assigned its special role in the work of caring for the Tabernacle (chap. 4). The family of Kohath was responsible to carry the holy furniture. The curtains and the tents were given into the care of the Gershonites, and the foundations of the Tabernacle were committed to the Merarites. The special care given to the symbols of divine relationship suggests how important are the divine provisions for maintaining a strong spiritual life.

Further arrangements were made for maintaining the purity of the camp (chap. 5), even to the point of settling marriage difficulties arising out of jealousy and suspicion.

The restrictions on those who took the voluntary vow of a Nazirite are given (chap. 6), and have particular interest for us since three of the best known biblical characters--Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist--seemed to be such from birth. They were to refrain from the use of alcohol in any form, from the cutting of their hair or beard, and from contact with dead bodies. The Nazirite vows were taken as an act of consecration to some special service to God. These vows are somewhat similar to the vow of fasting in the case of present-day believers. In this special connection, the well-known threefold benediction is uttered (6:24-26).

Chapter 7, the longest in the book, deals with the voluntary offering of the princes of Israel for the maintenance of worship. It is an almost monotonous recording of each man's identical offering. But the fact that it was so carefully chronicled indicates the interest of God in the individual's gift. The Levites then appear again, are separated from the rest of the people, cleansed, sprinkled, shaven, and finally presented to the Lord by Aaron. There is a clear analogy in this to the presentation of present-day believers before the Father by our great High Priest the Lord Jesus. He said of Himself, "I sanctify myself, that these also may be sanctified" (John 17: 19, KJV). Thus we were separated by His death that we should be holy before God. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17).

Three things yet remain to be set in order before the people begin their march from Sinai.

First, the Passover was kept for the first time after leaving Egypt. Gracious provision was made for the observance of it again one month later for certain ones who were unclean on the first occasion. This indicates some liberty in the observance of the Passover and perhaps helps with the problem in the Gospel of John, where it appears our Lord ate the Passover the evening before the rest of the nation partook of it.

The second thing to be done was to make clear the provision for guidance in the cloud and fire which rested over the Tabernacle. The people were not responsible to determine either the time or the direction of their march but were required only to be obedient to the divine signs. Sometimes the clouds tarried for two days, or a month, or even longer, and then, however difficult and dangerous was the location, there was no option but to remain encamped. Surely this is one of the most difficult lessons for believers to learn. "Wait" is the hardest word to learn in the vocabulary of spiritual discipline.

The third requirement before the cloud lifted as to learn the signals of the trumpets when they sounded. These signals clearly understood, the cloud' over the Tabernacle was taken up and the people began their journey through the wilderness of Sinai. The account closes with the remarkable call of Moses to invite the presence of the Lord, both at their setting out and their resting, thus indicating that everything is centered in the presence and government of God.

THE PEOPLE'S REBELLION

Chapters 11-25 record the people's discontent with God's provision and care. The first complaint seems to be against the hardship of their circumstances, but when the fire of the Lord burned among them and Moses interceded on their behalf, the fire abated (Num. 11:1-3).

The next complaint arose over the monotonous diet of manna. All they could think of were the melons, the cucumbers, the leeks, onions, and garlic of Egypt. They forgot the bondage and misery of Egypt and remembered only its delights. Moses, in his complaint before Jehovah, comes perilously close to joining their murmuring; but God's answer is to appoint elders to assist Moses in the oversight of the people (vv. 16, 17). To the people God then gave quails in such abundance that they ate them for an entire month--and then began to complain about the abundance of meat!

These rumblings of discontent were followed by a mutiny in Moses' own family (chap. 12). Aaron and Miriam became upset at Moses' marriage to a woman from Ethiopia. Though the Lord directly explained to Aaron and Miriam that He had called Moses to a specialized ministry, nevertheless their jealousy continued and

Miriam was punished with leprosy. Upon the intercession of Moses, and after seven days wait, Miriam was restored, for God is ever ready to pardon when evil is confessed and forsaken.

By this time the thousands of Israelites have reached Kadesh-Barnea, at the edge of the Promised Land. At the divine command, 12 spies were chosen to enter the land and view both its resources and its dangers (13:1-20). In comparing this with the first chapter of Deuteronomy it appears that the command to send out the spies was in response to the people's determination to do this. As they decided, so they were commanded to do; just another example of God's accommodation to man's weakness.

After 40 days the men returned, bearing with them, in the grapes of Eshcol, visible evidence of the land's fertility. But there is both a majority and a minority report. Ten spies compared themselves with the giants and were disheartened: the two spies compared the giants with God and were greatly encouraged. Upon hearing the majority report the people virtually mutinied and took action to return to Egypt. Though Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the people, and Joshua and Caleb pled with them to act in faith rather than fear, the people responded by picking up stones to stone them.

At this, Jehovah's patience was exhausted and He threatened to cut them off and raise up another people through Moses. Once again, as in Sinai, Moses interceded with the people, pleading the honor of God and the gloating of the Egyptians should they hear that Jehovah was unable to bring His people into the land of promise (14:13). Again it is God's grace, working through His human instrument, Moses, to plead the cause of mercy.

The people were pardoned, but were sentenced to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and exclusion from the land of everyone over 20 years of age. In a response of remorse rather than repentance, the people promised to go up to the land and attempted to do so in spite of the warning that their day of opportunity was gone. A defeat at the hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites was the result.

In seeming preparation for their 40 years of wandering, certain sacrifices and laws are repeated (chap. 15), with the explanation that they would be fulfilled when the people came into the Promised Land. What follows illustrates that they were not clear whether the laws were to be enforced in the wilderness. One man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath and was put in custody until they determined the mind of God toward him (15:32-34). The people were immediately instructed to put him to death according to the law, and when this was done they were all instructed to wear tassels on the corners of their garment. Into each tassel was bound a cord of blue, a symbol of the deepest truth in their life: that they were under the direct government of heaven.

Despite the divine warnings, rebellion continued to spread throughout the camp, and three men, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, openly challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron (chap. 16). Korah, as a Levite, resented the fact that the priesthood was confined to the family of Aaron; while Dathan and Abiram, both Reubenites, were contemptuous of Moses' authority, and resentful of the circumstances into which he had brought them. Korah led 250 of the elders of Israel in seeking to offer priestly incense before the Lord, but the cloud of glory appeared to the congregation and the Lord warned all the camp to stand back from the dwellings of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. As these men and their families stood at the door of their tents, suddenly the ground opened beneath them and they were all swallowed alive. Furthermore, fire from the Lord consumed the 250 elders (16:35).

On the morrow, in unbelievable stubbornness, the people yet murmured against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of responsibility for the death of those who had been punished. immediately a plague from the Lord broke out among them, and 14,700 died before Aaron filled his censer with fire and made atonement for the people (16:47). Upon that, the plague stopped. To make an end of the spirit of murmuring, Jehovah commanded each of the heads of tribes to write their name upon an almond rod, along with that of Aaron, and leave them in the tent of meeting overnight. On the morrow Aaron's rod had budded, blossomed, and bore fruit (17:8), thus indicating that those who have the right to bear authority are those who walk in the fullness and fruitfulness of resurrection life.

Further regulations were then given for the sanctity of the priesthood and the work of the Levites, and provision was made for their support from tithes and offerings. The tribe of Levi was to have no part of the

division of the land when they came into Canaan, for the tithe was to be their inheritance. The priests, likewise, were to have no inheritance, for the Lord Himself was their portion. All this has clear application to the universal priesthood of today.

Special provision for cleansing from defilement was made in the ordinance of the red heifer (chap. 19). With careful ceremony a red heifer was to be sacrificed, according to minute instructions, and its ashes were to be carefully gathered, mixed with water, and used for certain cases of uncleanness, particularly those involved with touching dead bodies. When it is remembered that on the average 82 people per day must have died during the 40 years wilderness wanderings, it is easy to see how necessary it was to have some provision for cleansing from such defilement. Nothing could more graphically portray the contagiousness of sin. There is unavoidable defilement involved in contact with those "dead in trespasses and sins" around us, but for this reason we must perpetually seek the fresh cleansing of the precious blood of Christ. As the book of Hebrews puts it, "If...the ashes of a heifer...sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ...cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:13,14).

We now reach the record of events at the close of the 40 years, when the people were again at Kadesh-Barnea. Here Miriam, the sister of Aaron and the half-sister of Moses, died and was buried (20:1). Also, once again the people were without water. When they complained, God graciously sent Moses and Aaron with the rod to a rock to speak to it that the people may have water. But though God was gracious, Moses was ungracious, and in his irritation and unbelief he struck the rock twice. For this violation of type Jehovah told both Moses and Aaron that they would not be able to lead the people into the land. But, nevertheless, he caused the rock to bring forth water for the people's needs (20:11).

The enmity of Edom (the descendants of Esau) is indicated by their truculent refusal to let Israel pass through their land along the King's Highway. In circumventing Edom they came to Mount Hor on the border of the land of Edom. There Aaron died (20:28), after transferring his priestly garments to his son Eleazar.

On leaving Kadesh, the king of Arad, a Canaanite leader, attacked Israel as they called upon the Lord for grace, and was defeated. Immediately after their victory comes the incident of the fiery serpents sent among the people because of their murmuring and impatience against Moses (21:6-9). This is the incident referred to by the Lord Jesus in His nighttime talk with Nicodemus (see John 3:14,15). He pointed out its significance in that just as Moses lifted up a bronze likeness of the creature causing death, so Jesus, made in the likeness of sinful flesh, was lifted up to give life to all who would believe.

Chapters 22 through 24 tell the story of Balaam, that strange Gentile prophet who seemed to have a genuine knowledge of Jehovah and yet whose heart was filled with avarice and lusting for material advantage. He was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse Israel, since Moab was next on their route of conquest. Told by God that Israel was only to be blessed, Balaam sent the Moabite embassy home with his refusal. But once again Balak sent princes to him to offer a huge reward if he would come and *curse* Israel. Evidently, Jehovah, reading the true intent of Balaam's heart, permitted him to go, though He was displeased with his motives. On his way, Balaam was confronted by an angel of the Lord--with drawn sword. However, only Balaam's donkey saw the angel. Three times the donkey turned aside to avoid the avenging angel. But when Balaam, in anger, struck the donkey, the Lord opened the animal's mouth to rebuke the prophet for his cruelty.

Three times Balak sought to have Balaam curse Israel, and three times the prophet was unable to utter cursings but instead, in lilting poetry, predicted the sovereign call of Israel, their protection by the divine hand, and their ultimate conquering of the peoples around. When the furious Balak refuses to pay him Balaam uttered an oracle of doom against Moab, Edom, and Amalekites, and the Kenites. In his final oracle he seemed to see even to the days of David, predicting "a star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth" (Num. 24:17). In its ultimate fulfillment this reaches unto the Messiah Himself.

Though the Old Testament does not clearly describe Balaam's evil, the New Testament makes clear that the subsequent sexual immorality of the men of Israel with the daughters of Moab, and their consequent idolatry, was an outcome of the teaching of Balaam. When an Israelite man brazenly brought a woman of Midian into his tent for sexual purposes, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, jealous for the honor of God, thrust his spear

through both man and woman and by that terrible punishment stayed the plague which had broken out (Num. 25:6-9).

GOD'S PROTECTION

Chapter 26 begins the third and last movement of the book. Here we have the account of the second census taken of the men of war and their families. Instructions were then given to Moses concerning the division of the land when they came into Canaan. Of the original number that left Egypt, only two men were permitted to enter. These were Caleb and Joshua, the men of faith, who saw beyond the giants to the living God (Num. 26:65).

An interesting incident is related concerning the five daughters of Zelophehad. Left fatherless, they petitioned and were granted an inheritance in the land of promise (27:1-11). Typically, it established the principle that in Christ there is neither male nor female.

At this point, Jehovah informed Moses that the time has come for him to die, and at Moses' request for a successor, God appointed Joshua, the son of Nun (27:18,19). Joshua would not inherit the full authority Moses exercised, but that he would discover the divine will through the high priest by use of the Urim.

Following this, God repeated the various offerings and sacrifices to be given at the great feast days of Israel, already outlined in the book of Leviticus. Certain exceptions were then made to the general rule concerning vows. The vow of an unmarried daughter, living with her father, may be nullified if her father chooses to do so on the day she makes the vow as may that of a married woman by her husband (30: 1- 16). It is clear, however, that the men are involved only as the heads of households, otherwise single women were under the same solemn obligation to keep their vows as were the men.

The concluding chapters of the book, from chapter 31 through 36, are given over to an account of a holy war led by Phinehas the priest, against the Midianites, during which Balaam, the false prophet, is also slain. Here also, the two tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh insisted unwisely on settling on the east side of the Jordan rather than in the land of promise. They were permitted to do so only by agreeing to join their brethren in subduing their Canaanite enemies.

After reviewing the route taken by Israel from Egypt to the Jordan, and giving directions for the division of the land when the tribes enter it, Moses then assigned certain cities as residences for the Levites, six of which are especially designated as Cities of Refuge (35: 10- 15) for those who killed as the result of an accident or a sudden flare of temper.

Historically, the book of Numbers closes where the last chapter of Deuteronomy begins, giving us the account of the actual death of Moses. Numbers is the record of the failure of the people in their perpetual stubbornness and foolishness, yet it is also the story of the unwearied patience and continual faithfulness of God. Thus it encourages those of us who have often found failure in our own spiritual life. We have come to learn, as the New Testament declares, "If we are faithless,-He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

DEUTERONOMY

Deuteronomy is the last of the five books by Moses. It is a pastime of scholars today, and a supposed mark of intelligence, to raise the question of whether or not Moses actually wrote these books. Some maintain that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) was put together by some unknown editor who went through ancient books and abstracted various parts, and to which Moses' name was added to give it status. This is called the documentary theory of the Pentateuch. Anyone who studies comparative religion in high school or college will probably be exposed to it. But it is a theory that has been carefully examined and proved false by both Christian and Jewish writers. As one authority put it, "If the five books of Moses were not written by him, they must have been written by somebody else named Moses."

The book of Deuteronomy is made up of three great sermons? delivered by Moses shortly before his death. These were given to Israel while they waited on the east side of the Jordan in the Arabah, and after they had been victorious over Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan. At this time the multitude of Israelites were made up of a new generation who were but children when their fathers had been given the Law from Mount Sinai, and many of them were not yet even born at that time. Now they are about to enter the land of Canaan, and it is essential that they thoroughly understand their history before they make such a venture.

REVIEW OF THE JOURNEY

Chapters 1-4 contain the first message, in which Moses reviews the journey from the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai until the people reach their present location in the land of Moab, at the edge of the Jordan River.

Moses' first task was to recite to the people the wonderful love and care of God, who led them with a pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day, and guided them through the trackless, howling desert. He reminded them how God brought water from the rock to slake their thirst in a vast and waterless area; how He fed them with manna that did not fail; and delivered them from their enemies again and again.

In chapter 1 he traced the movement of the people from the giving of the Law at Sinai (also called Mount Horeb) to the refusal of the people to enter the land at Kadesh-Barnea. In chapter 2, he reviewed the second movement from Kadesh-Barnea to Heshbon, around the land of Edom, and through the wilderness of Moab to their encounter with Sihon, the king of Heshbon. Throughout this passage, Moses emphasized the continual deliverance of the people by the hand of God from their enemies, despite their unbelief.

Continuing his discourse, Moses reviewed the conquest of the Jordan Valley as far north as Mount Hermon, and the decision of Reuben and Gad to settle on the east side of the river. In a note of pathos, he recalled his own eager desire to enter into the land when the people do, but also the divine denial of this to him, though he was permitted to view the land from the top of Mount Pisgah. Moses closed the historic review, in chapter 4, with an exhortation to the people to remember the greatness of their God and to be obedient from their hearts. He warned also against the danger of idolatry, especially in the making of graven images. He reminded them of their surpassing privilege of relationship with the living God above all other nations around them. He concluded the message with setting aside three cities of refuge on the east of the Jordan for the protection of those who accidentally kill another.

SECOND GIVING OF THE LAW

The second message of Moses covers chapters 5-26. This begins with a fresh recital of the Ten Commandments as God gave them to Moses on Mount Sinai. It is from this that the book gets its name, for Deuteronomy means "the second (giving of) law." That has more significance than merely the historical account of the law's recital for a second time as we shall see before we finish the book. It must be understood that Deuteronomy is not merely a recital of the journeys of Israel, but it is also a divine commentary upon the significance of those journeys and their events.

In connection with the giving of the Law, Moses reminded the people that at that time they had promised to hear and to do all that God said. To this God had responded "Oh that they had such heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever" (Deut. 5:29). Moses then proceeded to give them the famous Shemah or "Hear, O Israel," which devout Jews have used for centuries to summarize the central feature of their faith--the uniqueness of their God. In connection with this is given the divine requirement to observe these words, to teach them diligently to their children by means of talking to them when they were sitting in the house walking by the way, lying down, or rising up. This is a great lesson on pedagogy, suggesting the utilization of "teachable moments," when truth could be imparted much better than in formal classroom situations.

Moses then began to review the conditions they would find in the land and the blessings that will await them there. He especially warned them to beware of three perils: that of *prosperity*, of *adversity*, and of *neglect to teach* their children. In chapter 7, Moses dealt with the danger Israel would face in confronting the corrupt

nations already in the land. However tempted they might be to show mercy to them, they were commanded to thoroughly eliminate the inhabitants of Canaan, that no vestige of their idolatries and depraved worship should remain to turn the people aside from their worship of Jehovah. They were reminded that they were chosen because the Lord had set His love upon them and that He, Himself, would be their strength in subjugating the nations around. Their own prosperity and good health would depend on the faithfulness by which they carried out these instructions. They need not fear the people for God Himself would cast them into great confusion until they were destroyed.

Chapter 8 recalled to the people the lessons God had taught them in the wilderness; how they had been humbled, and fed with the manna, so that they might know that "man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (8:3). These were familiar words to Jesus who used them to good effect against the tempter in the wilderness of Judea centuries later (see Matt. 4:4).

When the people have entered the land and are feasting upon its richness, they are to beware lest they begin to feel self-sufficient and to take credit in their own heart for all that God has given them. They must not say to themselves that it is because of their own righteousness that the Lord brought them in, they must remember that they are basically a stubborn people, and their history is one of a continual provoking of the Lord to wrath. Moses then recalled the awesome scene at Sinai, when, in the very face of the demonstration of the power and might of God, the people sinned by making the golden calf, and Moses must intercede for them for 40 days and nights. At that time he also made the second tablets of stone, and later placed them in the Ark of the Covenant where they were at the very moment he is speaking to the people.

In a passage of great beauty and power, Moses reminded the people that God is not asking of them anything but to love Him and to serve Him with all their heart and soul, keeping His commandments and statutes for their own benefit. The central emphasis of all is that "the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God" (Deut. 10:17). Yet His actions toward them are those of infinite tenderness and love. God is not asking them to love Him, apart from their awareness that He has first loved them and tenderly cared for them and watched over them, delivering them from their enemies, and disciplining them that they may be strong and whole as a people. As they enter the land, therefore, they are promised rain from heaven to water the earth, grass in the fields for their cattle, power in their warfare to drive out great nations before them until the whole of the land shall be their possession. To remind them of the essential in all this, they are annually to recite the blessings on Mount Gerizim and the cursings on Mount Ebal, which faces the site of Jacob's well.

Chapters 12 through 21 constitute a series of statutes and ordinances which are given to the people for their government within the land. They must first destroy all the places of worship of the nations then in the land, tearing down their altars and burning their Asherim (phallic symbols). These were clear indications of the foulness of the worship in the land at the time. God would then indicate, in due season, one place within the land where they must bring their burnt offerings and sacrifice and there they were to rejoice before the Lord. This was not fulfilled until the days of David and Solomon when the Temple was built, though a temporary provision was made when the Ark was located at Shiloh.

Further instructions are given as to the foods they may eat, avoiding always the eating of blood. They are then told how to tell false prophets from true. Even though the false prophet may be a wonder-worker, if, despite all his apparent power, he should suggest that they go after other gods, they were to stone him. Even if close friends or relatives should seek to entice them to idolatry, they likewise must be put to death. Even if a whole city should apostatize and begin to serve other gods, the inhabitants of that city were to be put to the sword, for "you are the sons of the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1).

Once again the dietary laws are restated, and the tithes are required for the support of the Levites. The sabbatical years are reiterated as the solution to inequities in economic life, and periodic readjustment of the means of wealth. The three great feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Tabernacles, are once again required as the three times in a year when all Hebrew males must appear before the Lord at the Tabernacle.

Provision is then made for the functioning of judges to decide cases where the law had not specifically spoken; also for the choosing of a king, who must not be a foreigner, nor multiply horses, or silver and gold, but must

carefully walk by the statutes of the Law and keep his heart humble before the Lord his God.

In chapter 18, there is the great promise given that "the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him" (v. 15). In some measure this great prophecy was fulfilled by all the true prophets who would rise later in Israel, but in its ultimate it looks forward to the coming of Jesus and His Moses-like actions in beholding the face of God, and uttering His word to all the people. This is the way Peter understood it in Acts 3:22. It is Jesus who perfectly fulfills the Old Testament ideal of priest, prophet, and king..

Again, three cities of refuge were chosen, this time on the west side of the Jordan. Those who were guilty of deliberate murder could find no sanctuary in these cities, only those who killed accidentally were to flee to them to escape the avenger of blood. Ancient landmarks must not be removed, and truth between man and man must be maintained at all costs.

It should be remembered that the Israelites were being sent into the land not only to gain it for their own possession but also to act as the instrument of God in exterminating a foul and corrupt people. In view of the warfare this involved, they were charged to keep before them the vision of their God and His power, and to eliminate from their armies any whose hearts were occupied with other matters, or who were fainthearted and fearful. Terms of peace were to be offered to every city they attacked, and if they were accepted, the inhabitants were not killed but put to forced labor. If the terms of peace were refused, the city was to be decimated.

Chapters 22-26 gather up various regulations for the life of the people within the land. They concern lost or stolen property, prohibitions against the wearing of the opposite sex's clothing, regulations of sexual uncleanness and sanitation, usury, vows, and divorce. Provision was then made for the punishment of theft; but excessive punishment was strictly forbidden--anything which humiliated or made an individual appear vile in others' sight. It was likewise forbidden to muzzle an ox as it tread out the corn. This is given a special spiritual significance by the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 9:8-10. The law of the kinsman-redeemer for those left without an heir, was again enunciated, and all weights and measures were ordered to be kept strictly honest.

The second message then concludes with the instructions of Moses on how the people were to worship in the new land. They must bring the firstfruits and offer them to God, with acknowledgments of His provision and grace, and this was to be followed with gifts given to Levites, to strangers, the fatherless and to widows. Upon the conclusion of this second message, Moses gave detailed instructions as to the impressive ceremony which was to be carried out upon the twin mountains of Gerizim and Ebal within the land. The Ten Commandments were to be given permanent display by being written upon plaster-covered stone monuments, and each year the sons of Rachel and Leah were to recite the blessings upon Mount Gerizim, and the sons of Jacob's concubines were to recite the curses upon Mount Ebal. The curses are detailed in chapter 27, and the blessings summarized in the opening words of chapter 28.

REVELATION OF THE FUTURE

The third message of Moses, chapters 27-31, is a great revelation of the future of Israel, both in terms of the possibility of blessing or of cursing. Chapter 28 is one of the most amazing prophecies ever recorded. It is as fully complete and remarkable in its detail as any other prophecy in all of Scripture, for it predicts the entire history of the Jewish people, even to the point where they cease to be a nation and are scattered over the face of the earth.

First, there is the prediction of the Babylonian dispersion, subsequent to the unbelief and disobedience of the people. This occurred eventually under Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean. Then there follows a prediction of their ultimate return to the land and that after several centuries they would again fall into the terrible sin of rejecting the great Prophet whom God would send. A strange nation would come in from the west (the Romans) who would be a hard and cruel people. They would burn the cities of Israel, destroy the inhabitants and once again disperse them to the ends of the earth.

Israel would then wander for many centuries as a people without a land, but God would at last gather them again, and there would be a final restoration. Upon concluding his great prophecy, Moses reminded the people that on this day they stand before the Lord their God and though there is much about the divine government which they cannot fathom, nevertheless the things that had been revealed to them in their past are given that they may take heed to their present and talk faithfully before their God. In graphic and vivid terms he described to them what would result if they turned from the living God to the gods of the nations about them'

In his closing word, Moses seems to look far into the future and see the people dispersed in lands of captivity. There he reminded them that if they will return to the Lord with all their heart and soul, God would forgive their sin, restore their fortunes, and gather them again into the land.

At this point, Moses uttered the great words which the apostle Paul quoted centuries later in his Epistle to the Romans, and which reveal the reason why Deuteronomy is called "the second law." Moses said to the people, "This commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach" (Deut. 30:11). This speaks of the divine provision by which the demands of the law might be fully met. "It is not necessary," Moses continued, "to go up to heaven and bring it down or to go beyond the sea and bring it back" (see vv. 12,13); but as Moses put it very plainly, "the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it" (see v. 14).

In Romans 10:5 Paul declares that "Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by that righteousness." Here he quotes the words of Moses concerning the Law given at Sinai, and taken from the book of Exodus. Then in Romans 10:6-9 Paul quoted this very passage from Deuteronomy 30, indicating that it refers to Christ, "But the righteousness based on faith speaks thus, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down), or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).' But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart'--that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom. 10:6-9).

In this quotation from Deuteronomy 30, Paul is declaring that it is not necessary to bring Christ down from heaven (the Incarnation), or to bring Him up again from the dead (Resurrection), for this has already been done. It is only necessary that the heart believe and the lips confess that Jesus is Lord and risen from the dead. Thus "the second law," which Paul calls "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus," fulfills, by another principle, the righteousness which the law demands. It is possible, because of this emphasis in Deuteronomy, that the book became Jesus' favorite.

Both of these principles are clearly taught to the people of Israel by Moses. He reiterates constantly the just demands of God expressed in the Ten Commandments. That is the first law. But, equally, he reminds them again and again of the gracious provision through the sacrifices and offerings by which the life of a living Lord can be their personal possession, to enable them to live at the level that God requires. The word "in the mouth" and "in the heart" would enable them to do all that God demanded.

As a consequence, Moses concluded his great address by saying. "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity" (Deut. 30:15). And with earnest words he pleads with them to choose life "in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days" (30:19,20).

In the final chapters, Moses summoned Joshua before him and charged him to be strong and of good courage. Then Jehovah told Moses that the time had come for him to sleep with his fathers, and that despite his faithful warnings, the people he had led would fulfill all his solemn predictions and that God would necessarily visit them with the punishments announced.

Moses was then commanded to write a song which would remain in the memory of the people long after Moses himself had departed. The song dealt with the great themes of God's everlasting covenant with Israel, His mercies to them, their failures and the penalties which followed, and the promise of final deliverance.

Then, before Moses' lonely death, he announced a benediction, similar in its predictive insight to the blessing of Jacob upon his sons in Genesis 49. The great lawgiver concluded his benediction by reminding the people that "the eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (33:27).

The final chapter is undoubtedly added by another hand, for it recounts how Moses ascended Mount Nebo to the top of the peak of Pisgah, and there, with his eye not dim nor his natural force abated, Moses laid down and died and the Lord Himself buried him in an unknown place in the valley of Moab.

The next glimpse of this mighty leader in Scripture shows him on the Mount of Transfiguration, along with Elijah the prophet, speaking to the Lord Jesus about His death which would soon take place at Jerusalem.

Though the people immediately rallied around Joshua and gave to him the obedience which they had shown to Moses, they knew that they would never see a man like Moses again, whom the Lord would speak to face-to-face, and through him manifest great and terrible deeds. It was not until the Messiah Himself should appear that the record of Moses would ever be excelled.

[Proceed to Chapter Six](#)

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

First published in book form (2 paperbacks) by Regal Press of Ventura California in 1980-81. [Copyright \(C\) 1997 Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

[PBC Homepage](#) | [Discovery Publishing](#) | [Ray Stedman Library](#)

Originated April 2, 1997. Corrections? Email [Lambert Dolphin \(dolphin@best.com\)](mailto:dolphin@best.com)