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Deuteronomy Devotional Commentary

Compiled from **Today in the Word - Moody Bible Institute**

Also includes **Our Homily Daily - F B Meyer** and **Our Daily Bread**

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Deuteronomy 1:1-4

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. - Psalm 19:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

The book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament is said to follow the form of an ancient Near Eastern treaty between nations--that is, between one superior nation and one subject nation. These treaties, or covenants, included a proclamation of the suzerain's (king's) power to make the treaty; a review of events leading to it; promises and obligations on both sides; and blessings for those who follow the covenant and curses for those who break it.

God used this ancient literary form to convey His truth to the ancient Israelites because it was a form they understood. As we spend this month examining this important Old Testament book, we, too, will become familiar with this treaty format.

As Deuteronomy opens, the Israelites had reached the end of forty years of wandering and were poised to enter the Promised Land. Before they did, though, Moses had some final exhortations. So while the literary form of Deuteronomy resembles a suzerain-vassal treaty, the book is also built around a series of sermons: "These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel" (v. 1). We'll signal these addresses as we go along. Deuteronomy is the key to the theology of the Pentateuch and indeed to all of Scripture--the book is quoted or alluded to nearly one hundred times in the New Testament. Its main purpose was to renew the covenant between God and Israel and to highlight major themes of His Law. These exhortations would refresh the Israelites' commitment to the Lord and prepare them spiritually for the conquest.

The book's themes include God's election, obedience, love, worship, and faith. The main content flows from Israel's identity as the people of God. Because He had chosen them, there were certain standards for their behavior and worship. By obeying, they would remain in a right relationship with Him, receive His blessing, and bring glory to His name.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Commentaries and other study resources can be very helpful tools, especially when encountering people, places, and customs so distant from our own lives. As we launch into our study of Deuteronomy, consider purchasing a book such as the IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis–Deuteronomy, by John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews (InterVarsity Press, 1997). It will prove to be a valuable asset in answering questions concerning the culture, chronology, and geography of the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 1:1-3:29

Do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were; submit to the Lord. - 2 Chronicles 30:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

One day a woman brought her son to the Greek philosopher Diogenes. "He is rude and behaves badly," she complained. "What can I do to improve his conduct?" With characteristic bluntness, the philosopher replied: "Strike his mother in the face."

Parental example often shapes the conduct of a child. If the example is a good one, this can be a blessing. But what if the example is bad? Are children doomed to follow in their parents' footsteps, making the same foolish choices and suffering the same consequences?

This question must have plagued the people of Israel as they prepared to enter the land of promise. Their parents had wandered in the wilderness for forty years and eventually perished there because they failed to trust God when He ordered them to enter the first time. The children had survived, but by this time the great acts of God that had purchased their deliverance from slavery in Egypt were only a distant memory. If the parents had failed so miserably when these events were still fresh, what possible hope could there be for the children?

God Himself provided the solution by calling the nation of Israel to renew its covenant with Him. To prepare them for the task of taking their promised inheritance, Israel's God outlined the laws that would guide their lives in the Promised Land, beginning with a review of the nation's history. Without mincing words, Moses recounted both God's provision and Israel's unfaithfulness. His purpose was not to rub Israel's nose in past failure but to help them to see their current circumstances through the eyes of faith. It was true that their record was one of repeated failure. God's, however, was one of unflinching love, fatherly discipline, and abiding faithfulness. By trusting in the one who redeemed them from bondage, this generation could learn from the mistakes of their parents.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you see your family background as a help or a hindrance to your spiritual life? In some ways, it is both. We may have scars that are the result of our parents' bad choices or have learned patterns of behavior that Christ wants us to "unlearn."

Deuteronomy 1:31

Our Daily Homily

F B Meyer

A SAFE carriage was that! In His love and in His pity God redeemed them, and bare them, and carried them all the days of old. When the little lad was tired and complained of his head, his father bade a servant carry him to his mother; but God does not hand over His children to His servants, He carries them Himself. When we realize that His everlasting arms are underneath, it is safer riding than any the ingenuity of man can devise; and here we need fear no ill.

"In all the way."--There are great varieties in the way--sometimes the sleepers are badly laid, and the carriage rocks and jolts; sometimes the gradient is steep, and the progress tedious; sometimes the pilgrim has to go afoot, climbing with difficulty from ridge to ridge; sometimes the route lies through a territory infested with enemies, and haunted by miasma; but we can each rejoice in the fact that the Lord "knoweth the way that I take," and that all the way, those gentle and unwearied arms bear us up and on.

"All the days."--Never a day without its cross, its lesson, its discipline, its peril; but never a day that God does not bear us up in His hands, as some mighty river bears up the boat of the missionary explorer. Through wilds, past villages of infuriated savages, over reefs and rocks, the patient river bears the voyager and his goods. Thus does God carry us. The Good Shepherd carries the lambs in His bosom. Why, then, should we dread the future, or quail before the faces of our foes? "The eternal God is thy refuge; and underneath are the everlasting arms." So strong: so tender! Let yourself go, and trust.

Deuteronomy 1:5-2:23

These forty years the Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything. - Deuteronomy 2:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

James Armistead, an enslaved man, was a key spy during the Revolutionary War. The English had offered freedom to any slave who joined them, and on this basis Armistead pretended to feed information to British General Cornwallis. But he was actually a double agent, risking his life many times to bring valuable intelligence to French General Lafayette, fighting on the colonists' side.

Lafayette commended Armistead as worthy of "every reward his situation could admit of," and on his part Armistead admired Lafayette so much that he added the general's name to his own. For his service during the war, he was emancipated by the state of Virginia and later given a veteran's pension.

Today's reading has another good spy story, albeit one with an unhappy ending. This is the start of Moses' first sermon, in which he expounded on Israel's recent history to remind the people of the things God had done for them and to set the context for the renewed covenant. The Hebrew word translated "expound" means "to make clear, distinct, or plain" (1:5).

One thing Moses clarified for the Israelites was that this was their second chance. Forty years before, the nation had been on the verge of entering the Promised Land, until ten out of twelve spies brought a fearful report (see Num. 13-14). Israel rebelled against God's instructions, and that generation failed to enter the land.

Another point that Moses stressed was the faithfulness of God. He built Israel into a great nation, just as He promised Abraham

(1:10). He liberated them from Egypt. And despite their disobedience, He continued to guide them and to provide for all their needs (2:7). Taking care of them like a father, He disciplined them for their own good (1:29–31; cf. Heb. 12:7–11). More than just a formal treaty, this shows an intimate covenant relationship.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In our Scripture reading, Moses began to review God's hand in Israel's history, so today might be a good time for us to do the same. Begin to draw out a timeline of your life, noting good times and bad times. When were you, figuratively speaking, "wandering in the wilderness" or "conquering the land"?

Deuteronomy 1:1-5

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us. - 1 Corinthians 10:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

Speaking to his countrymen last year, King Hussein of Jordan said he regretted his nation's involvement in the Six-Day War against Israel in 1967. 'In reality, it was probably our duty to try to keep this country from being part of that battle,' the king said in a statement issued on the 30th anniversary of the war.

It's amazing what a few decades will do for a person's perspective. The Israelites spent forty years wandering around in the desert as a result of a disobedient choice. And it was a choice that, in retrospect, Moses knew had cost the nation a great deal.

Having been liberated from bondage in Egypt by the miraculous power of God, the Israelites came to Horeb (v. 2, another name for Mount Sinai), where their leader and liberator Moses received the Law of God. Then the nation traveled from Horeb to a place called Kadesh Barnea, on the very edge of Canaan, the land God had promised to give them.

But at Kadesh, the people turned back in unbelief after the spies' report filled them with fear (Numbers 13). This act of unbelief turned what should have been an eleven-day trip from Horeb to Kadesh into nearly forty years of wandering around in the wilderness.

These events are the setting for our study this month, which we are calling 'Obedience and Blessing.' When Israel's four decades of discipline in the desert were complete, God led the nation back to the edge of Canaan this time from the east instead of up from the southwest.

There, on the east side of the Jordan River, the nation stood poised to enter Canaan. Although Moses would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land with his people, he had a final message for them in fact, a series of powerful sermons that comprise most of the Book of Deuteronomy.

The book begins, 'These are the words Moses spoke.' We are going to study his words in Deuteronomy, chapters 1 through 4, listening to this great prophet as he reviews God's faithfulness to Israel and warns the people against the sin of unbelief.

We will also look at some of the key historical events Moses refers to gathering lessons along the way that, we pray, will strengthen the faith of each of us and increase our desire to obey God and enjoy His blessings.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's a pretty simple formula to grasp: obedience to God equals His blessing. The corollary is also true: unbelief invites God's discipline. Israel, under the leadership of Moses, furnishes us with all the examples of the latter we will ever need. Paul even said that these events were recorded as warnings to us. Where are you in your spiritual pilgrimage as we enter August? Ask God to prepare your heart for obedience and blessing!

Deuteronomy 1:6-8

Reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God. - Jeremiah 26:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to a former army commander, conditions are so bad in the Russian army these days that two out of every three soldiers wear used uniforms and the troops aren't getting paid because the army has run out of money. Some Russian soldiers' wives even lie on the runways to block the airplanes taking their husbands off to duty, because the wives know they will have no money with which to feed their families.

Not exactly the picture of a conquering army, is it? Troops that are ill-prepared for battle will be hard-pressed to take on a formidable enemy and conquer vast amounts of territory.

This is exactly what God asked the Israelites to do, however; but they had no reason to draw back. They did not lack for anything they needed, because their supplier was God Himself. Unfortunately, they had previously rebelled against God's command and almost forty years later Moses warned a new generation against a similar failure.

Verse 6 begins the words of Moses the great sermons of Deuteronomy that review Israel's history and call the people to faithfulness and obedience. Significantly, the first words Moses spoke were a quotation of the words spoken by 'the Lord our God.'

These words are positioned for strong emphasis in the original text, highlighting the covenant-keeping name of God. 'The Lord' is Yahweh, the name by which Moses came to know the God who keeps faith with each generation (Ex. 3:14-15).

God's holy name reminded the Israelites that the covenant He made with them at Sinai was not just a cold legal arrangement. Rather, it was a living word of promise from the living God, who always was intimately involved with His people.

The Lord who established His covenant with Moses at Horeb (Sinai) is the same covenant-keeping God who commanded Israel to 'go in and take possession' of Canaan (Deut. 1:30-31).

Notice the wording here. God had already given the land to His people. They were to take possession of something that had their name on it. Yes, they would have to fight, but was there any doubt of victory if they obeyed God?

Is there any doubt of victory if we obey God?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The borders God outlined in today's text reveal that the land to be possessed was a vast piece of property. But the size of the task should not have thwarted the Israelites. They had seen God bring Egypt to its knees. The size of your God, not the size of your challenge, is the issue in obedience. Put the biggest task facing you this week up against the greatness of God, and then praise Him for His power.

Deuteronomy 1:9-18

Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God. - Deuteronomy 1:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

One writer says of the great Scottish reformer John Knox: 'Knox's bold preaching of the Word of God, without fear of what others might say, was his great strength. He firmly believed that everyone men and women, rulers and subjects alike is subject to the rules of Scripture and the God of Scripture.'

Men of conviction like John Knox were the kind Moses needed in the days after Israel was liberated from Egypt in the Exodus. He needed military commanders, administrators, and judges who feared God and His truths more than anyone or anything else.

The covenant blessing of God on His people was obvious in the way they were multiplying. The task of administering the nation had become too much for Moses alone.

This administrative arrangement was part of Israel's history, but why did Moses mention it here in Deuteronomy, forty years later, as he recalled God's dealings with His people? One Bible commentator has the right idea when he says that Moses was not simply rehashing the past.

Instead, the point of recounting this piece of history is captured in verses 16-18 of today's reading. God wanted the Israelites to do more than just conquer Canaan. His will was that justice and righteousness be established in the land.

That way the Israelite rule in Canaan would be a reflection of their just and righteous God. This alone was enough to make God's people distinct from the pagan nations that inhabited Canaan.

Since Israel would enter the land as soon as Moses had delivered his final sermons, his reminder of God's will for Israel's righteous living was very timely.

The words of Moses were also somewhat of a warning. The Israelites were not to let the opposition of the unrighteous turn them away from administering God's justice. Just as Israel would encounter opposition to their military invasion, they would be opposed in their efforts to administer in Canaan according to God's righteous standards.

This message still has a timely ring to it today. Our nation needs to hear and to heed God's call to exercise righteous judgment. His standards have not changed.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The words of the prophet in Isaiah 59:14-15 ring sadly true in America today. We encourage you to read these powerful verses today and spend a few minutes meditating on them. God cannot ignore the lack of justice, righteousness, and truth at the highest levels in our land. In fact, Isaiah says of unrighteous Israel: 'The Lord looked and was displeased' (Isa. 59:15). After your reading, please join with the Today family in praying for repentance and revival in our nation.

Deuteronomy 1:19-25

See to it ... that none of you has a
sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the
living God. - Hebrews 3:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

One popular magazine recently featured a story of a teacher who has her third-grade students write letters to themselves. She then saves the letters and mails them back to the students nine years later, as they are finishing high school and getting ready to embark on their lives. The students who receive these letters say they are a source of joy and a valuable connection to their past.

The generation that was hearing Moses' powerful messages in Deuteronomy enjoyed a similar blessing. These Israelites, like those students, were receiving the benefit of insight from the past.

But the similarity ends there, because the Israelites were getting forty years' worth of wisdom, not nine years' worth! And the message was coming not from a letter, but from the mouth of the Almighty God through His servant Moses. All that the people needed to do was to heed the word they were hearing.

Remember, the people to whom Moses spoke were not of the generation that came out of Egypt. These people were the children of the exodus generation, because God had decreed that all those who turned back in unbelief at Kadesh would die in the wilderness—with the exceptions of Joshua and Caleb.

In verses 22-25 Moses recounts how the nation sent spies into Canaan. Tomorrow we'll turn to the Book of Numbers to relive that event, which resulted in the fateful consequence of having to turn back into the desert.

The people listening to Moses that day must have felt that he was reading a letter from their past. We can imagine how their parents had told them the story of the spies and the problems that resulted. Forty years' worth of nights in the desert certainly gave Israelite families all the time they needed to recount God's dealings with them.

But all of that was past history. This generation was getting ready to 'graduate,' to enter the Promised Land after many years of disappointment. Moses had previously told their parents: 'Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged' (v. 21).

Unfortunately, the first generation did not heed the exhortation. Their children
now had the same opportunity and duty to believe God and to be strong.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Every parent knows the mixture of anticipation and apprehension that comes when it's time for children to step out and take responsibility for their own spiritual lives. If you are a parent, you know that you can't live your children's lives for them. Parents can, however, pray diligently for their children. Whether your children are third-graders, high school students, newlyweds, or parents themselves, pray that they will learn the lessons God has for them. And pray for yourself, that your example will help lead them and others in the right direction.

Deuteronomy 1:34-40

We should not test the Lord, as some of them did. - 1 Corinthians 10:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Generations of faithful parents have spent a good deal of time and energy teaching their children this simple fact about disobedience: it isn't worth the effort. That is, it doesn't help the child to get what he or she wants. Disobedience from those under their care rarely causes parents or other authority figures to change their program. It doesn't bring the rebellious person the desired result, and it ends only in discipline and disappointment.

Anyone who doubts this fact should read Deuteronomy 1 alongside Numbers 14. Looking back almost forty years to Israel's dramatic rebellion on the threshold of Canaan, Moses clearly recalled the sad consequences of the people's rebellion.

Not only was the desert littered with the graves of the rebels, but the cantankerous Israelites had caused Moses to blow a fuse and angrily disobey God. Moses referred to the incident here, but it actually happened later in the desert wanderings (we will explore this further in the August 12 study).

The generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt had grumbled in their tents (Deut. 1:27), but the all-knowing God heard their words and looked into their hearts. Provoked to anger by the people's unbelief, God pronounced a solemn judgment on every rebel in the nation. They would not enter the land of blessing, as He had previously planned for them.

But Israel's disobedience did not change God's plan one iota. Even in declaring judgment, God reminded Israel that He had sworn to their forefathers to give them the Promised Land.

This was another reference to God's covenant with Abraham, which was still in force. God was not about to let the unbelief of one generation void His oath. The rebels would pay for their sin, but God's promise would be fulfilled in the lives of their children.

If the people who had rebelled against God had any hope that He might change His mind, verse 40 answered that. These have to be some of the saddest words in Scripture.

Imagine standing at the very door of God's promises, yet being turned away because of your own lack of faith. God commanded the generation Moses led out of Egypt to turn back toward the desert and back toward judgment.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God has given us a wonderful Book that teaches us this foundational truth: disobedience toward Him isn't worth the effort, but obedience brings tremendous blessing. The lessons are there to be learned. This is one reason we send Today in the Word your way each month. We urge you to open God's Word every day to discover the blessings He has for those who follow Him. If you've missed part of this study, why not go back to pick it up this weekend? And if you're right on target, keep up the good work!

Deuteronomy 1:26-33

The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you. - Deuteronomy 1:30

TODAY IN THE WORD

The great British pastor and author Charles Spurgeon wrote: 'How many Christians think that in the morning and evening they ought to come into the company of Jesus—but can then give their hearts to the world all the day? This is poor living; we should always be with Him, treading in His steps and doing His will.'

Spurgeon's reference to being in God's presence each morning and evening reminds us of Israel's experience in the desert. God faithfully led them 'in fire by night and in a cloud by day' (v. 32), unmistakable signs of His gracious presence.

But in the end, the Israelites reacted like the Christians of whom Spurgeon spoke. That is, the nation gave its heart to the world and went its own way the rest of the day.

We're back to the narrative portion of our Old Testament documentary. Moses stood before the children of the generation that came out of Egypt to rehearse how their parents had rebelled against God. Moses said the people grumbled in their tents, as if they were whispering so God couldn't hear them.

Not only did God hear their grumbling, but His heart must have been pierced to hear His people accuse Him of hating them and setting them up for annihilation (v. 27). Moses tried to refresh the Israelites' memory by recalling the great victory God had given them over Egypt. But that was old news to these grumblers. 'What have you done for me lately?' was their motto.

These verses drip with irony. The deliverance from Egypt wasn't something Israel just heard about. God did it 'before their very eyes' (v. 30), but now they were acting as if they had not seen God do anything great.

There's more irony in Moses' word picture of God's carrying the nation 'as a father carries his son' (v. 31). The people said God hated them, when in reality He was pouring out His blessings on them like a loving father.

That's not all. Through the cloud and the fire, God led Israel safely from campsite to campsite on the way to Canaan—but the people accused Him of leading them into a trap. So they turned back in disobedience, leaving God's blessing untouched.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Many of the people listening to Moses in Deuteronomy would have been small children when the events of Numbers 13 and 14 happened. Imagine several little sets of ears hearing Dad and Mom in their tents, grumbling about the lousy deal God had given them and how they were going to die right there in the desert. This probably didn't do a whole lot for the children's faith! We wouldn't sit around our own dinner tables and grumble about God's dealings with us, would we? That's an important question to answer, since we do have a profound impact on how both the children and others in our lives view God.

Deuteronomy 1:41-46; Numbers 14:39-45;

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. - Proverbs 14:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

As supreme commander of the Allied invasion of Europe during World War II, Dwight D. Eisenhower was faced with a decision that held potentially overwhelming consequences. He had to decide whether to change the date of the D-Day invasion at the last minute or to let it proceed. Of the decision, Eisenhower later wrote: 'I knew I did not have the required wisdom... I asked God to give me the wisdom. I yielded myself to Him. I surrendered myself. And He gave me clear guidance. He gave me insight to see what was right, and He gave me courage to make my decision.'

The Israelites could have benefited from a similar attitude of humility on the part of their military commander(s). Someone made the decision to go into battle in the hill country of southern Canaan in defiance of the Lord and the nation paid the price of defeat and humiliation.

Today we're considering both this historical account and Moses' later reflection on it. This is a classic case of rebellion and disobedience, and then the insincere repentance that marks those who want to avoid the results of their actions.

We know Israel's bitter weeping wasn't coming from repentant hearts for two reasons. First, the people admitted their sin only after God had rejected them. Second, the Lord turned a deaf ear to their cries He never turns away those who come to Him in sincerity and genuine brokenness.

The two accounts we read today give different details of the story, although either one is enough to tell us what happened and why. Moses said the people refused to listen and acted in 'arrogance' in trying to undo the damage of their disobedience (Deut. 1:43).

There are two key elements in Numbers 14 that tell us that the army of Israel was heading into a disaster. 'Neither Moses nor the ark of the Lord's covenant moved from the camp' (v. 44). Both God's appointed leader and the symbol of His presence and covenant promises were absent when the troops went up to fight.

The people came back again beaten and in tears, but God once more turned a deaf ear. Their rebellion had crossed the line, and God had pronounced judgment. This is a lesson we can't afford to forget if we want God's blessing.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Many people say 'I'm sorry' after they get into trouble. This kind of after-the-fact confession is a trademark of our culture.

But God honors only one kind of confession: sincere sorrow and repentance for sin. Trying to do 'damage control' doesn't get us anywhere with Him. Has the Holy Spirit brought to your attention a need for confession? Seek God's promised forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9), and you'll put yourself in line for His blessing by your obedience.

Deuteronomy 2:37

Our Daily Homily

F B Meyer

THIS chapter is full of restrictions and prohibitions. There were territories which Israel was forbidden to enter at that time; though afterward, in the days of David, Solomon, and Hezekiah, they were all included in the possessions of the chosen people.

There are temporary limitations in all lives. Paul was forbidden to preach the Word in Asia, when first he came on its frontiers; though two or three years after he so filled it with his teaching that the trade of the silversmiths, who made shrines for Diana, was affected.

Limitations in our Usefulness.--Provinces of holy endeavor seem shut against you, as the Gentile world from the public ministry of Jesus. Nevertheless, do your best in what is open, as He did for the Jews, and the rest will be unbarred; but if not, in God's good time, the field will be cultivated by hands specially instructed and prepared.

Limitations in Knowledge.--There are mysteries which, in the earlier stages of their experience, are not made known to the saints; but which we come to know, as we follow on to know the Lord. And while there may be much in God's providence that is difficult to understand, yet our knowledge of Himself may increase as the years go by, until we glory in this, that we understand and know Him (Jer. 9:23).

Limitations in Experience.--Not to every one is it given to feel Christ's love as Rutherford did. Some are excluded from the sunny realms, as Cowper was. Such is the choice of God for them, and it must be best; but they shall all attain one day to the stature of the perfect man, and possess the blessedness from which they are now restrained.

Deuteronomy 2:1-8

These forty years the Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked

anything. - Deuteronomy 2:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

How long would you put up with someone who often threw your goodness back in your face and accused you of trying to do harm whenever you did something gracious? How long would your patience last if you had to deal with a whole nation full of people like this?

It's a good thing most of us don't have to answer that question, because there's a good chance our patience would have run out a lot sooner than did God's patience with Israel in

the desert.

On several occasions we have talked about Israel's disobedience and resulting judgment. But the fact that God banned the exodus generation from entering the Promised Land does not mean He completely abandoned them in

the desert.

On the contrary, the Lord testified through Moses to the younger generation of the gracious way He had supplied their ancestors' needs. The nation lacked nothing on its travels around the desert. And since many of the people listening to Moses had experienced a part of that provision, they knew first hand of God's blessing.

As he continued his sermon to this new generation of Israelites Moses summed up those forty years in the phrase 'for a long time' (v. 1. He and the people had obeyed God's order to turn south and head toward Seir, or Edom, the home of Esau's descendants, a mountainous area south of the Dead Sea.

In tomorrow's study we will relive that journey, for the fact is that the king of Edom refused Israel passage through his land. But his refusal was not the point the Lord wanted to make here in Deuteronomy.

Instead, the emphasis is on God's unfailing, even miraculous, provision for Israel on their 'journey through this vast desert' (v. 7). The people were not to take even a sip of water from the Edomites without paying for it. And under no conditions were they to provoke the people into a fight.

Do you see the picture God wanted Israel to see? They were His people, and He was responsible for their care. They did not need to look elsewhere or try to make it on their own. Sounds like a good lesson for us to take to heart today.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God's provision did not mean the Israelites never became hungry or thirsty. The people did get hungry and thirsty at times, but God was there to supply what was needed. Our problem is often that when we are in need, it's easy for us to forget God's promise to supply. When we do that, we start trying to make something happen on our own. Maybe you're being tempted to improvise right now, to go outside of God's boundaries to meet a need. If so, pray for the patience to wait for His answer.

Deuteronomy 2:9-15

The word of our God stands forever. - Isaiah 40:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Countless numbers of believers have claimed the great promise of today's verse as they have sought God's help or blessing.

That faith is well-placed. The psalmist said God's Word is 'eternal,' and that it 'stands firm in the heavens' (Ps. 119:89). When we

take God at His Word and obey Him, blessing follows.

But God's Word cuts both ways. He is also utterly faithful to execute the warnings and judgments contained in His Word. We rejoice when obedience brings blessing, but too many times we expect God simply to overlook or to discount our lapses.

The death of the exodus generation in the desert outside of Canaan helps lay to rest the notion that God is merely an indulgent deity who looks the other way when we disobey.

Moses could not have said it more clearly. Every fighting man of his generation who cowered before the Canaanites and refused to believe God perished over a period of thirty-eight years. God was utterly faithful to His word of judgment.

Let's recall again that the people listening to the sermons of Moses as given in Deuteronomy were not simply passive spectators. They were the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of the men whom the Lord had judged for their unbelief and disobedience.

The painful reminder that an entire generation had died needlessly was a powerful object lesson for the survivors: God demands and rewards obedience.

Even at the last, God gave His people another reminder of what they should have done to the Canaanites almost four decades earlier. The point of Deuteronomy 2:10-12 seems to be that if the Moabites (descendants of Abraham's relative Lot, v. 9) could drive out a people variously called the Emites or the Rephaites, Israel should have been able to conquer Canaan under God's sure promise of victory. The Emites were known for their strength and stature, but the Moabites defeated them and took their land. The Edomites also had their own victory to point to, since they had defeated a people known as the Horites.

Lest anyone think these fighting men of Israel just happened to die in the natural course of things, Moses made a strong statement to the contrary (v. 15). God sets Himself against those who set themselves against Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

James 4:6 says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' There's no rocket science involved in deciding which side of this equation we want to be on. The nature of pride is to push God away and say, 'I can do it myself.' But there is much grace in store for those who come before God with humility. Let's take a reading on our pride level today and be ready to humble ourselves if God reveals the presence of an arrogant attitude.

Deuteronomy 2:16-23

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance ... he set up boundaries for the peoples. - Deuteronomy 32:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Magazine articles filled with ideas on how to express love for special people are very popular these days. They usually show up under such titles as 'Fifty Ways to Say ÔI Love You' or 'Twenty-Five Ways to Make Your Child Feel Special.' The idea, of course, is that true love is shown by actions as well as by words.

The sermons of Deuteronomy in which Moses recalled God's dealings with Israel are a stunning catalog of the ways God show His love and care for His people.

It's true that Israel's disobedience and lack of faith are a part of the story. But when we step back to look at the big picture, the nation's forty-year trek through the desert is a testimonial to God's patience and overruling love. Even Israel's failures become the backdrop for God's grace in sustaining the people He chooses as His own.

In fact, Moses testified to God's care for the nations that bordered the Promised Land. Today's reading includes an editorial note (vv. 20-23) which reveals the way God enabled the Ammonites, another group who descended from Lot, to conquer the same intimidating race of giant warriors the Moabites had defeated.

Together with the Edomites, the people of Esau, this made three sets of 'in-laws' whose borders the Israelites were commanded to respect. Why? Because God had set their boundaries, giving these people the strength to overcome their enemies and establish their nations in security.

The fact that those nations later turned against Israel in various ways and came under God's judgment does not negate His care for them in the days of Moses.

Why did Moses take the time to remind his listeners of these historical details? As we suggested earlier, the existence of Edom, Moab, and Ammon was an object lesson to Israel of God's power in bringing about His purpose for a nation.

The Ammonites, for example, did not have the promises of victory that Israel had. Yet the Lord enabled the Ammonites to conquer a

fearsome foe. Since God showed His care for Ammon in this way, what greater thing would He do for His chosen people if they would only obey Him?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The question of what God would do in response to obedience is not merely historical. It is a question we can ask of ourselves.

The Bible testifies to God's providential, daily care for all of His creation. Jesus said the rain falls on both the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45). Since God has already proven His love for us in so many material ways, what greater spiritual thing would He do for us if we would only obey Him? The answer is exciting and challenging for us to consider!

Read: Deuteronomy 2:24-37

If God is for us, who can be against us? - Romans 8:31

TODAY IN THE WORD

After V-E Day brought an end to World War II in Europe, General George Patton gave a brief speech in which he referred to the utter defeat of the enemy, including, he said, 'towns whose names I can't pronounce, but whose palaces I have removed.'

Humanly speaking, Moses and the Israelites were in much the same position as they faced an unknown enemy. Chances are that Israel had never heard of Sihon or Og before they approached these kings' borders and tried to negotiate safe passage.

God's people were still on the side of the Jordan River opposite Canaan the eastern side of the river called the Transjordan. The forty years of discipline were now complete; the last members of the disbelieving generation having died in the desert (Deuteronomy 2:16). God was readying His people for the invasion and conquest of the Promised Land.

To those awaiting God's command to cross the Jordan, Moses told the story of how Israel had defeated an Amorite king who arrogantly defied God. Sihon's kingdom lay on Israel's path, but it was Sihon who put himself in Israel's way. There's a big difference between those two situations.

Moses' retelling of Sihon's defeat includes some details we didn't see in Numbers. Since Deuteronomy was written from more of a theological vantage point, God's activity in Israel's affairs is prominent. Moses reveals here that God had put the 'terror and fear' of Israel upon every nation His people would have to face (v. 25).

In today's passage Sihon's refusal is also seen against a new background. He had set himself against God, so God saw to it that the consequences of the king's stubbornness were played out completely. Israel won the battle because God delivered Sihon into their hands.

The complete destruction of the Amorites was part of God's judgment against the nations that had fallen into idolatry. Judgment such as this often seems harsh to us because, even as believers, we can get a little fuzzy on the absolute holiness and justice of God.

But if the greatest form of disobedience is to turn away from the true and living God to worship idols, then the greatest form of judgment must follow.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Being obedient to God doesn't mean that the enemy will simply disappear. On the contrary, the enemy makes sure to get in our way when we are determined to follow God.

So if you are encountering opposition, it may be a signal for you to keep moving forward. But you may say, 'I'm not sure if I should proceed or not.' Times like these are when God promises His wisdom to those who will ask Him in faith, with a believing heart (James 1:5-6). Bring your battle to the Lord, and seek His direction

Deuteronomy 2:24-3:20

The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord. - Proverbs 21:31

TODAY IN THE WORD

The miracle of the 1940 Dunkirk evacuation was made possible by the heroic defenders of Calais. Early in World War II, the German army swept through France. What remained of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) waited at Dunkirk, hoping for evacuation. Between them and the Germans lay only one city: Calais. Prime Minister Winston Churchill cabled the commander there: "Every hour you continue to exist is of the greatest help to the BEF... Have greatest possible admiration for your splendid stand." Outgunned and outmanned, the soldiers fought fiercely, holding out until they were exhausted and nearly out of ammunition. Their

brave stand bought enough time for the evacuation to get organized and subsequently to succeed.

The Israelites had fought well enough east of the Jordan River, but in fact, it was God Himself who won the battles. As part of Moses' historical review, he reminded the people that their victories were thanks to God alone (cf. Ps. 135:10–12; 136:16–22). They should trust in Him alone. They were His people--He would take care of them.

Before those battles had even begun, God saw them as done deals (see Num. 21:21–35). He arranged everything, inspiring the enemy with fear and making King Sihon's heart stubborn to provoke a fight. Exodus similarly speaks both of God hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardening his own heart. From a divine point of view, God is sovereign. From a human point of view, there's a price to be paid for arrogance toward God's people.

Why were Sihon, Og, and the Amorites utterly destroyed? Was Israel in the wrong? No, they carried out God's justice. He used Israel to judge the Amorites for their sin, so the nation's victory served the cause of righteousness. In fact, the term "completely destroyed" indicates that everything from the battle was given over to the Lord, or devoted to Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you started sketching out your personal timeline yesterday, go ahead and finish that today. Do you see any patterns in how God has led you? Can you find any links between the good times and the bad times? Would one or more of the victories have been impossible without lessons learned or character forged in the "deserts"? If you know the answers to these questions, give thanks and glory to God. If not, ask the Holy Spirit for insight into your experiences.

Read: Deuteronomy 3:1-11

You have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. - Psalm 61:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

Generations of leaders have known that one of the best ways to motivate the troops on the eve of a big battle is to remind them of their past victories.

Moses followed that tradition. He may even have helped to invent it! His retelling of Israel's victories over Sihon and Og gave the people important encouragement as they faced their biggest battle of all the conquest of Canaan.

King Og was worth only a few verses in Numbers 21 (vv. 33-35), but here in Deuteronomy Moses devotes more space to the story. The extra detail was important for these Israelites to know because the defeat of Og was another example of God's faithfulness.

'Do not be afraid of him,' God told His people concerning Og (Deuteronomy 3:2) and they weren't. What a difference it would have made if, about forty years earlier, the exodus generation had moved out as confidently as this one in response to God's promise.

But to Israel's credit, the troops moved out here and enjoyed the victory God had already prepared for them. It didn't hurt that the victory over Sihon was still very fresh on the people's minds. God made sure they didn't forget by using Sihon as an encouragement to do the same in Bashan.

Og and his people suffered annihilation, the same fate that befell their fellow Amorites. People may debate the morality of God's command for the destruction of a people, but the reality of the command is undeniable. Moses made this truth explicit in the case of the Canaanites (see Deuteronomy 7). God's reasons were grounded in His holiness.

The summary of Israel's conquests in the Transjordan had to be another source of encouragement. The extent of their land holdings in this region secured them from attack by other enemies as they turned west to enter Canaan.

But Moses was not quite finished with this story. It turns out that Og was a Rephaite, the race of giants we read about earlier. Israel's cousins, the Edomites and the Ammonites, had defeated those giants with God's help. Now Israel too could point to victory over an intimidating enemy as proof of God's blessing.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Maybe the enemy we talked about yesterday looks like a giant from where you stand. Because Satan knows that most of us are afraid of things that seem bigger than we are, he has a way of making problems appear to be gigantic. One way for us to bring that problem down to size is to do what Moses did recall a previous victory God has given us in this area. Whether our need is strength in temptation, patience with a difficult person, or faithfulness in serving God, reviewing yesterday's victory can encourage us to trust God for today's triumph.

Read: Deuteronomy 3:12-20

Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work. - Hebrews 4:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

It's a truism in sports that a team's success is more important than the statistics of individual players. Even the jargon of sports reflects this thinking. Baseball has the sacrifice bunt. And a batter who deliberately makes an out to move a runner along is said to 'give himself up.' This collective effort is called teamwork and few teams win without it.

Teamwork was indispensable for the Israelites too. After the defeat of the Amorite kings who held large portions of the Transjordan, Israel was in the position to invade Canaan. The goal of the battle was victory so that every Israelite could enjoy rest in the land God had promised His people.

But before Israel crossed the Jordan, Moses had to deal with a request by the tribes of Reuben and Gad, along with half of Manasseh a tribe that was divided between those who worked the land and those who raised livestock. It was the latter group that joined the other two tribes in asking Moses for permission to settle east of the Jordan, land ideal for grazing their herds (Num. 32:1-5).

Moses was angry at first, since it appeared that these Israelites were content to settle in comfortably and let their brothers fight the Canaanites. So Moses insisted that the armed men of these tribes go with the rest of Israel into Canaan until the whole nation was at rest. The men involved readily agreed to these terms (Num. 32:18).

What would be the blessing for these tribes' obedience to God in this matter? First, the families and livestock they had left behind east of the Jordan would be safe while they were away.

Second, the land they claimed would also be held for them. Since God had given this land to them as their possession they didn't need to worry about losing their homes while they were serving in the Israelite army.

Someone has said that there is no safer place for anyone on earth than in the will of God. The tribes who settled in the Transjordan certainly discovered that truth. When the time came to sacrifice for their brothers, they left home as they had promised. Their families and herds were never safer than when these warriors were helping their fellow Israelites enter into God's rest.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The writer of Hebrews uses Israel's rest in Canaan as a picture of the greater rest we have in Christ the cessation of our attempts to please God and reach heaven on our own merits.

Do you know someone today who is still struggling and working hard to earn God's favor? The best thing you can do for this friend or family member is to reach out in love and share the good news of God's grace in Christ. Why not pray that God will give you a special opportunity to talk to that person?

Deuteronomy 3:18-22

TODAY IN THE WORD

Iraq's military forces rolled into the tiny kingdom of Kuwait on August 12, 1990, effectively swallowing that nation and triggering the Gulf War. Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had been warned for weeks not to invade Kuwait, but he refused to take the warnings seriously. But when the forces of the multi-nation "Desert Storm" coalition arrived and when President George Bush announced, "The liberation of Kuwait has begun," everything changed.

When a vastly superior force joins the battle, things change, whether in earthly or in spiritual warfare. For the Christian, things always change when the Lord joins the battle. That was the promise Moses made to the people of Israel as they prepared to conquer Canaan. When the Lord your God fights for you, the outcome is assured. We want to leave you with this encouraging note as we wrap up the month.

The setting of Deuteronomy 3 is an interesting one. Two of the tribes of Israel, Reuben and Gad, along with the half tribe of Manasseh (v. 13) had settled on the eastern side of the Jordan River (the area known as Transjordan). Moses was upset with the arrangement at first, thinking the people would defect and not come to help their brother Israelites conquer Canaan.

But the men of these tribes promised to help when the need arose (Num. 32:16-19). Now it was time for them to keep their promise. Moses rallied them with the reminder that they were going into battle under the banner of the Lord's blessing and protection.

Someone may say, "Well, if the Lord is going to fight my battles for me, I guess that means I can relax." Not exactly. The men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh still had to pick up their weapons and fight, but they weren't out there on their own.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

David told the Philistine giant Goliath that he was a beaten foe, because ""the battle is the Lord's"" (1 Samuel 17:47). If you sometimes feel like a shepherd boy facing a giant when it comes to dealing with the devil, join the club! The enemy uses fear, discouragement and intimidation against all of us. That's how he fights.

Deuteronomy 3:21-29

Do not be afraid of them; the Lord your God himself will fight for you. - Deuteronomy 3:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

There is a definite note of sadness in today's story. Moses reminded the people of God's judgment on his disobedience at Meribah (Num. 20:12, 13), which resulted in his being banned from Canaan. Bible commentator Dr. Jack Deere says that Moses' conversation with God 'reveals something of the intimacy of Moses' relationship with God. It also heightens the feeling of tragedy in the experience of a man who devoted his life to fulfilling God's promise for Israel but knew he would never see its completion.'

Yet despite his own deep disappointment and knowing that his life was drawing to a close, Moses did not lose sight of the larger objective before Israel. The nation had conquered Sihon and Og, two powerful Amorite kings, and was ready for greater conquests in Canaan. Joshua was at Moses' side as God's appointed commander to lead the people into the Promised Land.

Look at the way Moses encouraged his young successor. Dt 3:21, 22 provide a classic biblical formula for encouragement. Moses told Joshua, in effect: 'Look at all

that God has done for you in the past. There is nothing you will face in the future that He cannot handle, because He is the same God today.'

Then Moses turned from speaking with Joshua to speaking with the Lord. It's not hard to imagine the anguish in Moses' voice as he stood on the very doorstep of the land he had spent forty years trying to reach. He must have been hopeful that God would relent and allow him to enter Canaan.

The text indicates that Moses kept on asking God to change His mind. But God became angry with Moses quite angry, according to the original language. He did allow Moses to go to the top of a mountain called Pisgah from where he could view the Promised Land from a distance. But that was the end of the issue.

Even though Moses had to stay in the Transjordan, he still had an important work to do. Joshua would need all the strength and courage he could muster for the task ahead of him.

God was ready to supply Joshua's need, but He also wanted to make sure that Israel's new leader had Moses's blessing. So Moses commissioned Joshua, signaling that Joshua was God's choice.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

With God the future is never up for grabs, because 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Heb. 13:8).

What an encouraging word of hope! Is there anything you have encountered to this point that was too big for the Lord? Since He was faithful yesterday, you can trust Him for today. And because He never changes, your tomorrow is already secure in Him. That's worth taking time to praise God for right now. Your praise delights Him!

Read: Deuteronomy 3:21-4:14

Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord. - Leviticus 18:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

One blot marred Moses' record of leadership during the Exodus: his sin at Meribah. Suffering from lack of water, Israel complained: "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place?" Moses and Aaron sought the Lord, and in reply He told them to speak to a rock. Out of it would come enough water for everyone.

In anger and frustration, however, Moses struck the rock twice with his staff, rather than obeying the Lord exactly. As a result of this disobedience, God judged him: "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them" (Num. 20:12; cf. Nu 27:12, 13, 14).

In today's reading, Moses' review of Israel's history took a personal turn. Because of his sin, he would be allowed only to gaze upon but not to enter the Promised Land. How agonizing it must have been for him--all that waiting and wandering, the burdens of

leadership, and then to be stopped just short of the goal. In God's judgment, the people saw the necessity of obedience. Even a great leader like Moses was not above God's law, and he suffered the consequences for his disobedience.

There was an additional warning here. When Moses said he'd sinned "because of you" (Dt 3:26), he wasn't rationalizing, but recognizing that his sin had resulted in part from their sin of grumbling and complaining. They'd often been guilty of this, and he wanted them to see sin's serious consequences. Actually, Israel's entire history from Egypt to the present time had been pounding home this very lesson (Dt 4:9). In this context, Moses urgently exhorted them to fully obey God's commands: "Follow them so that you may live" (Dt 4:1).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In light of the national scope of Deuteronomy, and given that today is Independence Day, we suggest that you spend some extra time in prayer for our country.

Deuteronomy 3:26

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

WE are to pray without ceasing; always praying, never fainting; asking, seeking, knocking. But there are some subjects concerning which God says, "Speak no more unto Me of this." In some cases these topics have to do with others, but more often with ourselves, as in the case of the Apostle Paul (2Cor 12:9-note).

It is an awful thing when God says of certain individuals, Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone; and when the conviction is wrought within us that the sin unto death is being committed, concerning which even the Apostle John said, "I do not say that he should pray for it." Such times come comparatively rarely; and so long as you feel able to pray for another, so long as no negative has been spoken, you may be sure that God waits to be entreated, and that your prayer will assuredly be answered.

But have you not realized at times that God has said about some earthly boon you were craving?-" Child, do not ask Me more, leave it with Me. I know what you want, and what is best for you. Seek first My kingdom, and all these things, literally or in their equivalent, shall be added." It is well when we have been praying eagerly, to allow God's winnowing-fan to pass over our petitions, to winnow away all that is not in His mind to give; so that only those desires may remain which His Spirit has indicted, and which He is therefore pledged to bestow. If He does not give the exact thing you ask, He will give the Pisgah view and more grace. He will say to you, as to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Deuteronomy 4:1-43

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? - Micah 7:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

A new believer went to bed one evening thinking about angels. "God," he prayed, "So far I have only read about angels. Now I want to see one. Please let me see an angel with my own eyes." He squeezed his eyes tightly shut and lay as still as he could, hardly breathing in his anticipation that God would answer his prayer. At last he gathered up the courage to open his eyes, but only a little. A thrill of fear shot through him as he saw the shapeless form next to his bed.

Instead of being happy at the prospect of having his request granted, he covered his eyes with his hands and began to plead with God again. "I've changed my mind, God," he begged. "Please, take it away. I don't want to see an angel after all." When he finally found the courage to look again, he realized that instead of disappearing, the form was now even more distinct than before. Indeed, with eyes wide open and heart pounding, he now saw the form for what it truly was—the mound of clothing that he had piled on the chair next to his bed before lying down to sleep.

Instead of being imaginary, Israel's encounter with God during the Exodus was very real and far more terrifying. The generation that Moses led out of Egypt saw God's deliverance with their own eyes and heard His words with their own ears. According to the author of the book of Hebrews, "The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, 'I am trembling with fear' " (Heb. 12:21). This experience was intended to make a lasting impression on God's people, but they quickly forgot all they had seen and heard. It didn't take long before they had violated nearly every command they had heard God's voice declare.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Our God is a God of grace and expectation. Can you think of a time when you experienced a remarkable deliverance or were made aware of some new truth from your study of God's Word? How did you respond? In Deuteronomy 4:32–39 Moses describes several

of Israel's experiences and calls God's people to respond in faith and obedience. Write a similar account of your own experiences and conclude with a challenge to yourself to "hold fast" to the Lord and renew your commitment to obeying Christ.

Deuteronomy 4

My justice will become a light to the nations. - Isaiah 51:4b

TODAY IN THE WORD

The ancient world didn't have the modern blast furnaces that are used to produce today's cast iron. The IVP Bible Background Dictionary points out that the melting point of iron, 1,537°C, could not be consistently attained with ancient technology. "But once the iron is heated beyond 1,100°C, it takes a spongy, semisolid form that can be forged. While a furnace can certainly be a metaphor of oppression, the fire of a smelting furnace is not destructive, but constructive. It is the furnace that transforms the malleable ore to the durable iron product. The exodus experience transformed Israel into the covenant people of God."

In today's passage Moses reminds the people that they should never take their transformation for granted--it was unique. Whereas many of their neighbors served a pantheon of deities in a blind hope that they were in favor with the gods and that their sacrifices were pleasing, Israel was both chosen by God (vv. 34, 37) and told what to do by God (vv. 33, 35). Election and revelation were the two major features of the Abrahamic covenant and set Israel apart.

But by the time we get to Deuteronomy 4, the generation that fled Egypt was dying after 40 years in exile. After God's deliverance from slavery, they demonstrated such a lack of faith that God forbade all those over the age of 20 from entering the Promised Land (Num. 14). Now the time was nearing for a new generation to enter Canaan and Moses was compelled to leave his people with explanation and exhortation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Trials and tribulations are as much a feature of modern life as they were in ancient times. Everyone, including you, can say that they've faced plenty of ups and down in their life. Take a moment and make a list of the major difficulties you've experienced. Then, next to each entry, commit to paper what you learned from that event or period of time. Evaluate your list and then say a short prayer thanking God for His faithfulness in shaping you into the person He desires.

Deuteronomy 4:1-8

Observe [God's laws] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations. - Deuteronomy 4:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Worldwide Challenge magazine, Dan LaGue describes a dramatic moment in Chinese missions: 'On a warm, summer night in 1904, a small hunting party ... showed up at the door of Methodist missionary Samuel Pollard. Pollard ... recognized the hunters as Miao people from the nearby Yunnan mountains who worshiped gods of wood and stone. The Miao wanted to learn to read. They had a burning desire to know the God of the Christians, too, although [Pollard] didn't know it. But he soon understood, for the following Friday five more Miao appeared at his gate, and within a month, nearly 100 tribesmen had visited him.'

Somehow the Miao people had learned about the true God, and they saw enough of His reality in the lives of Christians that they wanted what the Christians had. Samuel Pollard devoted the next eleven years to learning the Miao language, reaching those people for Christ and establishing a thriving church in their villages.

What a blessing it is when the witness of God's people draws unbelievers to Him! Israel had a definite responsibility to its idol-worshiping neighbors. The people's obedience to God was designed to distinguish Israel from the other nations and to be a powerful witness to God's greatness and righteousness.

Moses made God's intent clear in the opening verses of Deuteronomy 4, which marks a new point in his sermon. To this point, Israel's lawgiver had been reviewing the nation's history. Now he turned to an exhortation based on what the people had heard.

Today's reading divides neatly into two points two motivations for the people to obey God's law.

First, obedience to God produces blessing, the theme of this month's studies (Deut 4:1, 2, 3, 4). The Israelites who 'held fast to the Lord' were the ones who had survived the desert wanderings and were ready to take possession of the Promised Land. If the people needed a reminder of the disaster of disobedience, they needed only to recall God's judgment at Baal Peor (Nu. 25:1-9), where 24,000 sinning Israelites died in a plague.

Obedience had a second benefit a witness to the nations (Deut 4:5, 6, 7, 8). When God's people are faithful to Him, they radiate blessing to those around them wherever they go.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We usually think of our witness as something we do or sometimes as what we fail to do. But the Bible indicates that our witness is primarily a matter of what we are. Both Paul (Phil. 1:27-note) and Peter (1Pe 2:12-note) urge us to live exemplary Christian lives. One reason for this is that those outside the faith will see our testimony and glorify God. Since that's the case, this weekend would be a good time for us to review the quality of our witness in recent days.

Deuteronomy 4:2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God. -

Revelation 22:18-21

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1833, New Hampshire Baptists affirmed: "We believe the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried."

Human attempts to add to the Bible display at least two sinful attitudes. The first is disrespect. Failing to treat special revelation as a sacred process governed by God devalues the Word. As Moses knew in today's verse, such a careless attitude brings about disobedience—the point of respecting Scripture is keeping God's commands. Those who want to evade or modify them have their own ends in mind rather than God's glory.

The second sin is pride. Are we really so conceited as to think we can add to God's Word? As described on January 4, God still speaks to us today, but those words and leadings need always to be tested against the Word.

This is serious business. Deuteronomy calls down curses on anyone who alters God's words. John warned that the same judgment executed on the beast and his followers awaited anyone who added anything to the prophecy of Revelation (v. 18). Those fearsome events are described in chapter 16, including blood in the water, darkness, and drought. He also warned that eternal life would not be in store for anyone who subtracted anything from God's words (v. 19; cf. Rev. 22:1-5). False teachers, beware!

The final line uttered by Jesus in Revelation is: "Yes, I am coming soon" (v. 20). From this day until that one, by grace we must live in His truthful words.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Given the number of popular misconceptions and even lies about the canon (the books of the Bible), it's helpful to read more about the formation of the canon to understand how we got our Scriptures. *From God to Us*, by Norman Geisler (Moody), would be a good choice for newcomers to this topic, and *Origin of the Bible*, by F. F. Bruce, J. I. Packer, Philip Comfort, and Carl F. H. Henry (Tyndale), is helpful for those looking for more information.

Read: Deuteronomy 4:9-14

Watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart. - Deuteronomy 4:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

The 18th-century actor Charles Macklin once boasted to fellow actor Samuel Foote that he could repeat any speech after hearing it just once. So Foote challenged Macklin to repeat what he was about to say and then launched into a very hard-to-remember series of nonsense sentences. Macklin had to admit defeat.

It's hard to remember perfectly something we have heard only once. That's why God repeated His commands through each generation of His spokesmen and then recorded them so that we might obey Him and be blessed.

Moses knew how forgetful the Israelites were. He was well aware that they had trouble remembering even the amazing miracles of God's grace they had witnessed in the desert. If the generation standing before him was prone to forget, how in the world would their children ever learn and remember the lessons of obedience?

The answer was to instill the decrees of God in each generation of children as if they were the first people ever to receive them. Later on we'll review the great Shema, the confession of Israel's one God, that God commanded the people to teach to their children (Deut 6:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9).

Moses anticipated that command by cautioning the people not to forget the giving of the Ten Commandments at Horeb, or Mount Sinai. It was such an awe-inspiring visitation of God that it seems impossible that anyone who saw it could forget what happened.

Deuteronomy 4:9 helps us to understand that Moses was not worried about a simple memory lapse on the people's part. He was concerned that God's holy commands would slip from their hearts that is, that they would grow lackadaisical in their obedience. And if the parents became careless in following God, where would their children end up?

The presence of God on Sinai was so terrifying that even Moses trembled with fear (Deuteronomy 9:19). This business of remembering and obeying God's law was serious stuff. Why? Because day-to-day blessing from God depends on obedience to Him even though we have the ultimate blessing of redemption in Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The author of Hebrews cites Israel's experience at Sinai to illustrate the superior covenant we have in Christ (Heb 12:18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24-note).

We can thank the Lord that we do not have to stand at the foot of Sinai but we can't afford to forget that we serve the same holy, awe-inspiring God. He still demands that His people reverence His holy name. Hebrews 12 ends with this reminder: 'Our God is a consuming fire' (He 12:29-note). Ask God today to help you give Him the worship and reverence that is due Him.

Read: Deuteronomy 4:15-24

The Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. - Deuteronomy 4:24

TODAY IN THE WORD

Have you ever looked at the stuff in your attic or basement and sighed at your collection? It's amazing how easily most of us seem to accumulate things we once intended to use, or at some point thought too valuable to discard. However good our original purpose, though, most of what we store in our attics, basements, and garages will not be looked at again until the next yard sale or moving day.

The tendency to let once-useful things accumulate seems to be born into most people. It's easier to let the stuff pile up when it's out of sight and therefore, out of mind. If we carry this attitude over into our spiritual lives, however, it can be very dangerous.

When this happens, we find a believer who once devoured God's Word now treats it like a discard from the attic. Or spiritual disciplines that were once part of this person's daily walk with the Lord are now laid aside and forgotten.

It may seem as if Moses was belaboring his warning to the Israelites. 'Watch yourselves very carefully,' he warned (Dt 4:15). 'Be careful not to forget,' he cautioned (Dt 4:23).

Why was Moses so concerned that the people not allow God's commands to be shoved back into the attics of their minds and hearts? Because he knew human nature. Moses had forty years' worth of scars on his soul from the complaints and threats of Israelites who couldn't seem to remember God's goodness from one watering hole to the next.

Now the people were entering a land of idolaters who worshiped creatures on earth and the lights in the sky. Again Moses referred to the fact that he would not be allowed to accompany Israel into Canaan. So these messages contained in Deuteronomy were his last chance to warn the people against spiritual failure.

One way God's people could keep from slipping was to remember the day God gave them His commandments. They saw no form representing God, so they were not to make anything to represent Him. Obedience to a 'consuming fire' kind of God is the only path of blessing for His people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Is there anything in your spiritual attic that needs to be brought out, dusted off, and put to use or maybe discarded?

One way to find out is to look back to the early days of your Christian life. Was there a spiritual discipline you used to follow with enthusiasm that has since fallen by the wayside? Maybe it's your prayer life, your desire to tell others about Christ, or a habit you've acquired that you used to have a strong conviction against. This might be a good day to do a little personal attic-cleaning, remembering why it's so important not to put anything between yourself and God.

Read: Deuteronomy 4:15-43

Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. -

TODAY IN THE WORD

In many jobs, it's difficult to imagine life without a photocopier. So it might be hard for you to believe that this vital piece of office equipment has been around less than fifty years. In 1959, Xerox introduced its 914 copier machine, the first to make copies on plain paper. The 914 was a quick success, and soon "Xerox" became a virtual synonym for "copy."

When it comes to worship, however, nothing but the "real thing" will do! The great "I Am" is the one true God, and all the idols of the nations are just cheap copies. As he concluded his first sermon (in today's reading), this was the key lesson Moses wanted Israel to learn from his historical review.

God is not any created thing--He is the Creator. He is transcendent. At Sinai, the nation had seen that they could not fashion anything into an image for worship, so they should not be deceived and drawn into the Canaanite religions.

God is also personal, and He had put Himself on display, so to speak, in His actions toward Israel. He rescued them from slavery. He made a personal covenant and was personally present with them. He sovereignly chose them, provided for their needs, and gave them holy laws.

His uniqueness is the most important truth the people were to remember and obey. This truth is spelled out in the verses just before the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3, 4, 5, 6). The metaphor of a furnace conveys that the period of slavery in Egypt was a time of purification, or preparation, against the corruption of idolatry, to be the Lord's special inheritance (Dt 4:20; cf. Dt 8:2, 3, 4, 5). If they fail to do this--after all, that was the historical pattern--they'll be punished, but when they wholeheartedly repent and return to God, He'll show mercy.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Who is like unto our Lord? He and He alone is God! Respond to this truth from today's devotional with heartfelt worship. Seek out hymns and choruses that exalt God's greatness and lift up His name. We might suggest such songs as "O Worship the King," "Glorify Thy Name," "O Magnify the Lord," and "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." Singing these could be part of your personal worship time, or an experience you share with your family or small group.

Deuteronomy 4:20

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THE Apostle prays that we may know the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in His saints. God is our inheritance, and we are His. We are called to possess Him; He desires to possess us. His nature will yield crops of holy helpfulness to those who diligently seek Him; and He demands crops of holy love and devotion from ours.

What Sovereign Grace is here!--There was nothing in us to distinguish us from others. We were but part of the great moorland waste, when He fenced us in, and placed us under His tillage and husbandry. It is by the grace of God that we are what we are. "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved: in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

What responsibility!--Three times over in this chapter we are bidden to take heed to ourselves. It is no small thing to have been the subjects of God's special workmanship; because He is a jealous God, very quick to mark the least symptom of declension, and very searching in His dealing and discipline. As we learn here, our God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

What Hope!--We cannot derive much from ourselves, however we toil and strive. Self cannot discipline self to any advantage. The field is worked out. The Divine Husbandman must put into us what He would take out of us; He needs therefore to have almost infinite resources. But these are God's, and if we yield ourselves to Him, He can make all grace abound toward us, that we, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work.

Read: Deuteronomy 4:25-28

You shall have no other gods before me. - Exodus 20:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

During his first term as president, Franklin Roosevelt teased a patriotic group about its obsession with the pedigree of its members. 'Remember, remember always,' Roosevelt said, 'that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and

revolutionists.'

Moses made a similar plea to Israel. 'Remember where you came from, and to whom you belong,' was his message in Deuteronomy. For God's people of that day, the first step to disobedience seemed to be forgetfulness.

The passages we will study today and tomorrow are brief but remarkable. Here Moses speaks not only as lawgiver but as prophet, looking far into Israel's future to predict the nation's unfaithfulness and eventual expulsion from the land.

We can imagine the passion and pain in Moses' voice as he spoke of a future day when Israel might forget God and their obligation to worship Him alone. Forgetting God would make the people susceptible to the corruption of idolatry a sin Moses had just warned them against committing. Idolatry was the ultimate insult to God and an abomination in His sight.

Moses called heaven and earth as witnesses because they were fixed and permanent, in contrast to the fickle nature of the people's hearts. If, as Moses said, Israel insisted on flirting with idols, God would permit the nation to consummate the unholy union. He would, in fact, send His people into captivity in nations where they would have their fill of idolatry.

The danger Moses warned about in these verses changed the focus from the immediate to the more distant future. Up to this point, his concern had been that the Israelites not fail to obey God and possess Canaan.

But there was also the opposite danger that after the immediate challenge was met, the curse of complacency could set in and cause a massive case of spiritual amnesia.

Once again, Moses tied the issue to the need for each generation to learn about God for itself. If the current generation failed to pass along vibrant faith in God, their grandchildren would be left with only a musty memory of long-ago blessings and warnings from a God they didn't know very well.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Most people don't become excited about hand-me-downs, whether it's clothes, furniture, or faith.

We said earlier that the Christian life can't be lived second-hand. Faith must be a personal possession. But let's turn today's warning around and remember that if our faith is a bright fire, those within our influence will be drawn to the flame. Is your Christian life the kind others would want to imitate? It can be, because if we turn to Him God is ready to do more than we could ask or think.

Read: Deuteronomy 4:29-31

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. - Jeremiah 29:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the horrors of modern-day persecution against Christians is the practice of child slavery in the north African nation of Sudan. The radical Muslim dictatorship that seized power in 1989 has been sponsoring raids against Christian villages in the south. Thousands of children and other young people have been kidnapped in these attacks and taken north to be sold to Muslim masters. One young man who was recently rescued said that after seven years in bondage, he had almost forgotten his family. Thankfully, his family never forgot him or abandoned their efforts to bring him home.

What a picture of the tragedy that befell Israel hundreds of years after Moses! The people were not innocent victims like the child slaves in Sudan. But their land was attacked and devastated, and they were carried off into bondage in faraway countries all because they allowed themselves to forget God.

On the edge of Canaan, in his final message to God's people, Moses looked far ahead and saw the coming danger. The same spirit of rebellion and disobedience that plagued Israel from the Exodus to the conquest of Canaan manifested itself many years later.

Seven hundred years after Moses, the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians. More than a century later, Judah would fall to the Babylonians. But even in their exile, the people of God were never far from His heart and mind.

What was this cord of faithfulness that connected God to His people which would give them hope, even in captivity? It was His covenant promise made to Abraham, an oath that was still in force because God is a gracious Father who never forgets His promises or reneges on His Word.

These verses may have seemed like a distant issue to the people listening to Moses. But by proclaiming them, and then later writing them down, Moses planted a seed of hope that would one day come to fruition.

That day was centuries later, when God's people called to Him from foreign places and He heard their pleas. It took defeat and slavery to rid Israel of its love for idols, and it took a gracious God to forgive and restore His chosen ones.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Although we may not bear the marks of physical slavery under foreign masters, we were once slaves too. We were slaves to sin. Jesus said so Himself (John 8:34). We were servants in the 'dominion of darkness' (Col. 1:13-note), under the control of Satan. But even while we were oblivious to God, He did not forget us. In grace He rescued us from our helpless spiritual condition and transferred us to the kingdom of Christ. Do you need a bright spot in your week? Consider where you were and where Christ has brought you!

Read: Deuteronomy 4:32-38

You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God. - Deuteronomy 4:35

TODAY IN THE WORD

Fanny Crosby was the great American hymn writer who lived in blindness throughout her long life. Dwight Moody once asked this amazing woman what she would ask for if God granted her one request. She replied that she would ask God to allow her to stay blind, so the first thing her eyes saw would be the face of Jesus.

Fanny Crosby was a unique person who 'saw' God in a way that no sighted person could duplicate. In the same way, Israel was a unique people group that had the opportunity to see God as no other nation could. Out of all the nations on earth, only Israel saw God do such amazing works with their own eyes.

The claims Moses made in today's reading were not the gloatings of a human ruler. And they were not limited to a few recent events or a few years of history. All the way from creation itself to the giving of the Law at Sinai, nothing this great had ever happened to anyone but Israel.

With these words Moses turned from Israel's future to her past. Each question Moses asked demanded the same answer: No, this had never happened before. No other nation had seen God's wonders and signs and mighty power the way Israel had seen them. No other people could point to a divine birth for their nation. Israel alone was the apple of God's eye.

Why did Moses want the Israelites to consider their miraculous origin? So that they might understand the greatness and uniqueness of their God that He alone is God among all the so-called gods of this world.

The knowledge Moses wanted to impart was not merely intellectual, though. This was much more than a history lesson or an attempt to fire up the people for conquest. Moses rehearsed God's greatness toward Israel so that the people would love and fear Him and desire to keep His commandments.

God loved Israel's forefathers and promised by a covenant to love their descendants after them. The Israelites were not the recipients of God's covenant love because they were better or stronger or smarter than anyone else. It was because they had a gracious God who chose to set His love upon them.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Fanny Crosby's fruitful life reflected her deep commitment to Christ.

Can we say the same of ourselves? For example, take a look at your schedule for the month of August. Does it reflect your commitment to serve and to obey Christ, or are your days consumed with 'just getting by?' Obeying Christ means that everything we do should be done in His name (Col. 3:23-note) and for His glory. Renewing your commitment to this priority would be a great way for you to end the summer.

Read: Deuteronomy 4:39-40

Keep his decrees and commands ... so that it may go well with you and your children after you. - Deuteronomy 4:40

TODAY IN THE WORD

Aspiring preachers have long been taught that even the best sermon falls short if the speaker fails to call for a response to the truth that has been presented.

Moses made no such mistake in the first of his sermons to the assembled people of Israel. He called on his hearers to 'take to heart' what they had heard and to 'keep [God's] decrees and commands.' These are the final words in this first of several powerful messages of warning and encouragement.

The exhortations of Dt 4:39, 40 grow out of the previous section in which Moses demonstrated God's unique choice of Israel and His

exclusive ability to perform His will. Moses' concern was for Israel's obedience to God, both in their conduct while capturing Canaan and in their manner of life once they had settled in the land.

Moses knew what it would take to keep God's people faithful to Him. They had to constantly remember that there is no God beside the Lord; therefore, no one else could claim their love and loyalty.

The uniqueness of Israel's God was certainly on Moses' mind. 'Besides Him there is no other' (Deuteronomy 4:35). Then, to make sure the people got the point, Moses repeated this reminder (Dt 4:39).

Moses was so fervent in his message because he knew something that few others realized. Israel's future security and stability depended entirely on the nation's ability to remain true to her God.

Canaan would be full of temptations for the people to worship and serve other gods. And sadly, God's chosen nation would eventually succumb to these enticements. Moses had a prophetic sense that Israel was headed for ruin if the people ever took their eyes off the Lord and started worshipping the gods around them.

There was a great deal at stake here. Obedience to God was, and is, the path to long life and blessing from generation to generation. Fearing and obeying God alone was not just a theological requirement for Israel. God had intertwined faithfulness to Him with blessing from Him in such a way that the two rose or fell together.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Providing long-term financial security for one's family is a major industry in America. The Bible encourages us to provide for tomorrow. But biblical stewardship goes beyond our finances. Have you ever sat down to list the spiritual assets you want to leave to your children or other important people in your life? We encourage you to try it and to be specific in your desires. It's an exercise that will help you focus on what is truly valuable in light of Christ's eternal kingdom. Then turn your list into a prayer list, asking God to help you lay up spiritual treasure.

Read: Deuteronomy 4:44-5:33

Be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. - Deuteronomy 5:32

TODAY IN THE WORD

Earlier this year, tens of thousands of people thronged the streets of Taipei, Taiwan, to get a glimpse of one of Buddhism's most famous relics. The relic, which belongs to a temple in Xian, China, was kept in a jewelled casket under tight security. What was it? A finger, it is believed, of the Buddha himself, the religious leader who died more than two thousand years ago. During the festivities, this finger bone was taken to a stadium and placed on a platform strewn with orchids. Thousands of the faithful chanted, waved flags, and came to venerate the finger.

How sad. Thousands went to worship a long-dead finger bone, without any knowledge of the God whose finger wrote the Ten Commandments (Dt 5:22; cf. Ex. 31:18).

Today's reading marks the beginning of Moses' second sermon, which runs through Deuteronomy 26:19 and contains the bulk of the actual covenant. "Hear, O Israel," he began, making a serious and solemn call to the nation to listen and respond (Dt 5:1). What were the historical facts of the covenant? God had taken the initiative to make it with the people. It wasn't an ancient legend, but an event from their own lifetimes. At Sinai, the Lord had revealed Himself personally. Moses had been the mediator, at the people's request, but they had seen and felt for themselves His awesome presence. What was the core of the covenant? The Ten Commandments (Dt 5:6-21; cf. Ex. 20:1-17). Many of these deal with the holiness of God and the necessity of worshipping Him alone. Others forbid doing wrong to people. Generally speaking, these commands outline or summarize what our behavior should be toward both God and other people. They defined what it meant for the Israelites to be the "people of God." Two copies were made, which was customary with covenants or treaties at that time (Dt 5:22). Both copies were deposited in the Ark.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you've never done so before, why not memorize the Ten Commandments?

Deuteronomy 4:44-5:5

As I judged your fathers in the desert of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign Lord. - Ezekiel 20:36

TODAY IN THE WORD

Israel received the Law of God while they camped in the valley of Beth Peor in the land of the Amorites. They defeated Sihon and

Og, the two kings of the Amorites. They had been summoned by God to Mount Sinai, referred to here as Horeb, a term that comes from a Hebrew word meaning “desolate region” and sometimes used to speak both of the area in which Sinai is located and of the mountain itself (cf. Ex. 3:1; 33:6). It was here that Israel personally encountered the Living God and entered into a covenant with Him.

In view of this, it is surprising to read Moses’ statement in today’s passage claiming, “It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today” (Deut. 5:3). The parents of those who heard these words were present when the Law was given on Sinai. When they heard the commandments they replied, “Everything the Lord has said we will do” (Ex. 24:3). What, then, did Moses mean?

Moses could not have meant that God had never entered into a covenant with Israel’s ancestors. Nor could he have meant that the Law somehow did not apply to the parents of those who were being addressing at that moment. In effect, his message was simply this: “God isn’t dealing with them now, He is dealing with you. It is time for you to commit yourself to obedience.”

The previous generation heard God’s Word and promised to obey it, but they failed to follow through on their commitment. Even if they had obeyed, it still would have been necessary for the generation that followed them to make a personal commitment of their own.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

A religious heritage from one’s parents is a great benefit, but it is no substitute for personal faith.

Deuteronomy 5:1-21; 6:4-12

I rejoice in following your statutes. - Psalm 119:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Wresh family in Champlin, Minnesota, is thankful for a newly passed law that requires Minnesotans, whether drivers or passengers, to wear seat belts in cars. In July 2008, their son, Nick, was driving and apparently fell asleep at the wheel. He missed a curve in the road and hit some railroad tracks. After being ejected from the car, Nick was killed on impact. Authorities believe that Nick might have lived if he had been wearing a seat belt. Since Nick’s death, his family has advocated for the new seat-belt law.

It’s easy to see why the Wresh family is thankful for this new law, which is clearly intended to protect life. In today’s passages we read about a far more important set of laws, the Ten Commandments. These laws are also intended to protect human life, although we don’t always think about them in this way.

Notice that these commandments begin with the reminder of how God delivered the people from their slavery in Egypt.

This shows us that the Ten Commandments are much more than a legal code. They’re an expression of a loving God who wants to give abundant life. When the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, they were confronted by pagan religions. They were also leaving behind numerous Egyptian gods and goddesses. So the first three commandments protect people from the horrors of idol worship, which is actually another type of slavery. We’ve already seen the dangers of forgetting what God has done, so the fourth commandment ensures that the people cease from their labors and intentionally focus on God’s mighty acts, especially the Exodus.

The remaining six commandments all concern our relationships with other people. It’s evident that the command not to murder protects life, but the other commandments are also designed to promote the fullness of life that God intended for his people. That’s why Deuteronomy 6 puts so much emphasis on remembering God’s laws.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps you’ve never associated the Ten Commandments with gratitude before. Read through each commandment and list some reasons why you can be thankful that God has given this command. For example, consider the last commandment. Think about the spiritual and emotional death that comes with coveting something that someone else has. Think about how this takes your focus away from what God has given you. This commandment protects you from a number of destructive emotions and experiences.

Deuteronomy 5:6-21

The command-ments ... are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” - Romans 13:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

A family was studying a devotional about giving the Ten Commandments. The father asked, “How many commandments did God give to Moses?” Without skipping a beat, their five-year-old son replied, “Too many!”

On the surface it may seem to us as if that five-year-old was correct. Especially when we note that Moses began his exposition of God's "commandments, decrees and laws" with a review of the Ten Commandments. Many people today feel that ten rules from God are challenging enough. Just imagine what it must have been like for the people of Israel when they heard all the stipulations laid down in the rest of the Mosaic Law.

Some responded by attempting to sift through all of God's decrees to identify those that were most important. Matthew's Gospel tells how one expert in the Mosaic Law came to Jesus and asked Him which was the greatest commandment of all. Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:37-39). A quick survey of Moses' summary of the foundational commands of the Law confirms Jesus' statement. All its commands and all the commands that follow in the book of Deuteronomy are coordinated by these two great poles: our obligation to God and our obligation to others.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do either of these statements describe you? "I don't think God expects anyone to take the Ten Commandments seriously," or "I think you can get to heaven by obeying the Ten Commandments." These are misunderstandings of God's Law. Scripture also teaches that "no one is justified before God by the law" (Gal. 3:11). It's clear from both the Old and the New Testaments that these commandments do provide a moral foundation for behavior. To help hide this Word in your heart, write out and memorize the Ten Commandments.

Deuteronomy 5:22-33

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. - 1 Timothy 2:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

This coming Sunday you may lift your hands in worship and sing, "Our God is an awesome God," and then a few hours later use the same term to describe the meal you just ate or the detailing on your neighbor's car. Although the language of awe is commonplace among us, we rarely actually experience it.

Israel, on the other hand, learned from firsthand experience that the God they worshiped was awesome. After they heard the words of the Law proclaimed by God's own voice, they were filled with joy and terror. They rejoiced to discover that "a man can live even if God speaks with him" (Deut. 5:24). However, they did not feel that such a relationship could be sustained without help. They begged Moses to act as their mediator—pleading with him to be God's spokesman and their representative.

This illustrates one of the primary themes of the Old Testament law: the truth that we need someone to bridge the gap between man and God that has been created by our sin.

While the church has always recognized this problem, it has not always sought an adequate solution. Like Israel, some have looked to other believers to function as mediators. The New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ has fulfilled what Israel asked of Moses. Others may be appointed as priests, but only Christ can function as a true priest. He alone knows what it's like to be God and man. His death on the cross is the only payment God will accept for sin. Because He rose from the dead and lives forever, He is the only one who is "able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you been looking to someone or something other than Jesus Christ to serve as your "bridge" into God's presence? Perhaps you have been relying on the clergy or rites of the church to make you right with God. Others in the church can instruct us and pray for us. They can be a source of great encouragement and can be used to help us grow spiritually. The ordinances of the church are a helpful reminder of what Jesus did. But only Christ can bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

Deuteronomy 5:1-21; 6:1-8

If you love me, you will obey what I command. - John 14:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

Parents do many things because they want the best for their children in the long run. Some actions may feel restrictive or even harsh at the moment, but parents believe that fruit will come in the end. For example, parents may scold their children for using certain language or may steer them away from kids who could be a bad influence. Such restrictions are not meant to keep kids from having fun, but rather are for their well-being and are rooted in love.

Some people consider parts of the Ten Commandments no longer applicable to contemporary society. They don't see the connection between adherence to these commands and an individual's well-being. Even many of us quite familiar with the Ten Commandments read through them without realizing that they are rooted in God's profound love for us.

Because He created us, God knows that certain actions will lead us into bondage and away from Him. Notice that even before God gave the Ten Commandments, He reminded the people that He had led them out of their slavery in Egypt. God's "commands, decrees and laws" (Deut. 6:1) always lead to freedom from slavery and destruction.

God also gives these prescriptions because He is a holy God who must be approached and worshiped in a holy way. In his book, *Engaging with God*, David Peterson notes, "Worship is an engagement with God on the terms that He proposes and in the way that He alone makes possible." The Israelites had ample exposure to Egyptian gods and goddesses, and they would encounter many more pagan gods in the land of Canaan. Therefore, God gave His people clear guidelines for how to worship Him while they were still in the wilderness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When we think of worshipping the Lord, we don't always think of His commands. But how we approach the Lord often determines how we will worship Him. If we have been disobedient to Him, we will not be able to enter into His worship. Even if we haven't disobeyed a particular commandment, we can dishonor the Lord by approaching Him flippantly or irreverently. As Jack Hayford notes, "A pre-disposition toward the informal can unwittingly cultivate an insensitivity toward the One to whom worshipers come."

Deuteronomy 5:29

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

HERE is a sigh from the Divine heart. It recalls the tears of the Lord Jesus over Jerusalem. The people insisted on their willingness to do all that was required of them, but they were destined to learn and teach that the will may be present, without the power; just as a sick man may have the will to walk across his bedroom, and will fall to the floor because he has no strength.

God's Commandments are for our Welfare.--We find men shrinking from consecration to complete obedience because they fear that it will mean loss and pain. There may be loss and pain; but only in the excision of things which they would be the first to put away, if they understood their nature and outworking as God does. Those who obey God most literally find the most blessedness in life, whether now or hereafter.

We approve them with our Will--More than once the people insisted that they would do as God commanded. We are not so destitute of moral perception as not to see the beauty of a life wholly yielded to God; but let us not rest content with this, or we may have yet to cry with the Apostle, The law is holy, just, and good; but I am carnal, sold under sin.

God wants the Heart.--He will not trust Himself to us, so long as the heart is a stranger to the indwelling of the Divine Spirit. "Oh, that there were such a heart in them!" We need to cry to Him to create in us a clean heart, to ask that He would exchange the heart of stone for one of flesh, to entreat that His love may be shed abroad in our heart, that we may perfectly love Him. "My son, give Me thy heart!"

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1-5

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. - Deuteronomy 6:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

You've heard the old saying that familiarity breeds contempt. It's debatable how much truth there is in this formula. But after spending time in the Book of Deuteronomy, we can safely assume that at the very least, familiarity can breed complacency.

This was one of the dangers Moses tried to nip in the bud before the Israelites headed off into Canaan. We have fast-forwarded in the book to chapter 6, because we want to end the month with one of the most important chapters in Scripture.

Some Bible teachers have argued that Deuteronomy 6:4 is the single most indispensable verse in the Bible. This confession of God's true nature is called the Shema, from the Hebrew word that means 'hear.' This verse alone is enough to set the one true God totally apart from any competitor or impostor.

We have learned by now that Moses was intent on establishing the uniqueness of Israel's God in the minds and hearts of His people. None but the true God could claim their complete allegiance and love and that is exactly the response that God wants from

His own.

Once again, the context of Moses' message was blessing for those who heard and obeyed. Dt 6:1,2,3 drip with promised blessing, the way the Promised Land dripped with milk and honey. Obeying God would bring possession of the land, long life, and great increase. There is also the implied blessing, elsewhere stated explicitly, that future generations of the obedient would also enjoy God's abundance.

Moses' concern that God's people enjoy long life is repeated nine times in Deuteronomy, underscoring the fact that God's intent is to bless His people.

Why does God command us to love Him with all that we have and all that we are? Because He deserves no less, and because He pours out His blessing on those who please Him.

God's commands are not too hard for His people to understand or to keep. Jesus said, 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Mt 11:30). For those who are 'careful to obey'

(Deuteronomy 6:3), and willing to obey from hearts of sincere love for God, the blessings of heaven are available.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One way children get into trouble is by not listening to what their parents are telling them. This can happen also to us as adults in our relationships to God. One measure of our love for God is how willing we are to listen to what He wants to tell us. We can listen as we meditate on Scripture and spend time being quiet in God's presence. Find some time this weekend to come before God with a listening ear and an open heart. He will meet you there.

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

TODAY IN THE WORD

Every parent, every person is an example to others. Tommy Bolt, a professional golfer known for his graceful swing and terrible temper, once tried to liven up a clinic he was giving by telling his teenage son: "Show these nice folks what I've taught you." The boy obediently hurled a nine-iron up into the blue sky!

Certainly that was not what Mr. Bolt had in mind! But the son was following the father's example.

In contrast, when Robert Ingersoll, the infamous skeptic, was in his heyday, two college students went to hear him lecture. Later they discussed his tirade against the faith.

"Well," said one, "I guess he knocked the props out from under Christianity, didn't he?"

"No," the other replied. "He didn't. Ingersoll did not explain my mother's life; and until he can explain my mother's life, I will stand by my mother's God." What a compliment! What a challenge! For us to live in such a way that our children or our friends would be convinced of the reality of God.

This was the charge given to the Israelites by Moses as they made preparations to enter the Promised Land. They were to know God's commands (vv. 1, 6, 17, 20). More importantly, however, they were to obey (observe or keep) God's commands (vv. 1-3, 17-18, 24-25). Then they had the responsibility to impress or teach these commands to their children (vv. 7-9, 20-25).

It wasn't enough for these parents just to know the truth or even to talk about the truth. Central to the continuation of the faith was the need to live the truth.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY How do you treat the other members of your family? Today, take a moment to consider... Undoubtedly others watch how we live, especially those in our household. A Christian once asked a Jewish rabbi friend: "When are you Jews going to become Christians?" The rabbi replied, "When all you Christians become Christians." Our children, our relatives, our friends, our neighbors, our co-workers—all these are watching and waiting to see if our faith is genuine. An old poem puts it this way: "You are writing a Gospel, a chapter a day, by the things that you do and the words that you say. Men read what you write, whether faithful or true: just what is the Gospel according to you?"

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. - Deuteronomy 6:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Medieval church leader Bernard of Clairvaux asserted: "God is entitled to our love. Why? Because He gave Himself for us despite

the fact that we are so undeserving. What better could He have given? If we ask why God is entitled to our love, we should answer, 'Because He first loved us.' God is clearly deserving of our love especially if we consider who He is that loves us, who we are that He loves, and how much He loves us."

In the same vein, Moses exhorted the Israelites in today's reading concerning the sweet, urgent necessity of loving God. In yesterday's reading, the Law was summarized in Ten Commandments--in today's reading it's distilled to just one. Moses preached that the people should love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul and mind and strength--with their whole being, with everything they had (Dt 6:5; cf. Mt 22:37, 38, 39, 40). God was exclusively worthy of this love, not only because He alone is supreme, but also because He'd shown through His mighty deeds His enduring love for Israel.

Even in modern times, Dt 6:4-9 are regarded as a creed and recited daily by pious Jews. This passage provides a picture of God's law permeating everyday family life (also illustrated in Dt 6:20-25). The covenant was not merely to be inscribed on stone tablets and put away in the Ark, but was to be written on Israel's hearts. It was the nucleus of everything they were and everything they did (cf. Jer. 31:33, 34).

Many Jews take literally the language of verses 8 and 9. Some tie phylacteries, small boxes with Scripture inside, to their foreheads and left arms; similar objects called mezuzot are attached to the doorframes of their houses. These images suggest that God's Word should control our actions (hand), decision-making (forehead), family life (doorframes), and hospitality (gates).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One emphasis that emerges from today's reading is the need for God's Word to be an integral part of family life. The Israelites were instructed to discuss the Law in their homes and to teach it to their children--figuratively speaking, to write it on the doorframes of their houses.

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you. - Deuteronomy 6:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

Certain events in popular culture capture the public's attention and dominate the conversation—they become known as water-cooler moments. It could be celebrity gossip, sporting events, a television show, or (especially in corporate culture) the latest office rumors. What we talk about in those moments when we have nothing else to discuss says a lot about what is most important to us as individuals and as a society.

It is telling, then, that the subject of God and His Word are more often taboo than the topic of our water-cooler discussions. God instructed Israel to do the opposite. He wanted to be at the forefront of Israel's conversation. And it made perfect sense, especially if there had been no official written copy of God's Word prior to God inscribing the Law or Moses recording the Pentateuch. If God's Word wasn't on their lips, it was unlikely to be on their hearts.

Today's passage is one of those chapters that uplifts the spirits of the reader. Israel was being encouraged, not scolded. The Lord spoke reassuringly and with certainty of the victory they were about to enjoy and the relationship of righteousness they would encounter with Him. He did include a warning about the consequences of disobedience, and it stands out in the middle of this passage (vv. 14-16). God was not only jealous, but He was also dwelling among the people of Israel (v. 15). For them to assume that He could not see their actions would certainly be a terrible mistake.

The overall tone of the passage is very positive and reassuring. Even so, God anticipated the skeptical question that would come from the next generation: Why do we have all these rules (v. 20)? The answer had nothing to do with joyless restrictions. God rescued His people from slavery, and He wanted them to prosper and to preserve their legacy as people of faith in the Lord their God. Their obedience to the Law demonstrated the reality of their relationship. True obedience could never be independent of their faith in Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Try reading this passage as God's exhortation to you with some New Testament substitutions. Instead of bondage in Egypt, think of how God freed you from slavery to sin. Instead of the inheritance of the Promised Land, consider your eternal inheritance. And when you reach the final verse, read Philippians 3:9 in its place: "And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 Weeds

British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge once had a discussion with a man who firmly believed that children should not be given formal

religious instruction, but should be free to choose their own religious faith when they reached maturity. Coleridge did not disagree, but later invited the man into his somewhat neglected garden. "Do you call this a garden?" the visitor exclaimed. "There are nothing but weeds here!"

"Well, you see," Coleridge replied, "I did not wish to infringe upon the liberty of the garden in any way. I was just giving the garden a chance to express itself." - Our Daily Walk

Deuteronomy 6 - Responsibility to Teach Children - Our Daily Bread

On three separate occasions, God told parents in Israel how to answer the serious questions of their sons and daughters (see Exodus 13:14, Deuteronomy 6:20, and Joshua 4:6,21). This would indicate that God wants us to take the time to answer our children when they ask us about spiritual matters. How we respond can either greatly help or terribly discourage them.

Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy told of an aunt who hurt him deeply when she didn't take time to answer some questions that were troubling him. She stirred his emotions by telling him of Jesus' crucifixion, but when he cried out, "Auntie, why did they torture Him?" she said simply, "They were wicked." "But wasn't He God?" Tolstoy asked. Instead of explaining that Jesus was indeed God, that He had become a man so He could die for our sins, she said, "Be still—it is 9 o'clock!" When he persisted, she retorted, "'Be quiet, I say, I'm going to the dining room to have tea.'" This left young Tolstoy greatly agitated.

Commenting on this scene, Calvin Miller said, "Tolstoy found it incomprehensible that Christ had been brutalized and his aunt was not interested enough to stay a little past tea time and talk about it."

Do we allow our own interests—a television program, a sporting event, a hobby—to keep us from taking time to listen, admonish, and instruct our children, or anyone who may ask us about God? If we pause long enough to explain His truth, He will use it to change lives. -H.V.L.

Lord, teach me how to love and live
That I may cheer each heart,
And to my fellowman in need
Some blessing rich impart.

- Anon.

Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, for all the people you can, while you can.

Deuteronomy 6 - Forgotten Wife - Our Daily Bread

After stopping for gas in Montgomery, Alabama, Sam drove more than 5 hours before noticing he had left someone behind—his wife. So at the next town he asked the police to help get him in touch with her. Then Sam called his wife to tell her he was on his way back. He admitted with great embarrassment that he just hadn't noticed her absence.

How Sam could forget his wife is beyond me. But wait! We're not much different in our relationship to God. We actually fail to remember the One who created us and redeemed us. How is this possible? I don't know. But we do forget. And it's a constant struggle not to.

Man's short attention span is no surprise to God. Speaking to Israel, He offered solutions in Deuteronomy 6. First, know the real issues of life and keep priorities straight (Dt 6:4,5). Second, take the Scriptures seriously. Become so familiar with them that they are a part of what you think and feel and do (Dt 6:6). Third, talk about God to your children, and look for opportunities to tell them of His love (Dt 6:7). Fourth, write reminders to yourself and put them where they can be easily seen (Dt 6:8,9). Fifth, realize that your need for God is not limited to times of obvious stress or danger. Enjoy with gratitude whatever health and happiness you have (Dt 6:10,11).

Can we put God out of our mind? I'm afraid so. That's why we must acknowledge and obey Him continually. It's the only way of keeping Him in mind. -M.R.D.II

King of my life I crown Thee now—
Thine shall the glory be;
Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow,
Lead me to Calvary. - Hussey

Backsliding begins when knee-bending stops.

Deuteronomy 6:4- Monotheism - Our Daily Bread

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

This great verse has been recited countless times by Israelites down through the centuries, setting forth their distinctive belief in one great Creator God. The Jews had retained their original belief in creation, handed down from Noah, while the other nations had all allowed their primitive monotheistic creationism to degenerate into a wide variety of religions, all basically equivalent to the polytheistic evolutionism of the early Sumerians at Babel.

But along with its strong assertion of monotheism, there is also a very real suggestion that this declaration, with its thrice-named subject, is also setting forth the Triune God. The name, "LORD," of course, is Yahweh, or Jehovah, the self-existing One who reveals Himself, while "God" is Elohim, the powerful Creator/Ruler. "Jehovah our Elohim is one Jehovah" is the proclamation. A number of respected Jewish commentators have acknowledged that the verse spoke of a "unified oneness," rather than an "absolute oneness." The revered book, called the Zohar, for example, even said that the first mention was of the Father, the second one the Messiah; and the third, the Holy Spirit.

The key word "one" (Hebrew achad) is often used to denote unity in diversity. For example, when Eve was united to Adam in marriage, they were said to be "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Similarly, on the third day of creation, the waters were "gathered together unto one place," yet this gathering together was called "Seas" (Genesis 1:9,10).

Thus Israel's great declaration should really be understood as saying in effect: The eternally omnipresent Father, also Creator and sustainer of all things, is our unified self-revealing Lord." -HMM

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Command and teach these things. - 1 Timothy 4:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

Although Jill believes in having family devotions, they never seem to turn out the way she thinks they should. She easily identifies with the mother whose daughter once asked, "Mommy, when are we going to get together and have family commotions?"

"Family commotions" seem to be a good description of what happens when Jill suggests that it's time for her family to study the Bible. "Can't we do it later?" someone will ask. "I'm watching television" another will complain. All too often the children seem bored, the dog barks, or the phone rings.

Spending time together in God's Word is a challenge for most families today. How good to learn, then, that God's plan doesn't limit the family's spiritual life to a single method. Instead, it prescribes a holistic approach to training children in spiritual matters. God does indeed command Christian parents to pass on the truths of the faith to their children, but the strategy He prescribes is a flexible one. Parents are called to explain spiritual truths to their children in the context of ordinary life. Instead of demanding that family devotions be observed at a specific time, this subject is to be the focus of family discussion throughout the day. Biblical principles should be so naturally woven into the fabric of our daily lives that it seems as if they were written on the doorframes of our houses and inscribed on our gates (Deut. 6:9).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When was the last time you discussed God's Word together as a family?

If you have a plan for family devotions, try not to limit your spiritual conversations to just these formal occasions. If your approach to your family's spiritual life is more informal, be careful not to let the subject of God's truth become pushed aside by the rush of the day.

Read: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. - Deuteronomy 6:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Welcome to the last year of the millennium! It's safe to say that 1999 will produce much excitement, uncertainty, and speculation. The countdown to 2000 has begun in earnest, and many people will be looking for something solid to hold on to amid predictions of computer meltdowns and end-time upheavals.

All of this makes January 1999 a perfect time to anchor our souls in 'the word of the prophets made more certain' (2Pe 1:19note). These are the great truths of Scripture that will never change or fail, because 'the words of the Lord are flawless' (Ps 12:6).

In other words, theology matters! It's not just a branch of study for religious professionals. The word theology itself means the study

of God, literally 'the word of God.' That alone tells us theology should matter for every Christian. What we believe has a profound affect on the way we live and the decisions we make.

Therefore, we need to know and affirm what the Bible teaches especially in these days when truth is defined as whatever feels right to any given person in any given situation.

At Today in the Word, we want to encourage you in every way possible this year. You may already have noticed one important addition to our ministry lineup for 1999, a column entitled 'Theology Matters,' written by Moody faculty member Dr. Harry Shields, who is chairman of the Pastoral Studies Department.

Each month, Dr. Shields will shed light on the great truths God's people have confessed and affirmed for centuries. Our studies this month are another effort to help you lay a solid foundation for your Christian life in this new year.

Deuteronomy 6 is a logical place to start, since verse 4 affirms the basic truth that our God is unique in His oneness. Notice that Moses does not simply state the fact of God's character and then leave it. Theology always demands a response.

That is very clear in today's reading. Since the Lord is the only true God, we are called to love Him with every part of our being, and impress His truth on our children. Fulfilling these commands is a challenge worth our best efforts in 1999!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One of the best ways to let God's Word sink down into your heart and guide your actions is to memorize Scripture. If you have been a Today family member for very long, you know how much value we place on Scripture memory. Writing Deuteronomy 6:4-5 on the 'doorframes' of your mind is a great way to begin the year. And, if possible, why not make it a group project to memorize these life-changing verses? Encourage your family, roommates, prayer partners, or others to join you in this project.

Deuteronomy 6:4-19; 8:1-5

For the word of God is living and active... It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit. - Hebrews 4:12a

TODAY IN THE WORD

How would history look without the Word of God? The Bible has influenced literature, music, law, and art, as well as science and psychology. Although not everyone impacted by the Bible acknowledges Jesus as Savior, it's clear that the Bible, both directly and indirectly, has changed the course of human history.

This shouldn't surprise us, because God's Word is alive (Heb. 4:12). No other book can make this claim. This month we're going to pursue a somewhat different study by looking at the impact that God's Word has had on the individuals who shaped history. We'll begin our study with our Lord Jesus, who is Himself the very Word of God. Along the way, we'll meet a variety of people, some famous and some less well-known. Each day we'll see the power of God's Word.

As you read through today's passages, consider how much this sounds like Jesus' teaching. That's because Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy more than any other Old Testament book. As Jesus grew up, it's certain that He heard the opening words of our first passage (Deut. 6:4-9) often. The Jews called this passage the Shema (from the Hebrew "to hear"), and it was recited over and over in homes and synagogues. In fact, Jesus quotes this passage in Mark 12:28-31. Recall that He also quoted Deuteronomy 6:13, 16 and 8:3 when He was tempted by Satan (Matt. 4:4).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you ever considered the impact of God's Word in your own life? Perhaps you have a favorite passage or a significant verse that has shaped your life. Take a few minutes today to reflect on these verses. When did you first hear them? How have they influenced your thinking?

Deuteronomy 6:4-14.

TODAY IN THE WORD

Life wasn't easy for George Young. The rural church he pastored was obscure, and George worked as a carpenter to keep food on the table. But the Youngs were happy in God's service. And when, after a lot of hard work, George was able to move his family into a small home they had built themselves, their joy seemed complete.

But one night local hoodlums who disliked George's gospel message burned the house down. The Youngs cried out to God. His peace flooded their hearts, and George wrote about it. The result is the hymn of comfort: "God Leads Us Along."

George Young understood and lived by the principle stated in today's verse. You can't really express words of praise to God for His

care and comfort unless you love Him more than you love your possessions. For most Americans, our homes are almost sacred. We attach to these buildings all of our memories and warm associations.

But a home is still a thing. (At least, the building in which we make our home is.) No matter how attached we might be to the things money can buy, God wants and demands first place in our affections.

We're still talking about money and finances from the first of our three perspectives, that of God to man. So it's not surprising that in Deuteronomy 6 the reasons given as to why God should have top spot in our hearts are theological and doctrinal. That is, they relate to His Person and truths about Him.

For instance, one reason we should love God with our total being is that He alone is worthy because He alone is God (v. 4). This verse is the great Shema of Israel, from the word for "Hear." This was Israel's confession of faith, the truth that set Israel's God apart from all pretenders.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you keep a hymnal next to your Bible and Today in the Word? If not, we urge you to purchase a hymnal at your next opportunity. You can usually find one at most new or used bookstores. Or your church may have extra hymnals available for purchase.

Deuteronomy 6:5

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

"LOVEST thou Me?"

"Who art Thou, Lord, that I should love Thee?"

"I am He that liveth, but I died; I loved thee, and gave Myself for thee; I have made thee mine forever in a bond that even death cannot break; I have loved thee with an everlasting love; I shall never be at rest till thou art with Me where I am."

"Indeed I would love Thee; but how?"

"Thou shalt love Me with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

"This were impossible unless Thou give me the love Thou requirest."

"This I will do for thee, since love is of God. Only obey these simple directions:

"1. Abstain from all wrath, anger, malice, evil speaking, and all else that would grieve my Holy Spirit.

"2. Yield thyself to the Spirit, that He may produce in thee His choice fruit--Love. 'The fruit of the Spirit is love.' 'He sheds love abroad in the heart.'

"3. Consider my love to thee, especially that I died for thee when thou wert yet in thy sins. Meditate much upon the sacrifice I made for thee, that thou mightest have thy sins blotted out, and enjoy the peace which passeth all understanding.

"4. Believing that thou hast received the love of the Spirit, begin to let it work through thy life to all around thee.

"5. If thy heart is unwilling to love any, put thy will on My side, and confidently believe that I am able to work in thee to will and to do of My own good pleasure."

Read: Deuteronomy 6:5-9; 20-25

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. - Deuteronomy 6:6-7

TODAY IN THE WORD

A visitor to the hospital room of Dwight Eisenhower reported that at one point in their conversation, the former president who was near death raised up in his bed and declared, 'I still have something to say to the American people.' It was an expression of Eisenhower's desire to complete what he considered his legacy of leadership.

Every Christian has a legacy to complete too not only a personal and perhaps a family legacy, but a clearly defined body of truth to preserve and pass on to future generations. It's here that older believers in the final season of faith may make their most important contribution to the kingdom of God, and it's a good place to end this part of our study.

Don't let the familiarity of these classic verses in Deuteronomy 6 cause you to miss their solemn importance. There is no way to

measure adequately the power of life-related teaching about God's truth by someone who is living it in front of his or her 'students.'

This kind of generational teaching begins in the home, and it is still the most effective kind of teaching when done consistently. Although older believers usually do not have their children or grandchildren living with them, they can form a tremendous 'second line' of teaching and example for the generations coming after them.

In Dt 6:20 you'll see one reason a godly legacy is so effective. Moses assumes that some day the younger generation will ask, 'What does all of this mean?' That's when the older generation has a golden opportunity to explain God's goodness and faithfulness to them.

Notice that this includes a divine history lesson. Your story of God's leading and blessing ought to be a solid part of your family's story that every member knows and can recite.

But it goes beyond history. The older generation is instructed to tell the younger people about God commands, and to urge the younger to obey God and enjoy His blessing.

In other words, a spiritual legacy is not just a body of material about the past. It should help guide those coming behind us to walk in God's ways.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you ever considered preserving your personal and family spiritual 'story' so your children and grandchildren will have a solid foundation to build on?

If not, this might be a good time to begin writing down or recording the things you want to share with the younger generation. Or if you have an older believer in your family with a lot to share, offer to help him or her tell the story of God's faithfulness to them.

Read: Deuteronomy 6:6-9

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. - Deuteronomy 6:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

When the late basketball star 'Pistol' Pete Maravich was a youngster, he practiced his dribbling and other skills so relentlessly that he was able to dribble a basketball out the window of his father's car at thirty miles per hour! Maravich always had a basketball in his hands, and the training paid off in the ball-handling skills that made Pete a legend by the time he had graduated from college.

Transfer that kind of dedication to the spiritual realm, and you get some idea of what Moses had in mind for the training of children in the matters of God.

It's not that parents and children are to walk around all day with a Bible in their hands although some later Jewish groups took Moses very literally and wore small boxes of Scripture on their foreheads and wrists. God's purpose is always that His Word become a vital part of a family's daily routine.

We usually hear about the family setting when this passage is taught. But we can't afford to pass by Dt 6:6 too quickly. The process begins with the adults, not the children. God's Word must be fully at home in our own hearts before we can transmit it effectively to our children and to others around us.

Only then are we really equipped to impress God's truth on those who are within our sphere of influence. The best setting for this is not necessarily formal instruction, although Deuteronomy 6 certainly does not prohibit that.

But Moses was after something more than intellectual instruction. God's law was given to guide the moral behavior of His people, not simply to enlighten their minds. If something is going to affect the way we live each day, it needs to be deeply ingrained within us.

Every cult leader knows this, which is why false groups practice such intense indoctrination. But a child or other young person who is well-grounded in the Word and can apply it to the issues of life has little to fear from a peddler of lies.

Moses knew that eventually the Israelites would settle in Canaan and build houses for themselves. He was eager to make sure those houses were well furnished with God's truth.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In light of today's lesson, this weekend is a good time for us to make sure our homes are places where God's Word is prominent. We'll talk about this today and tomorrow.

The first step is to minimize distractions, things that keep our minds absorbed with the stuff of this world and that drown out the Word. Think through a typical week around your house. Do the television, radio, CD player, or computer command large chunks of your time and attention? If you see an area of concern, this may be the time for an honest evaluation.

Read: Deuteronomy 6:10-12

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord. - Deuteronomy 6:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Few things in life are as unattractive as ingratitude. Failing to be thankful for what we have received, and even forgetting the source of our blessings, is not just bad manners. It is a sin, since everything we have is a gift from God (1 Cor. 4:7). The Israelites were on the verge of inheriting an incredible windfall of blessing the well-developed and fruitful land of Canaan. The way Moses described what was ahead for the people of God must have made their heads spin.

After all, these were the children and grandchildren of people who had known nothing but slavery in Egypt. Forty years of traveling in circles in a harsh desert didn't do much to upgrade their lifestyle either. Now all of a sudden, they were facing a future of unprecedented prosperity.

All that stood between Israel and this wealth was the people's obedience. Yet once more, Moses set things in their proper context. This was no 'name it, claim it' deal. The land of Canaan was a gift of God's grace in fulfillment of His covenant promises to Israel's forefathers.

That means the people listening to Moses could not go back to their tents and say, 'God is blessing me because of all the wonderful things I've done and the great person I am.'

Don't misunderstand. God's blessing was most definitely an act of goodness to the people He loved. But He did not want the Israelites to go into Canaan with the idea, 'We deserve this for all we've suffered. We've earned a reward. It was our skill in battle and our power that won Canaan for us.'

People who start thinking like this commit a grievous sin, one of forgetting whose hand has provided all they have. If there's one lesson that is written large across the pages of Numbers and Deuteronomy, it is the danger of forgetting and thus the need to remember who God is and what He has done.

A very wise man named Agur once asked God to give him neither poverty nor wealth. The danger of gaining the latter was that too much material gain can lean one to disown God (Pr. 30:9). Does our abundance make us grateful, or forgetful?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

These words from the Proverbs make up one of the lessons that need to be learned at home.

Yesterday we talked about the importance of making God's Word prominent in the daily life of our families. One idea is to look for current events that can become the springboard for a dinnertime discussion of a biblical principle. You might use a Bible story such as Daniel and his commitment to God (Da 1:8-16-note) to ask family members how they would handle a similar situation. The teaching opportunities are there if we are alert to them.

Read: Deuteronomy 6:13-19

Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight, so that it may go well with you. - Deuteronomy 6:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Many years ago, a young hotel clerk in Philadelphia explained to an older couple that no rooms were available for the night. But instead of turning the pair out into the pouring rain, the clerk insisted that they take his own room. The next morning the man thanked the clerk and told him he deserved to be the manager of the finest hotel in America. 'Maybe some day I'll build one for you.' The clerk simply smiled. Two years later, however, he found himself in New York as the first manager of the new Waldorf-Astoria Hotel! The couple he had befriended were Mr. and Mrs. William Waldorf Astor.

Talk about the rewards of service. The Lord lavishes His goodness upon those who serve Him faithfully and obediently. 'No good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless,' the Bible says (Ps 84:11).

Moses drew on all the passion of his heart to warn, teach, and exhort Israel to love and to serve the Lord God faithfully. He realized that if the people stopped following the God of Abraham, they would begin following the worthless idols of the nations around them. As one Bible commentator has pointed out, God created us with the need to worship.

The opposite of serving and obeying God is to put Him to the test to doubt His goodness, take for granted His provisions, and provoke Him to anger. The Israelites had just about cornered the market on that sin. Massah (Deuteronomy 6:16) was another name for Meribah, the occasion when the people's temporary thirst caused them to question the eternal God.

That was a painful memory for Moses. The only thing more painful would be for the nation to repeat that sin once they had entered Canaan and had experienced times of need. God's promise of provision did not mean the people would never be in temporary need.

But the key was to remember in those times that God had led His people to Canaan, and He would be their supply if only they would trust Him. He had promised Israel the land and had pushed out all of her enemies. In light of all He had done for them, God had a right to be jealous for the devotion of His people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Because the week before Labor Day marks the traditional end of summer vacation, it is a perfect time for us to reflect on God's goodness through another season.

We hope your summer has been spiritually refreshing and productive. Perhaps God has taught you new things about Himself, has given you a deeper love for His Word, or has met a special need in your life. Why not draw up a mental checklist of God's goodness to you this summer and then turn your gratitude into praise?

Deuteronomy 7:1-26

Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. - 2 Corinthians 6:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

In our culture today, some aspects of this passage may be disturbing. The command to totally destroy all those living in the land of Canaan makes sense only when the authority of the God who gave it is kept in view. He is the God who "made every nation of men" and the one who "determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26).

As Creator of the world, Israel's God also had authority over all nations, even over those who did not acknowledge Him as God. As the only one who possesses the power to give life, He also has the authority to take it (Neh. 9:6; cf. Job 1:21).

In order to understand this difficult command, we should keep in mind that God promised to give the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 15:7). When Israel moved into Canaan, they weren't stealing the land but claiming what was rightfully theirs.

God's purpose for Israel was to function as a "light to the nations" (Isa. 51:4). God's people were never meant to be isolated, but they were intended to be a nation apart. This could not happen if they adopted the values and practices of their neighbors. The danger of corruption was so great that drastic measures had to be taken. Intermarriage with those who didn't worship their God would only erode Israel's faith and eventually lead to assimilation by the surrounding nations.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Which would others say is most true of you? Are you an influencer? Or are you more influenced by others around you? Most of us are both—our attitudes and actions are affected by those around us, and we in turn help to shape the behavior of others.

Deuteronomy 7:1-8:20

He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. - Deuteronomy 7:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

After nearly two decades of work, University of Chicago professor Phil Eaton recently created what might be the world's most powerful non-nuclear explosive. Named one of the most important discoveries of the year 2000 by the American Chemical Society, "octanitrocubane," as it is called, appears to be about 20 percent more powerful than HMX, currently, one of the most powerful explosives. Pioneered by Eaton, the techniques used to synthesize octanitrocubane have also proved useful in medicine and agriculture. But its most obvious application is military, and it may lead to the production of lighter, more powerful weapons.

When it came to military might, Moses told the Israelites to trust in God, not weapons. He would be the One who would conquer the land for them. They should put their faith not in their spears or their courage, but in their almighty Lord.

During the conquest, the Israelites were to practice "total destruction"—no treaties, no mercy, no intermarriage, no idolatry. The

nation was to shun any form of political, social, or religious association with the Canaanites. God wanted to safeguard His "treasured possession" (7:6) from being contaminated by their evil, in particular their idolatry, which would bring on His anger and judgment (Dt 7:16, 25, 26; 8:19, 20; cf. Deut 20:17, 18).

We know that was God's judgment on the Canaanites for their wickedness (Deut 9:4, 5). The total destruction represented an offering made by Israel to God--the destroyed things were completely devoted to Him, somewhat like a burnt offering.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

What's the biggest problem you have in your life these days? Give it over to God to be conquered!

Deuteronomy 7:4

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THE question of marriage is repeatedly considered in these chapters, and never once is it supposed that the Israelites might bring a heathen partner to the faith of God's elect; but it is always insisted that the heathen husband or wife will subvert the faith of the child of Abraham. "Thou shalt not make marriages with them; for they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God."

The same law holds still. You may suppose that by marrying the ungodly and irreligious you will be able to convert them to your way of thinking; but you must remember that regeneration is the work of the Holy Ghost, and He is not likely to lend His aid in regeneration whilst you are acting in defiance of His distinct prohibitions. The command of Christ is so clear and positive against His followers entering into an unequal yoke with unbelievers, that it simply leaves no option for the obedient. With the child of God, marriage must be "only in the Lord."

In order to make these marriages impossible, Israel was bidden to destroy the nations of Canaan. Separation from their society and practices was thus enforced. The slaughter seemed ruthless; but there was no other way of preserving intact the chosen race, as a peculiar people unto the Lord. Our separation also must be strict even to the extreme. If we would keep our young people from worldly alliances, we must begin with their amusements and companionships. There should be every endeavor to promote their happiness and interests; but we must very carefully guard the young plants from the blight of worldliness.

Deuteronomy 7:25 Iconoclastic

Here's another discussion starter for your Sunday school, Bible study, or social occasion. In January, Texas evangelist James Robison and his wealthiest convert, T. Cullen Davis, smashed a million dollars worth of jade, ivory, and gold art objects which had a history of Oriental religious worship.

Their grounds: Deuteronomy 7:25, wherein the Lord told the Israelites: "The graven images of their gods shall you burn with fire. You shall not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto yourselves, lest you be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord your God." Robison and Davis destroyed, among other things, a half million dollar jade pagoda. If you are shocked, ask yourself what you would have done back in that Deuteronomy 7 era. If you are not shocked, look up the meaning of "iconoclastic" and define how far you want to carry the principle.

Source unknown

Deuteronomy 8:1-9

As a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you. - Deuteronomy 8:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

In *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis envisions a heavenly land in which things are so solid as to be painful for the ill-prepared. Grass cuts their feet, rivers move like glass, and the weight of fruit makes it impossible to carry. But the protagonist soon learns that one can be disciplined for the heavenly life. In one scene, an inhabitant beckons: "Will you come with me to the mountains? It will hurt at first, until your feet are hardened. Reality is harsh to the feet of shadows. But will you come?" This land required physical training before bodies could be accustomed to its joys.

Although the world of *The Great Divorce* comes from the imagination of Lewis, the idea of discipline for the purpose of training is quite biblical. Particularly today we see the Lord's discipline of His people to prepare them for right living. God describes the Promised Land in vivid detail as a rich and abundant land (vv. 1, 7-9). But between these verses comes the somewhat surprising description of God's preparation of His people for this arrival. The Lord has led them through the wilderness to "humble" and "test"

them (v. 2). Verse 3 again identifies God's humbling action as He let Israel feel hunger, then fed them with manna. They wandered for forty years in the desert and yet they were never in want of food, water, or clothing.

Why did God allow Israel to experience such hardship? The answer is provided in our key verse for today. All the hardship experienced by Israel was a demonstration of God's fatherly discipline, meant to train them to trust His goodness and provision when they entered the land. Indeed, such divine discipline was intended not as punishment for doing wrong, but as training for doing right, so that they might learn to "live and increase" in the land (v. 1). We train our bodies through healthy eating and sleeping habits, not to punish ourselves but in order to prepare for the demands of life. Like the feet that needed to be trained to enjoy the heavenly mountains in *The Great Divorce*, we too need God's training discipline to prepare us for His kingdom.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As with the Israelites, so today we need God's training discipline. And just as the body can be disciplined with exercise and diet, we can be trained spiritually as well. Consider how "spiritually disciplined" you are, and make a goal this week to work on your own personal disciplines of prayer, fasting, Scripture reading, or corporate worship. Ask God to use His Spirit and Word to train and prepare you for living in His kingdom, not just for a moment or a day, but for eternity.

Deuteronomy 8:1-20

Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. - 1 Chronicles 16:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

Multi-millionaire J. Paul Getty was once asked to write a short article explaining the secret of his financial success. He agreed and promptly sent the publisher a sheet of paper with a single sentence written on it. It read: "Some people find oil. Others don't." Was he simply lucky? Your answer will depend upon the role you see that God plays in success.

What many might characterize as "luck," the Bible labels as grace. One definition of grace is "unmerited favor." When God grants me a blessing that I don't deserve, He shows me grace. This was certainly true of Israel. They had not earned the right to dwell in the land of Canaan. It was God's gift to them. This great blessing brought with it a corresponding risk. It was possible, even likely, that once they had settled in the land, God's people would come to believe that they had done something to deserve all they had received. They would forget God's mighty acts of deliverance and their own disobedience. Instead of crediting Him with their success, they would attribute it to their own power and strength.

The familiar saying warns that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. Israel was in danger of suffering an even worse fate. For them, to forget their history was equivalent to forgetting God. They were warned that such spiritual amnesia would eventually lead to their expulsion from the land of promise. Israel's experience in the wilderness had shown that the God of blessing was also a God of discipline. He loved them too much to let them forget all He had done, and He was willing to take drastic measures to "jog" His people's spiritual memory.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Memory is one of the secrets of maintaining an attitude of gratitude for all that God has done. Consider developing a strategy that will help you to "Remember how the Lord your God led you" (Deut. 8:2). It doesn't have to be elaborate. It might be something as simple as keeping a journal of God's answers to your prayers. In ancient Israel they sometimes piled stones into a mound to memorialize God's acts of deliverance (or judgment) in their lives. What kind of memorial might serve as your personal "pile of stones?"

Deuteronomy 8:3

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THERE was a Divine intention, then, in the hunger and thirst and weariness of the desert march. God suffered these hardships to come to the chosen people, in order to teach them dependence on Himself. The daily gift of manna was a perpetual evidence of His loving thought and care for the pilgrim host; they came to learn that sin and backsliding could not alienate His compassions; they found that the Word of God was life. But none of these lessons could have been acquired if the supplies of food had been as regular and plentiful as in Egypt. They were suffered to hunger that God might make them know.

You are suffered to hunger for human love, that you may know what the love of Jesus can be to His own. Open your heart to it, until it flood you as the sunshine does the south windows of a house.

You are suffered to hunger for recognition and gratitude, that you may know what the "Well done!" of Jesus is, and to lead you to look for that only. What do the words of men amount to unless He smile?

You are suffered to hunger for easier circumstances, for money, that you may know the tender provision which Jesus can make for those who are wholly dependent on Him. In the absence of all human help, you will learn the sweet taste of His manna.

Glory to God, to God, he saith, Knowledge by suffering entereth, And life is perfected in death.

These seasons of hunger are necessary for the discipline of life. But, thank God, He is able to satisfy us; and out of His riches in glory in Christ Jesus He can and will fulfill every need of ours (Phil. 4:19, R. V.).

Deuteronomy 8:3 Dissident Soviet Jew

Anatoli Shcharansky, a dissident Soviet Jew, kissed his wife goodbye as she left Russia for freedom in Israel. His parting words to her were, "I'll see you soon in Jerusalem." But Anatoli was detained and finally imprisoned. Their reunion in Jerusalem would not only be postponed, it might never occur. During long years in Russian prisons and work camps Anatoli was stripped of his personal belongings. His only possession was a miniature copy of the Psalms. Once during his imprisonment, his refusal to release the book to the authorities cost him 130 days in solitary confinement.

Finally, twelve years after parting with his wife, he was offered freedom. In February 1986, as the world watched, Shcharansky was allowed to walk away from Russian guards toward those who would take him to Jerusalem. But in the final moments of captivity, the guards tried again to confiscate the Psalms book. Anatoli threw himself face down in the snow and refused to walk on to freedom without it.

Those words had kept him alive during imprisonment. He would not go on to freedom without them.

From Discipleship Journal, Issue #43 (1988), p. 24

Deuteronomy 8:1-9:21

It is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. - Deuteronomy 9:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

If God is good, why do bad things happen? Skeptics have used this question to argue against Christian faith, but genuine seekers ask this as well. Faithful believers, from Job to the present day, know that this question is more than an intellectual puzzle. It impacts our lives all the time on an emotional and spiritual level. We cannot ignore it or explain it away.

Today's reading certainly does not provide a complete answer to this question, but it may shed some light. We see that bad things happen not only because of our sin, but to remind us to reorient our lives toward our true home.

In Deuteronomy Moses gave the Israelites a summary of the Law and their history as a people. Chapter 8 tells of God's provision during the forty years of desert wandering and the blessings of the Promised Land they soon will enter. We must see that God's first impulse and greatest wish is to bless us. He creates and saves us, not to make minions for His bidding but to share the abundance of His love.

But Deuteronomy 8:14-17 both warn and foreshadow what may come. All of these blessings might lead the Israelites to forget the Source, and distort their perception of who they are. God gives gifts in spite of, not because of, our state of purity. Chapter 9 reminds the Israelites that their real danger came not from the enemies they faced in battle (9:3), but in their own hearts. Perhaps this is why Moses rehearsed one of their great failings, the Golden Calf.

Their disobedience here led God to declare that He wished to destroy the Israelites (9:14), but Moses interceded, appealing to the character of God and His faithfulness and mercy. For all the harsh language of chapters 8 and 9, God's mercy is the dominant theme. He seeks to save us from ourselves (8:3, 16). We need to be reoriented in our walk with Him.

APPLY THE WORD

The theme of God's mercy extends when Moses stated, "Then I took that sinful thing of yours ... and ground it to powder as fine as dust" (v. 21). Just as Christ was "crushed for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5), God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Suffering can be a call for us to repent, a call to realize that God loves us enough not to let us walk away. Let us heed this call "as long as it is called 'Today' so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Heb. 3:13).

Deuteronomy 8:6-20

Remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. - Deuteronomy 8:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his autobiography, the famous Bible translator J. B. Phillips wrote about a time when he felt he was on top of the world. “My work was intrinsically exciting. My health was excellent; my future prospects were rosier than my wildest dreams... I was well aware of the dangers of sudden wealth ... [but] I was not nearly so aware of the dangers of success. The subtle erosion of character, the unconscious changing of values and the secret monstrous growth of a vastly inflated idea of myself slowly seeped into me. Vaguely I was aware of this and I prayed, ‘Lord, make me humble--but not yet.’ ”

All of us can identify to some extent with what Phillips was saying. You don’t have to be a corporate CEO to know the intoxicating feeling you get when you’ve closed the big deal or won a promotion, or when everybody is shaking your hand and telling you what a great job you’re doing.

These things aren’t wrong. But as Phillips warns, success at any level can attack us in crucial places--such as our ego and value system. It can also give us spiritual amnesia, causing us to forget God. Paul asked the question, “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7). Answer: nothing.

Today’s verse holds the cure for the problem of forgetting. The Israelites were standing with their toes on the edge of the promised land when Moses issued his plea.

The Israelites had more than enough reasons to remember God and His goodness. Even though it had been about forty years since they had left slavery in Egypt, the memory of their bondage had to have been strong. Besides, they had just left a “vast and dreadful desert” (v. 15) where they experienced extreme hunger and thirst. It’s impossible to think you did it on your own when you see water gushing out of a rock and food falling from the sky.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Yesterday we listed three benefits of being diligent in our work. Today we need to consider three dangers of forgetting that God is the power and the source behind our ability to do what we do.

Deuteronomy 8:10-18.

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to the Small Business Administration, at least one part of the American dream is still coming true for a lot of people. An SBA report says that a new American millionaire is being created every twenty-two minutes. That’s about sixty-five new millionaires a day, representing a tremendous amount of wealth.

But while this report says being a millionaire is the “grand dream” of many Americans, it isn’t God’s primary goal for His people. As today’s text shows, money and finance are God’s idea, part of His creation. And He has definite rules as to how we should handle our financial resources.

We will spend this month pursuing a biblical view of money—what God wants and expects from us in this area. We will look at the topic from three perspectives, giving ten days to each. First, we will look at money from God’s point of view, emphasizing His primacy as the Creator and Owner of everything, including our wealth.

Then we’ll consider how finances affect our relationships with others, tackling themes such as honesty, generosity, paying our bills and taxes, using money wisely, and keeping our hearts free from the love of money. During the final ten days of September, we will talk about finances from the perspective of man to God, dealing with issues related to our giving.

Today’s verses are a great “stage setter” for our study because they lay down several foundational truths we will build on all month. In Deuteronomy, we see the Israelites poised to enter Canaan after decades in the wilderness. Their memories of the exodus had grown dim, and they needed to take “Theology 101” again. So God set out to remind them of His precepts.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Merely mentioning the “green stuff” usually provokes immediate and diverse reactions among Christians.

Deuteronomy 8:10-18

Remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. - Deuteronomy 8:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Like Jacob, his father-in-law Laban liked to manipulate and deceive (Genesis 29-31). While Jacob was an accomplished trickster and dealmaker himself, Laban beat him at his own game, first deceiving him into working fourteen years for the right to marry Rachel, then paying him “wages” of only the spotted and speckled sheep from his flocks. Nonetheless, God blessed Jacob with wealth and prosperity to such an extent that Laban and his family became jealous. Jacob gave full credit to the Lord for his success: “The God of my father has been with me ... God has taken away your father’s livestock and has given them to me” (Gen. 31:5, 9).

Giving credit to the Lord is one of the key principles of godly financial stewardship. After all, God is in charge of our financial destinies: “The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts” (1 Sam. 2:7). Or in the words of today’s verse: “It is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth” (v. 18).

The Mosaic covenant included God’s promise of blessing on obedience. The corresponding temptation, however, was that once the people had received blessings they would forget the Source and take the glory for themselves. The human tendency is to blame other people or circumstances for bad things, but to take full credit for good things! Moses, after presenting an appealing portrait of peace and prosperity, forcefully warned them of the temptation of pride (v. 14). By focusing on self, pride forgets who God is. The Israelites could not afford to forget the One who had freed them from slavery in Egypt, led them through the desert, provided for their needs, and would bring them to the Promised Land. When that day came, they would need to resist the inevitable temptation to pat themselves on the back (v. 17).

We, too, must acknowledge the Lord as the real Provider and the One who controls our financial situations. In light of this, we, too, should reject pride and focus instead on a response of praise (v. 10) and a habit of obedience (v. 11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As both wage earners and business people, we face the temptation to give ourselves credit for any success. We would do well to heed God’s words: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight” (Jer. 9:23-24).

Deuteronomy 9:1-10:11

They are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm. - Deuteronomy 9:29

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes of intercessory prayer: “Intercession means no more than to bring our brother into the presence of God, to see him under the Cross of Jesus as a poor human being and sinner in need of grace. Then everything in him that repels us falls away; we see him in all his destruction and need. His need and his sin become so heavy and oppressive that we feel them as our own, and we can do nothing else but pray: Lord, do Thou, Thou alone, deal with him according to Thy severity and Thy goodness. To make intercession means to grant our brother the same right that we have received, namely, to stand before Christ and share in His mercy.”

Moses was one of the great intercessors in biblical history (cf. Jer. 15:1). As we have already seen this month, Moses’ exhortations keep circling back to a few key themes: Obey God. Give Him glory. Trust in His faithfulness. He will fight for you, which means the battle is already won. Moses also repeated a few key errors the people should avoid: Don’t worship idols. Don’t take credit for the coming victory. Don’t think you’ve somehow earned this reward from God. This is not about Israel--it’s all about God!

Were the people likely to fall into these errors? Yes. Case in point: the golden calf at Sinai (Ex. 32). No sooner was the Law given than broken, and God was angry enough to destroy them. Moses interceded successfully, but the memory of this time still grieved him (Dt 9:24). Their rebelliousness should be a constant warning to them not to be under any illusions about their own “righteousness.” The message is clear, both to them and to us: Never underestimate human sinfulness!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In today’s reading, we see that Moses was a passionate intercessor. Israel had committed the abomination of idolatry, and God was ready to judge them, but Moses stepped in and pleaded successfully for his people.

Deuteronomy 9:1-10:11

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

John Steinbeck once observed that failure is often a catalyst for spiritual growth. “If everything is coming your way,” he wrote, “you

are probably in the wrong lane. Adversity and defeat are more conducive to spiritual growth than prosperity and victory." But what if the defeat we experience involves more than a setback in our circumstances? What if we have experienced defeat because of our own sin?

As Israel prepared to take possession of the land God had promised them, it was vital that they keep in mind their defeats as well as their victories. The Lord commanded, "Remember this and never forget how you provoked the Lord your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord" (Deut. 9:7). A healthy awareness of their past failures was intended to be a remedy against spiritual presumption. More importantly, it would bring to mind how God had been faithful to discipline and forgive them.

The Bible is filled with stories of people whose mistakes and failures were redeemed by God. Some—like Jacob the deceiver, Judah the father of an illegitimate child, David the adulterer, and Rahab the prostitute—even appear in the lineage of Jesus (Matt. 1:2–5). Peter denied Jesus three times, and Thomas questioned whether Jesus had truly risen from the dead. Paul persecuted the church. All of these were used by God despite their past failings.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Why not take Paul's advice and do some "spiritual calculating?" Think of three or four instances where you acted contrary to God's commands. What were some of the consequences you suffered as a result? How did your sin affect those around you? Think also about the lessons God taught you as a result of these experiences. Conclude by reading 1 John 1:9. If you have never claimed God's promise of forgiveness through Christ, do so today. Thank Him for His promise to cleanse you from "all unrighteousness."

Deuteronomy 9:1-7

Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. - Deuteronomy 4:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

In our limited thinking, we may wonder why God would choose one nation, Israel, to specifically reveal Himself. What about all the other nations that weren't chosen? How can that be fair? Maybe we think about times when we weren't chosen for something and conclude that choosing one and not others is inherently unfair. But this is to focus on only half the process. Yes, it's true that Israel was chosen from all the nations, but (and this is key!) Israel was chosen to be a blessing to all the nations.

In Exodus 19:5-6, God said to Israel, "You will be my treasured possession ... you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." From the beginning, God intended the nation to minister to the surrounding nations (a kingdom of priests) and to demonstrate the ways of God to them (a holy nation).

Deuteronomy 9 makes it clear that Israel wasn't chosen because of its own righteousness, but rather because of the wickedness of the surrounding nations. Here then are two reasons for the Conquest: first, God's promise to Abraham; and second, the wickedness of the nations (v. 5). Because Israel was to be a witness, it had to be holy. But the sad truth is that the Israelites had been stubborn and sinful from the time they left Egypt (v. 7). The rest of this passage refers to the incident involving the golden calf, which is also recorded in Exodus 32.

While Moses was still on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, the waiting Israelites began to worship a pagan idol that they themselves had made (Ex. 32:4). After all the Lord had done for them, no wonder His anger burned against them (v. 9).

Notice carefully the reasons that Moses gives as he intercedes for God to spare the people. First, the Lord's reputation will be damaged among the Egyptians (v. 12), who will ascribe evil motives to the holy God. Second, God made a promise to Abraham and his descendants. Moses knew that God could never go back on His word, so this appeal is really an affirmation of the Lord's faithfulness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Just as Israel was called from the nations to minister to the nations, so too we as Christians are called from the people around us to minister to these very people. We must remember that it wasn't because we were so good or so talented that God saved us, but because of His great love and His glorious redemptive purposes.

This should motivate us to share our faith with others. If God has placed someone in your life who needs Christ, pray that you will have an opportunity to minister to that one today.

Deuteronomy 9:5

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

IT is well to be reminded that we have no claim on God. All He does for us and gives us is of His own free grace. By grace have we been saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves--it is the gift of God. There certainly was nothing in us to merit eternal life, before our conversion; and it is equally sure that there has been nothing since to merit the continuance of His favor. Indeed, as we remember and review the past, to us belong shame and confusion of face for our repeated acts of disobedience. Oh the depth of the riches of His grace!

If we were not saved for our goodness, we shall not be lost for the lack of it.--When we have been betrayed into sin, in the keenness of our remorse, the fear is suggested lest God should put us utterly away. And there would be ground for the fear if we had been chosen because of our righteousness.

But since our original acceptance with God did not depend on works of righteousness which we had done, but on His mercy in Jesus Christ, it will not be undone by our failures. This thought does not lead to carelessness and indifference, but to a holy fear of sinning.

If our justification was apart from our merit, our sanctification will be.--The one was a gift, so must the other be; the hand of faith must receive each from Christ, and her voice must render thanks for each, as the unmerited gift of Divine Love. Where is boasting, then? It is shut out. We can claim nothing but emptiness and need. Handfuls of withered leaves! The Lord Jesus is our only hope, pleading for us in heaven, and living within our hearts. Of ourselves we are nothing: only in Him are we complete.

Deuteronomy 9:7-29

I lay prostrate before the Lord those forty days and forty nights. - Deuteronomy 9:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

Early in the Exodus, the people of Israel camped near Mt. Sinai. While the nation waited, Moses climbed up the mountain to meet with God and receive the Law. He was gone forty days and forty nights.

Down below, the people grew impatient. They wondered if Moses would ever come back. Aaron gave in to their pressure, collected some gold, and made a calf for them to worship. "You'd better get back," God told Moses. "They're cheating on me already. I've a mind to wipe out the entire faithless bunch!"

Moses went down and caught Israel red-handed in idolatry, then went back up Mt. Sinai to plead before God for the lives of the people (Ex. 32).

In today's reading, he recounted this episode to Israel so that they'd learn from their history. We can also learn here about interceding for the forgiveness of others. What does it mean to intercede? It does not mean to repent for others--which isn't possible--but to implore God's mercy to hold off on judgment and bring them to repentance. On this basis, we can pray for our nation, family members, friends, and others.

Moses' intercession had all the elements of a confession. He admitted Israel's sin and recognized God's justice. His words showed an understanding of sin's heinousness before the Lord. The forty days and nights he fasted and prayed reflect great spiritual intensity. He also knew that forgiveness could precede repentance--that is, that his prayer could be answered before the nation had repented (cf. Num. 14:20; Jer. 33:6-9).

Moses demonstrated extreme love for the people, even to the point of being willing to trade places with them (Ex. 32:32). God had offered to make a mighty nation out of him alone, highlighting that he had nothing to gain by praying for Israel's forgiveness (v. 14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Moses, like Jesus, was probably sustained supernaturally during his amazing forty-day fast, but fasting has traditionally been associated with intense prayer and repentance. If this kind of prayer or confession is something you plan to do soon--perhaps for "Today Along the Way" for October 13--consider making fasting a part of it. The length and nature of the fast are up to you. When Bible characters fasted, it showed sincerity and passion of prayer as well as self-denial and focus upon God. Let it mean the same for you.

Deuteronomy 10:12-11:32

Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. - Deuteronomy 10:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Martin Luther once commented: "As it is now, people go to hear a sermon and leave again unchanged. They act like a sermon is only worth the time that it takes to hear it. No one thinks about learning anything from it or remembering it. Some people listen to sermons for three or four years and still don't learn enough to respond to a single question about faith. More than enough has been written in books, but not nearly enough has been driven into our hearts."

Luther was saying much the same thing as Moses in today's verse: circumcise your hearts! Our reading today captures the greatness of God and of Israel's calling as the people of God. He is the supreme Ruler of the entire universe, yet He'd specially chosen Israel: "The Lord set His affection on your forefathers and loved them... He is your praise; He is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders" (Dt 10:15, 21).

Therefore, because of God's greatness and choice, the people were to circumcise their hearts (10:16). Circumcision was a physical sign of the covenant; as a metaphor, it also signifies submission and consecration. Moses might have said: "Stop being rebellious! Cease and desist! Instead, behave like the people of God you are! Bow to His rightful authority and pursue holiness." That's a daunting assignment, for it means no less than to be like God (cf. Matt. 5:48). God is just, fair, and holy; He defends the victimized and loves the stranger. How could they reach such lofty goals? "Fear the Lord your God and serve Him. Hold fast to Him and take your oaths in His name" (Dt 10:20; cf. Deuteronomy 30:6). Hold fast, or cling (NASB), is a powerful verb to describe trust and intimacy--it's the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 2:24 to describe marriage.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you tied God's words on your hand or bound them to your forehead? Have you fixed them in your heart and mind (11:18)?

Deuteronomy 10:12-22; 24:10-22

The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them. - Hosea 14:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

While speaking to a group of business school students at a prominent American university, a retired executive described that there is no such thing as business ethics. Rather, he continued, there are simply ethical people in business. The successful businessman explained how following Jesus had transformed his relationships with others in all aspects of his life, including business. In our passage today, justice in one's business and personal life reflects a right relationship with God.

Deuteronomy 10:12-22 is Moses' passionate plea that the Israelites would wholeheartedly love and obey God. Moses reminds the people that God is the sovereign creator who forged a special relationship with them. To "walk in all his ways" is not primarily about compulsion. It is about a loving response to God in the context of their covenant relationship with Him (vv. 12-13). God's people are called to "circumcise" their hearts, to renounce hardheartedness in exchange for hearts that reflect His love, mercy, and forgiveness (vv. 16-22). Once again, God's love for the disadvantaged in society is highlighted (vv. 18-19). Moses reminds them that they know what it is like to be a foreigner in Egypt, and they know what it is like to experience the Lord's salvation and protection. Therefore, love those who are "aliens" among you, sojourners, immigrants, and refugees.

Deuteronomy 24:10-22 describes specific ways in which God's people are instructed to emulate His love for vulnerable people in the community. The passage is concerned with the poor who need loans and live paycheck to paycheck hoping to stay afloat (vv. 10-15). It also considers the refugee, immigrant, orphan, and widow who have no social safety net to rely upon for provision and protection (vv. 17-22). The instructions to care for these people reflect God's patience, compassion, and generosity, and they preserve people's dignity and prevent exploitation. Caring for the poor and weak is pleasing in God's sight and embodies what it means to be "righteous" (v. 13). In fact, neglecting this kind of care is called sin in verse 15.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

From a worldly perspective, the behavior advocated in today's reading is risky and even laughable. Walking in God's ways requires trust and cultivating a generous, compassionate heart like His. Let the Holy Spirit search your heart and expose any fears you may have that keep you from living justly in your business and personal life. Renounce whatever prevents you from recognizing God as faithful and trustworthy (10:16-17). Ask God to reveal specific ways you can reflect His love, mercy, and forgiveness to vulnerable people.

Deuteronomy 10:12-11:32

I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. - 1 Corinthians 7:35

TODAY IN THE WORD

Everyone likes good food, but many of us don't equate that with food that is "good for you." When parents set limitations on how much ice cream their children eat, they may try to help them understand by saying: "It's for your own good." But that rarely makes the child feel good about broccoli! We might feel skeptical, then, when we read that God used this reasoning to explain why He gave decrees and commands to Israel. We may have a nagging suspicion that, although these laws may be good for us, we definitely won't enjoy them.

Perhaps that is why the Lord went on to remind Israel of His motives for giving His law. It wasn't because He wanted to make their lives miserable. He was motivated by love and by a desire to bless His people. These commands would help Israel to know Him better and would give them an opportunity to return His love. They would also provide a safeguard against the moral and spiritual dangers that were inherent in the culture of their day.

According to Josh McDowell, all the moral precepts found in Scripture have this dual aim—to provide us with a better understanding of who God is and to protect us from the consequences of sin. In his book *Right From Wrong* he explains, "The commandments and precepts of Scripture are designed not only to say, 'Do this,' and 'Don't do that,' but to lead us beyond the precept to a universal principle (one that applies to everyone) and, ultimately, to the God who expresses Himself through precept."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Our obedience to God's commands should be motivated by our knowledge that they are "for our own good" and should be energized by our personal experience of God's redemptive love. Is there a command in Scripture that you find especially difficult to accept today? Prayerfully examine it to learn what it reveals about God's love for you. It may be designed to pave the way for future blessing, or it could be intended to protect you from harm. Ask the Holy Spirit for His power as you seek to obey.

Deuteronomy 10:14-20 James 2:1-4;

You are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. - Deuteronomy 10:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

As debates about higher education in America have intensified, from the rising cost of tuition to affirmative action to relevance for jobs, admissions committees at colleges and universities have faced greater scrutiny. Several elite universities have admitted that they give preferential treatment to applicants from wealthy families for two reasons—not only can their parents afford to pay the entire tuition bill, but they also might be courted as major donors to the university.

In our passage today, James makes clear that this type of preferential treatment should never exist in the church. If we are to live wisely and please God, we cannot be characterized by discrimination on the basis of wealth.

It may appear from the chapter break that James is changing topics, but actually he is continuing his themes from chapter one: submitting ourselves to God's desires is the path to life and blessing. We've already looked at his examples of anger and our tongues; now we see another instance of how we should be controlled by God's desire—the way that we treat both rich and poor people.

At first glance, James's instruction may seem rather easy to follow. But when we are honest about our natural tendencies and preferences, we must admit that it is easier to go to church with people who look like us and who won't embarrass our sensibilities. Besides, those who come with greater resources can support the church financially, while those who are poor will probably require more assistance.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Many American churches appear to be clusters of "sameness"—same race, same socioeconomic status, even same age. If this happens because the churches aren't welcoming others who are different, it's violates God's wisdom.

Deut 10:18

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

IN the gate of the Eastern town, at early morn, the judge sits, and any suppliant has a right to appeal to him. The word *Porte*, or *Gate*, as applied to the Turkish Government, alludes to this. So to the thought of the inspired writers, behind the flimsy veil of sense, God sat within the shadow, "keeping watch upon His own," waiting to answer every plea, and to avenge the innocent and oppressed against high-handed wrong.

Individuals may appeal to that tribunal.--David, Jeremiah, and other sufferers, lodged their complaints there. Their cry was not for revenge, but for avengement. There is a great difference between the two. The one is vindictive and retaliatory; the other is magisterial and passionless.

Whenever an affront or wrong is inflicted on thee, avoid vindicating, or answering for thyself. Be still toward man, unless it be to induce thy brother to repent; but turn instantly to thy righteous Judge, asking Him to right the wrong and vindicate the right. He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. When Christians go to law, and seek to maintain their cause against wrongdoing, they miss this. The weaker you are, the more certainly will the Lord judge for you.

The Church may appeal.--Our Lord depicted her as a widow pleading to be avenged of her adversary. Her martyrs cry from under the altar, "How long, O Master, holy and true? Dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood?" To us the delay is long; but we know that He has no complicity with evil, and that He is faithful. Give us the white robe, that we may wait!

Deuteronomy 11:8-12; Hosea 9:1-9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Two small children are playing on the floor, each with plenty of toys. Suddenly, Junior decides he doesn't like what he has and wants the toy his sister is playing with. So he proceeds to confiscate it, and a struggle ensues. After the dust settles, his sister loses interest in the toy and discards it. Interestingly, the toy is now Junior's, but he doesn't want it any more. Every parent has witnessed a scene like this at one time or another.

This is a rough analogy of Israel's attitude toward God's abundant blessings. He had blessed the nation with material and spiritual gifts beyond what any other nation had ever enjoyed. In fulfillment of God's covenant promises, the fertile land produced an abundant harvest (Deut. 8:7-9).

But Israel was not content to worship God for these blessings. The people looked at the pagan nations around them and decided they liked the idols these nations worshiped. So instead of serving God, the Israelites bowed down to Baal, the Canaanite fertility god. They then attributed their abundance to him and implored him for continued fruitfulness.

God had no choice but to punish such arrogant faithlessness. And as we have seen throughout the book of Hosea, God's judgment was perfectly appropriate to Israel's sin. If the people wanted to defile themselves by worshiping unclean idols, God would see to it that they would eat unclean food during their captivity in Assyria (Hos. 9:3).

Moreover, while in exile Israel would not be able to offer the sacrifices to God prescribed by the Mosaic covenant, and her great feast days would pass unobserved. Once more, God matched His chastening to Israel's sins. They had treated His blessings as nothing and discarded Him. So they would waste away in a foreign land while their possessions and homes back in Israel became overgrown with briars and thorns (v. 6).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's verse offers us an antidote to the snares of pride, lust, and greed that trapped ancient Israel. In fact, we recommend that you take an extra five minutes today to read the 25th Psalm.

Deut 11:22-23

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

WE wonder why the Lord does not drive out and subdue our besetting sins. We do not possess them, but they us. The explanation is to be found in our lack of consecration. We do not keep all His commandments, or walk in all His ways.

God cannot deliver us from besetting sin unless we yield ourselves to Him entirely.--It is only when He is Judge, Lawgiver, and King, that He can save us. The great surgeon will not undertake a case unless he have its entire management. The general cannot protect a town until it has passed over its government entirely into his hands. If you would give yourself utterly and unreservedly to God, you would find how strong He is for those whose heart is perfect toward Him.

Unless we obey all His commandments;--because they contain His precise direction as to what we should, or should not do. If you want your medical man to heal you, you must abstain from things he forbids, and do those he prescribes. You cannot expect God to save you unless you utterly and reverently obey all His commandments; that, for instance of not having fellowship with the world and its ways.

Unless we cleave unto Him.--There must be the daily walk with God, the abiding in Him, the holy and unbroken communion. "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word, in him truly is the love of God perfected." "He that abideth in Him sinneth not." The anointing of the Holy Spirit will teach us this sacred habit (1John 2:27). But entire consecration must precede entire deliverance.

Deuteronomy 11:26-27

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last summer, more than thirty years after his heroism, a former army helicopter pilot was awarded America's highest aviation medal. Walter Schramm was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross at a U.S. Army base in Germany in recognition of his actions on November 14, 1965, during the first major U.S. battle of the Vietnam War. Schramm's case, the delay was due to an oversight. God sometimes takes time to settle His accounts too, but the delay isn't due to any oversight on His part. He has sovereign reasons for the way He deals with us.

Deuteronomy 12:1-32

You and your families shall eat and shall rejoice ... because the Lord your God has blessed you. - Deuteronomy 12:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

Today, when we think of the worship center of Israel, we think of Jerusalem. But for four hundred years, it was Shiloh. Centrally located in the hill country of Palestine, Shiloh hosted the Tabernacle from Joshua until Samuel (Josh 18:1; 1Sa 4). At that time, God's judgment on the house of Eli was fulfilled and his family was wiped out. The Philistines captured the Ark in battle, and also apparently burned the city. Shiloh was never again the national worship center. In fact, the place became a warning of what happens when God's commands are ignored (Ps. 78:56-64; Jer 7:12, 13, 14).

The reasons for Shiloh's tragedy are found in today's reading, even before it was chosen as Israel's center of worship. To honor God's name, worship must be done on His terms. Purity is paramount; idolatry and selfishness bring condemnation. Beginning with today's reading, we'll see more specific provisions of God's covenant with Israel. Moses will continue to repeat major themes, but now Deuteronomy will dig into particular issues and individual requirements of the covenant.

One question was: Where would the Tabernacle and Ark reside? These precious items were traveling together with the people. But once the Israelites had conquered and settled the land, where should national worship take place? What would be the best place for the Tabernacle and Ark--the center of their spiritual life? God Himself promised to choose a place.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Many times in Deuteronomy, Moses instructed the Israelites to celebrate before the Lord, to come into His presence with rejoicing. This is worship.

Deuteronomy 12:1-32

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. - Romans 10:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Differences over worship style are the basis for many church conflicts today. In most instances people disagree over music. Although these conflicts are never desirable, they can have the benefit of forcing us to ask some fundamental questions about worship. What is God looking for? Does He accept all forms of worship? Or does He want us to worship Him in a specific way?

As far as worship under the Law of Moses was concerned, God was indeed looking for a particular "style" of worship. The Law of Moses described how Israel was to worship in great detail, specifying when, where, and how God's people were to approach Him. It even regulated the kind of clothing that priests were to wear when they approached the altar! The Lord also warned His people not to adopt the religious practices of the nations they were about to displace as they took possession of the land of promise. In fact, they were commanded to take extreme measures to ensure that the idolatrous worship of those people didn't spread.

These commands raise an inevitable question. Is God as specific when it comes to the church's worship? The answer is "yes"--but with a significant difference. The commands given to Israel dealt primarily with methods and rituals. The church, on the other hand, is to approach God in worship through the person of Jesus Christ. All that the Old Testament law specified merely anticipated what Christ would accomplish by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. As important as the Law was, it could not do for the worshiper what Jesus Christ would eventually do: "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw

near to worship" (Heb. 10:1).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Is it possible that our many conflicts about worship style have caused us to lose sight of the real focus of our worship? Jesus told the woman of Samaria that God is seeking a certain kind of worshiper.

Deuteronomy 12:7, 12, 18

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THE presence of God is an incentive to true joy. We rejoice before Him. There is some mistake in our religious life when it is not a joy to us to stand in the presence of God. He that feareth, and rejoiceth not, is not made perfect in love. Note the elements of true joy.

First. The putting away of all known evil.--"Ye shall surely destroy." The permission of evil habits, books, companionships, and unlawful methods of obtaining money, are destructive of peace and joy. The prodigal son went away for merriment; but he only found real joy when he had given up his evil ways and returned to his father, a true penitent, and resolving upon a better life.

Second. The sense of acceptance with God through Jesus Christ.--"Unto the place which the Lord shall choose shall ye come." This refers, of course, to the brazen altar and the altar of incense. We have a better heritage in the finished work of Jesus, whose blood is more precious than that of bulls and goats and lambs, and in whom we are accepted and beloved.

Third. Feeding an Christ.--"Ye shall eat and rejoice." A part of the meal-offerings and other sacrifices was reserved for the worshippers. We have an altar of which we, too, eat. His flesh is meat indeed; His blood drink indeed.

Fourth. Entrance on the rest of our Inheritance.--We which believe do enter into rest; not the rest of heaven, but the heavenly places which those enjoy who have learned to cast every load of anxious care on the great Burden-bearer. ' , There remaineth a Sabbath rest for the people of God. Let us give diligence to enter into that rest" (Heb. 4:9, 10, 11-note).

Deuteronomy 13:1-18

It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him. - Deuteronomy 13:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

When doctors find cancerous cells in their patients, they have only one goal: kill the cancer! By whatever means possible, cancer must be removed from the body. If this can be done, the patient might go on to live a long, normal life. So doctors attack the disease with all the resources they possess: surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy. These are strong remedies, and in themselves can have serious consequences and cause great suffering. Then why use them? Because the disease would do worse. The cancer must be completely eradicated.

It was in this same spirit that Moses cried, "You must purge the evil from among you" (Dt 13:5; cf. 1Co 5:13). The spiritual disease of idolatry could cripple or kill the nation--it must be annihilated.

Purity in worship is serious business. Evil was to be eliminated from the national life of Israel. False prophets were to be executed. Anyone who tried to drag the people away from the Lord was to be dealt with ruthlessly. God even warned them to be ready for tests in this area (v. 3). Israel needed to learn that worship is the highest priority--higher than friends, family, and even marriage. If a loved one was an idolator, they were to "show him no pity" (Dt 13:8; cf. Luke 14:26). Compromise in this area would be spiritually fatal. How would they know such a person? A false prophet or idolator would ignore what God had done in history, lead them into disobedience to His Word, and fail to acknowledge His supremacy. The central test--even against the experience of a prophesied event coming true--was who the object of worship was. If it was anyone other than the Lord, that person was to be stoned by the community. Everyone was to take part in enforcing justice and restoring righteousness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Here's a question for self-examination today: Are there any idols displacing God in your life? Don't be too quick to answer "no." This is serious business. Examine your heart and your actions. What do you spend your time thinking about and on what do you spend your energy? Do these things show that you're following God wholeheartedly, without compromise? Or do they suggest that God is more of a back-burner presence than you thought? Pray over these difficult and crucial questions.

Deuteronomy 13:1-18

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. - Acts 4:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Coins in the United States have the phrase "In God We Trust" stamped upon them. But to which God does this refer? It is true that many who framed the Constitution shared common values shaped by their Judeo-Christian heritage, but the American religious scene is now far more pluralistic than it was when the United States was founded. While many still acknowledge Jesus Christ as God's Son and believe that the Bible is the Word of God, Christians must compete in the marketplace of ideas along with Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and countless other religious views. The United States is one of the most religiously diverse countries on earth.

This tradition of religious pluralism offers at least one advantage. It has allowed the church to worship and proclaim the gospel in freedom. But it also poses a danger. Because we live in a culture that celebrates religious diversity, we face the temptation of becoming religious pluralists ourselves. With so many views existing side by side, how do we protect ourselves from embracing false views of God?

The children of Israel were confronted with a similar problem. Moses warned that once they settled in the land God had promised to give them, their faith would be constantly challenged by the pagan beliefs of the surrounding nations. False prophets would come claiming to have special insights directly from God and demonstrating the ability to perform miraculous signs. Friends and relatives could be deceived by their teaching and might tempt others to adopt the same views. Entire towns might be drawn into false worship.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In order to "guard the good deposit" of truth that has been entrusted to us, we must first know the truth. Obtain a copy of your church's doctrinal statement from your pastor or a church leader and study it. What does it tell you about the truths your church believes are essential to the Christian faith? What does it say about Jesus Christ and His work? The Moody Publishers catalog has many books about Christian doctrine, such as Basic Theology by Charles Ryrie and Foundational Faith edited by John Koessler.

Deuteronomy 13:3

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

HOW much happens to us for this reason! God proves us--not that He may learn aught of us which He did not know before, but that He may reveal us to ourselves. We need to know ourselves, that we may be prompted to know and use His infinite resources, and that, in the great consciousness of our frailty and weakness, we may be led to avail ourselves of His grace.

God proves us by opportunities of Christian service.--We think we are fitted for some great sphere, and chafe because it is withheld: but the reason is not far to seek. We have been tested in some very little service, as a class in the Sunday-school, and have been found careless and unpunctual; is it likely that we shall be entrusted with the greater?

God proves us by the money with which He entrusts us.--Money resembles the counters with which children play. It greatly tests us. It is described as the unrighteous mammon, and as not being our true riches; but it is entrusted to us that we may be proved, before God entrusts us with the real treasures of His Kingdom. Be wary how you use money; on this may turn the responsibilities of the eternal world of which we now know nothing.

God proves us by our actions with regard to doubtful things.--Not in the things which are clearly right or wrong, but in those which lie in the debatable ground of the twilight, is our true character tested. What you are in matters which must be viewed in relation to others is all-important, as the true gauge of character. By currents of opinion, by winds of doctrine, and by the many voices that are speaking in the world, the Lord your God proveth you.

Deuteronomy 14:1-21

You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean. - Leviticus 10:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

One day, the Pharisees and teachers of the law spotted Jesus' disciples eating with ceremonially unclean hands. Immediately, they pounced, accusing them (and by implication, Jesus) of disregard for the Law. In response, Jesus put things into perspective and condemned the leaders' hypocrisy. He explained to the crowd that, spiritually speaking, "clean" and "unclean" are not about external factors-- these are the issues of the heart. They're not about human traditions or lists of dos and don'ts. What makes a man "unclean" is not what he eats, but his sinful desires (Mark 7:1-23).

In that case, what's the significance of today's reading? The key ideas behind the Law's classification of some foods as "clean" and others as "unclean" are identity and purity. God gave Israel instructions which would set them apart as His holy people (Dt 14:1, 21).

Certain prohibitions in this chapter were to keep Israel from idolatry. Cutting and shaving, for instance, were customs associated with pagan funeral rites (Dt 14:1). Other rules related to keeping other provisions in the Law. Not eating an already dead animal, for example, would keep people from eating blood, which was forbidden.

Making a distinction between "clean" and "unclean" foods dates at least as far back as Noah (Ge 7:2), though the reasons for these restrictions remain mysterious. Some commentators hold that the prohibitions reflect health or hygiene concerns, and others that the forbidden animals were used as symbols or sacrifices in pagan religions. Neither claim has been shown to be true across the board. Rather than seeking a pragmatic explanation, it's best to view the Israelite diet as one more way prescribed by God to set His people apart and to testify to the world of their special relationship with Him (cf. Lev. 11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The Pentateuch's teachings on "clean" and "unclean" were rooted in the identity of Israel. Since the nation had been chosen by God, there were certain things that were appropriate or not appropriate for them to be and to do.

Deuteronomy 14:1-29

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. - 1 Corinthians 10:31

TODAY IN THE WORD

The story has been told about a little boy who refused to eat prunes when they were served to him. The boy's mother sent him to his room with a shake of her finger and the admonition, "God is angry at you!" A thunderstorm broke out while the boy was serving his punishment. As the storm raged, the mother began to feel a little remorse for being so stern with her son. Thinking that the crashing thunder and flashing lightning might have frightened him, she decided to open the door and peek into his room. When she did, the mother saw the boy standing at the window. As he contemplated the fury of the storm he muttered to himself, "What a big deal to make over a few prunes!"

We may be tempted to draw a similar conclusion after reading today's passage. The dietary laws described in the Law of Moses seem strange, if not a little petty, to us. Why should God care if His people ate animals with a split hoof or not? Was it really so important to their spiritual life that the seafood they ate had fins and scales on it?

These laws served three important purposes. First, many of them had a basis in health concerns. The prohibition against eating pork, for example, was wise in a culture where eating poorly cooked pork could be deadly. Second, many of these dietary laws made the difference between holy and unholy living more vivid to God's people by declaring as unclean many animals to which Hebrew culture had a natural aversion.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Read 1 Corinthians 10:23–33. Like the Corinthians, our questions about what constitutes godly living sometimes concern matters not explicitly addressed in Scripture. In such cases the path of holiness is more difficult than simply examining the shape of an animal's hoof. The Corinthian believers were not bound by the dietary regulations of the Law of Moses, yet food became a "spiritual" issue in their congregational life. Can you think of similar matters that affect the life of your congregation? What does it mean for you to live as a child of God in such circumstances?

Deuteronomy 14:22-15:23

Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then ... the Lord your God will bless you in all your work. - Deuteronomy 15:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last summer, the Barna Research Group reported that giving to churches, religious organizations, and nonprofit organizations has dropped significantly in recent times. Fewer Americans give, and those who do, give less money--between 1998 and 2000, average annual per capita giving fell by more than a third. While many churches teach tithing, and many people claim to do so, only about six percent of Americans actually tithe, including just 12 percent of born-again Christians.

In view of these facts, it's worth looking into the godly stewardship and generosity in today's reading. Moses here reviewed the Law's instructions concerning money, debt, ownership, and material goods.

The Israelites gave to the Lord their firstborn animals and a tithe from all their harvests. Some of the tithe might be eaten at a celebratory worship feast, some might go to support the Levites, and some might be allocated to the poor. The tithe concept is an old one, first seen in Scripture when Abram tithed to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20). Since a tithe was regarded as the king's portion, giving helped teach the Israelites to revere the Lord as their King.

Every seven years, the people were to forgive loans made to their fellow Israelites. This national debt cancellation probably served to equalize the distribution of wealth, and to give a break to people struggling financially. To obey God wholeheartedly in this area demonstrated faith in Him to provide and bless (Dt 15:9, 10), in contrast to, for example, the rich man in Jesus' parable who trusted in his full storehouses (Luke 12:16-21).

The Israelites were likewise to offer freedom to slaves (and give them bonus pay!) after seven years, remembering that they themselves had been slaves in Egypt. They were also commanded not to plow their fields in the seventh year, giving the land a Sabbath to honor their Creator and to show trust in His generous provision.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today, we suggest that you review your most recent budget decisions, or the general ways in which you handle your finances. In keeping with today's reading, do they reflect generosity, wisdom, and faith in God as your Provider? Do you give the "firstfruits" of your paycheck to the Lord, or do you wait to see how much is left after your expenses are met? Do you give Him the "king's share" in acknowledgment that all you have comes from Him?

Deuteronomy 14:22-29

Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice. - Deuteronomy 14:26

TODAY IN THE WORD

For some of the best food in America, just head for ... a Navy submarine? That's right. Because submarine duty is one of the most demanding assignments in the military, professionally trained Navy chefs serve such delicacies as steak, prime rib, stuffed lobster tails, and fresh-baked bread in generous portions to the sailors. On one submarine known for its chicken dishes, a week's menu once included Sichuan chicken, Jamaican chicken, chicken cordeon bleu, savory baked chicken, chicken cacciatore, Southern fried chicken, and chicken noodle soup.

Sounds like a five-star underwater feast! Feasting before the Lord was a key element in the leisure-and-worship life of Israel. In today's reading, we see in action the principles mentioned yesterday--rest, worship, and celebration. The physical pleasures of good food and drink, the combination of happiness and order, and the freedom and spiritual blessing of being in God's presence fuse together into a beautiful picture of community pleasure.

This special covenant meal took place in the context of tithing, and so was an acknowledgment that our well-being and all that we have ultimately belongs to the Lord (v. 23). As God's ministers, the Levites received the bulk of the tithe for their daily needs, but first the whole nation was to have a feast with it. The poor were also to be provided for, showing that a spirit of compassion is exactly in line with godly holidays. What a contrast this was to comparable Canaanite events where feasting would be accompanied by sexual immorality and drunkenness.

Celebration was such an essential part of this regulation that it included a "Plan B." If the distance was too far, the worshipers could buy the feast fixings, "anything you wish," and organize the worship meal somewhere else. The point was to eat together and rejoice in the Lord's presence (v. 26).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Why not organize your own "festival" to the Lord? Plan a special meal for your family or small group which includes rest, food, fellowship, and worship--a "celebration dinner" along lines similar to those in today's passage. Scripture readings, spontaneous testimonies, or candlelight prayers might help add the worship dimension. If a meal sounds like too much work, make it a potluck or go to a restaurant.

Deuteronomy 14:24

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

GOD'S pitifulness is very manifest here. If the pious Jew found it impossible to transport all his tithes in kind, he might change them into money, and bind it in his hand. It was for from God's thought that His service should become irksome, or the soul faint in

performing it. An alleviation was suggested, of which the worshipper might take advantage, if he would. This principle may be applied in several directions. We are not to make God's service a toil, but esteem it a delight. "Thou shalt rejoice, and thine household."

The Lord's Day should be the gladdest of the week; full of love and joy and holy song. We should carefully guard against anything approaching to slavish observance: and be very careful that our children and servants should look forward to it with delight.

Christian work should not be carried to the point of exhaustion. There is a mistake somewhere if it so breaks down the health and spirits that the worker is not able to carry it. At such a time, we need to avail ourselves of any assistance or alleviation that may be possible.

Acts of devotion, also, should be for our enjoyment and refreshment. It seems sometimes as though God's children relied more on length than strength, in their prayers. They are not at ease or natural in the Father's presence. The forms of their devotion are so numerous and prolonged. that they are not able to carry them. By all means maintain the salutary form, but not for form's sake. Let the joy of the Lord, taking pleasure in His presence and in communion with Him, be always the first thought.

Deuteronomy 15:1-23

As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. - Galatians 6:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

It must have seemed like a dream come true when the members of St. Mary's United Methodist Church learned that one of the residents in their community had remembered the church in his will.

The amount was staggering—\$60 million. The will made no stipulations as to how the money was to be used, so the congregation formulated an advisory board to help them decide. Once word got out, the church's phone began to ring off the wall with calls requesting financial aid. What seemed like an unmixed blessing now proved to be a challenge as the church struggled to maintain a proper focus despite its new-found wealth.

George MacDonald once observed that the rich are not the only ones in danger of being dominated by things. "They too are slaves who, having no money, are unhappy from the lack of it," he observed. Interestingly, money and slavery are both the focus of today's passage. Both were linked in the culture of ancient Israel. Deuteronomy 15 describes how every seven years Israel was to cancel all debts and free those who sold themselves into slavery to escape poverty. During this Sabbath year the people were also required to let the ground lie fallow. The land certainly benefited from this practice, but it was primarily God's way of providing for the poor (Ex. 23:10–11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you have a plan for providing for the needs of the poor? If you lack the financial resources to do this, why not consider offering some of your time and effort instead? Ask your pastor whether there is a food pantry located in your community. It may need volunteers to help distribute food to the needy. If you live near an urban area, there is probably a rescue mission or homeless shelter that would be happy to have you help serve a meal to its residents.

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land. - Deuteronomy 15:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

Writer Clint Kelly recounts the story of Una Goble, who was a neighbor of the great author and scholar C. S. Lewis. Mrs. Goble tells of going with a group of carolers to Lewis's home one Christmas, hoping he would make a donation to the charity they were representing. Lewis did make a generous contribution, and also invited the carolers in from the cold for hot refreshments.

C. S. Lewis is a great example of the openhanded generosity God wants from His children. God even built the principle of generosity toward people in need into the law of Moses. But there was no group of officials who went around checking on how well each Israelite was obeying the law. True generosity has to begin in the heart.

This is not a lesson on the ministry of giving, but generosity has an important relationship to our work. We're talking about God's purposes for work (see the August 1 outline), one of which is to give us extra resources we can share with those who are hurting.

The connection between how we treat others and how well we do in our work is made explicit by the promise of verse 10. Some people may want to take this promise and push it to the extreme, turning it into an ironclad method for getting more from God.

But this is not only a poor interpretation of Scripture, it violates the spirit of the principle God was teaching Israel (tomorrow we'll examine the same basic principle in the New Testament). The point here is giving, not getting. The person who is looking to get more isn't likely to have the kind of giving spirit God is eager to bless.

God was so committed to His people's generosity that He took into account the law which required debts to be forgiven every seven years. No one could use the seventh year as an excuse not to give, for fear of not getting anything back. Jesus taught the same principle when He told us to give without worrying about a return (Luke 6:30, 36).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

For most Christians, the main way we touch the lives of people in need is through our giving to God's work around the world.

Deuteronomy 15:8; Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37

Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. - Deuteronomy 15:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Christian "intentional communities" have sprung up in cities all across the United States in recent years. One of the best-known, Jesus People USA in Chicago, has been in existence since 1972; other intentional communities have formed in places as diverse as Philadelphia, Tampa, Durham, and San Francisco. These Christians are characterized by sharing property, living simply, worshiping together, and ministering in challenging neighborhoods. They strive to embody the description of the church in our reading.

Approximately 120 believers gathered in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:15). By the Spirit's power after Pentecost, another 3,000 decided to follow the resurrected Christ (2:41). This miraculous conversion of new believers is followed by an equally incredible description of their life together (2:42-47).

Verse 42 explains that the Christian community was devoted to four practices. The first was teaching. Signs and wonders accompanied the apostles' teaching, confirming their authority (v. 43). The temple was also associated with teaching, they met there daily (v. 46). Second, sharing their possessions with one another was another prominent characteristic of their fellowship (vv. 44-46). Third, "breaking of bread" refers to shared meals and the hospitality of opening their homes to one another (v. 46). Finally, prayer included the daily temple gatherings and "praising God" (vv. 46-47). Their life in community gained the respect of those who were not Christians, and people "were being saved" every day (v. 47).

Peter and John continued to preach the gospel and were imprisoned (3:1-4:30). The believers were not deterred by this opposition. In fact, 5,000 more believed in Christ (4:4) and were further emboldened by the Holy Spirit (4:31). Acts 4:32-37 confirms that the Christians' vibrant community life continued and strengthened. They remained unified and remarkably generous with one another. Luke repeats: "There were no needy persons among them" (4:34).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The early church shared more than common beliefs and core values. They shared their whole lives—including their material possessions. Passages like Deuteronomy 15:1-18 and Leviticus 25 share astonishing similarities with today's readings. "There shall be no poor among you ... do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs" (Deut. 15:4, 7-8). Are our hearts hard or our fists closed to our brothers and sisters in need?

Deuteronomy 15:10, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Give generously ... without a grudging heart. - Deuteronomy 15:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Pastor Ray Stedman told the story of a man in Houston who received a letter from a Christian radio station seeking contributions. The station calculated that it needed \$76 from each listener to stay on the air. The letter promised that God couldn't be "out-given"—thus contributors could be assured that their \$76 would come back to them three-fold. The man wrote back to the station suggesting that they send him the \$76 first. That way the station would receive back three times the amount they needed to stay on the air!

Many people believe that giving is like a cosmic investment plan—give a certain amount and it will come back, with interest! At first glance, today's passage seems to support this thinking. Yet a deeper look shows a much different principle.

In the ancient world, like now, no farmer would sow grudgingly or sparingly, knowing that a little seed in the ground meant little fruit at harvest. So, just as farmers sow generously, God's people should also give generously. Paul followed this proverbial saying with a key principle. God gives to us first so that we can be generous. The order here is key. We don't give first so that we can receive a

blessing. This is where the radio station got it wrong.

Knowing that God gives first encourages us that there's never a time when we can't be generous. This also encourages us that when we receive a little extra, it's not so that we can spend it all on ourselves. Instead, material blessings enable us to give even more to others.

Our generosity is a practical means of sharing the gospel, because others will see obedience linked with our verbal profession of Christ. What comes back to us is a spiritual, not material, blessing—namely, others praying for us (v. 14). Ultimately, giving brings us right back to where it all begins—God's indescribable gift of Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

“God loves a cheerful giver” because that's exactly what He is! God gives freely and beyond all we can imagine. This is true first and foremost in the gift of His Son, but it's also true every day we live and breathe. Take time this weekend to reflect on God's generosity in your life. If possible, join with family or friends, and write down specific examples of God's abundance. Then praise God together for the opportunity to live out of this generosity as you prepare for tomorrow's collection during church.

Deuteronomy 15:17

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THIS is what we desire to be to Christ. We have forfeited our own natural inheritance, and have taken refuge in His house. For six years we have enjoyed all that Jesus could do to make us happy; has not the time come when we should say to Him, "We do not want to go out from Thee again, but to remain with Thee forever"? Paul delighted to call himself "a bond-servant of Jesus Christ" (Ro 1:1-note; Gal. 1:10; Phil 1:1-note.; etc.).

There are two stages, so to speak, in our dealings with Him. First, we come driven by fear; the produce of our own efforts has failed; we have no other resort. Like the bird fleeing from the hawk, we have made for His breast; like the sailor driven by the tempest, we have taken the first harbor that offered. But when we have tested the blessed Master, and found Him so sweet and strong, we elect to remain with Him, not for His gifts or even His salvation, but for Himself. We do not wish to go out free; we love Him so dearly that we would rather go anywhere with Him than remain without Him.

This resolve of ours is ratified by Him. He nails our ear to His cross. Through the blood of self-sacrifice, and self-surrender; through our deeper appreciation of the meaning of His cross, as separating us from the old selfish life; through our identification with Him in death and resurrection; through our sacrifice of all that would hinder us—we come into deeper and closer oneness with Himself. As the Father bored through His ear, in accepting His glad delight to do His will, so does Jesus make real and permanent the consecration we lay at His feet (See Psa. 40:6, 7).

Deuteronomy 16:1-17

The Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete. - Deuteronomy 16:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

Chicago is the American city most in need of joy, at least according to a recent, unscientific online survey. Taken by the Mars Candy Company, the survey of nearly 350 American cities placed Chicago first, followed by New York, Houston, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles. As a result, Mars—maker of M&Ms, Snickers, Milky Way, Twix, Dove, and Three Musketeers candy bars—in an effort to spread more joy, gave away 50,000 free samples of their candy bars on Michigan Avenue in Chicago on October 1, 2009. That induced smiles!

In today's reading, the people of Israel received instructions to joyfully celebrate God's blessings to them in three sacred festivals: Passover (vv. 1-8), the Feast of Weeks (vv. 9-12), and the Feast of Tabernacles (vv. 13-17). Passover celebrates the nation's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. No yeast is permitted in the Passover meal as a symbolic reminder of Israel's hurried departure. The Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost, marked the firstfruits of the wheat harvest and was a holiday of thankfulness for God's provision and blessing. The Feast of Tabernacles was another harvest festival commemorating the Exodus from Egypt to Canaan. The people lived in small booths in order to remember and honor God's provision during their long journey in the wilderness.

Specific historical events and the people's overall relationship with God were involved in these joyful occasions. These were national feasts, not individual choices or even family traditions. All of God's people were to gather together in obedience to His command. These were also times for worship and offerings, not just pleasure or leisure (though those were included). No work was permitted

to be done, as that would have been a distraction. Celebrating was intended to draw the community's attention to their blessings and the Giver of these good things. This completed the circle and so made their joy "complete" (v. 15; see John 16:24).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How can "celebrate," "rejoice," and "be joyful" be obeyed as biblical commands? We're so used to thinking of joy only as a spontaneous emotion that it might sound as if we're being told to force or fake a feeling. Instead, we're being given a godly understanding of joy. Joy begins with obedience. And when we stop in obedience to count our blessings, like the Israelites in today's reading, we realize that the Giver of blessings is also the Giver of joy. In this case, feelings follow actions!

Deuteronomy 16:1-20

These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies. - Leviticus 23:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

What's your favorite holiday? Perhaps it's Christmas, with its fresh evergreens, snow, Nativity scenes, and concerts of Handel's Messiah. Or maybe Easter, a season to meditate on the life-giving death and resurrection of our Lord. If you like bright sun and outdoor barbecues, no doubt you enjoyed the Fourth of July, just past. Or do you prefer more personal holidays, such as your birthday or wedding anniversary?

Such occasions help form the rhythm of our lives--times of rest, remembrance, celebration, and worship. The special feasts described in today's reading served much the same purpose for the nation of Israel.

Passover commemorated the night that the angel of the Lord "passed over" the Israelite houses in Egypt. In the last of the ten plagues, he killed the firstborn son wherever there was no blood on the doorposts (see Ex 12:1-28). Passover was immediately followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, named for the bread without yeast that the people carried in their hasty departure from slavery (cf. 1Cor. 5:6, 7, 8). This festival took place in the month of Abib (March or April on our

calendars), the first month of the Jewish year. Passover is "New Year's Day," a fresh start for God's people.

The Feast of Weeks, or Firstfruits, was a harvest festival. At the wheat harvest, the people celebrated it to show joy and thankfulness for God's blessing. This event took place in May or June, and was also called "Pentecost." In the history of the church, Pentecost is the day the Holy Spirit first descended on the believers. Jewish tradition also links this festival with the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai.

The Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths, took place in September or October, and was also a harvest festival. The people lived in booths made of tree branches and foliage in order to remember the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

While the feasts described in today's reading are not normative for the church, we, too, can plan special occasions of celebration and worship.

Deuteronomy 16:12

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THIS gave the touch of gentle tenderness to Israel's treatment of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. They knew what loneliness and desperate suffering were; and from their own experience could speak to the heart. Without tenderness and sympathy, what are our gifts to the poor worth? It is as important to give graciously and kindly as to give at all. None are so sensitive as sufferers, whether in mind, body, or circumstance; they are quick to notice the slightest roughness or harshness in our manner of bestowing relief; they would prefer a pittance given with tender sympathy to a larger gift flung at them grudgingly. But what can give this thoughtful sympathetic manner like the memory of our own sufferings, when we were bondmen in Egypt!

It may be that God is passing thee through some fiery ordeal, to teach thee and fit thee to be His almoner, touching and soothing as His outstretched hand of pity. Soon thy present sorrow shall be but a memory; but thou wilt be called to minister to the fatherless, the widow, the stranger. Always say in thine heart, God is passing me through this sorrow, and comforting me, and delivering me, that I may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the very accent, caress, and tender word which He hath spoken to me. "Blessed be the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

In heaven itself we shall never quite forget that we were bondmen once, but were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. This

will give a new meaning to the song of adoring gladness.

Deuteronomy 16:21-17:20

Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner. - Proverbs 13:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

On the cutting edge in the computer world is a group called the Silicon Valley Fellowship, a network of Christian leaders in high-tech firms. According to Christianity Today: "Start-up churches, new Bible studies, and a growing network of prayer groups are having a subtle but significant influence on the high-tech industry by changing the hearts and minds of entrepreneurs, who in turn are changing the way they work." Chen Wenchi, CEO of Via Technologies, the third largest computer chipmaker in the world, is one such executive. Important meetings are preceded by prayer, Bible studies and praise sessions are held weekly, and the company pays careful attention to community needs in its factory locations. Says Chen: "God is placing me in Silicon Valley so I can be His servant here."

In any age, in any sphere, godly leadership requires righteousness and integrity. That's certainly true in today's reading. It deals primarily with Israel's political leadership. Favoritism and corruption were unacceptable in the legal system of God's people. Judges were to "follow justice and justice alone" (Dt 16:20). Careful investigation was also important--one witness was insufficient evidence, and difficult cases were to be brought to the national worship center for a verdict. There was no "wall" between religion and society, quite the contrary, since true justice was associated with the Lord's presence. Thus, it's no surprise to find idolators and those showing contempt for God condemned to death.

The words of Moses about a king provided for an eventuality many years down the road. Rules for this future leader were designed to help him avoid the dangers of trusting in his military power (horses), greed (excessive wealth), and idolatry (foreign wives obtained for treaty purposes).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Leadership requires obedient faith, justice, and integrity. These qualities come from God, and leaders will be held accountable before Him.

Deuteronomy 16:1-17

The gift is acceptable according to what one has. - 2 Corinthians 8:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

A few years ago USA Today revealed that more than 40 percent of Americans felt that it was okay to cheat on their taxes. These statistics probably haven't changed much since then. Some feel this way because they believe that the government wants too much of their money. Others don't agree with the way their money is spent. Many feel that the load is unevenly distributed. We certainly don't agree with the ethics of those who cheat on their taxes, but according to biblical principles we can sympathize with the desire for an equitable tax burden.

An evenly distributed burden is also the ideal behind the guidelines for giving outlined in the Old and New Testaments. Under the Law of Moses, God's people were required to present themselves to the Lord three times a year. Each time they were not to come before the Lord "empty-handed" but were to bring a gift in proportion to the way God had blessed them (Deut. 16:16-17).

This principle was reflected in all of the offerings required of Israel. The type of offering to be brought was dependent upon the worshiper's income. Where a wealthier person may have been required to bring a sheep or a goat, the poor were told to bring only two doves (Lev. 5:7). If a worshiper could not afford doves, they were permitted to offer grain instead (Lev. 5:11). It was not God's intent that offerings brought to Him would be a burdensome tax on His people's spiritual life.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It can be tempting to think primarily in terms of the amount when we give to God. How much does He want? Should we give Him ten percent? Should we base it on our gross income or our net? Should we give less than a tithe? The biblical pattern, however, is to begin with the spirit rather than the amount. Our giving is pleasing to God "if the willingness is there" (2 Cor. 8:12). Like the believers in Macedonia in Paul's day, we need to give ourselves to the Lord first and then set the figure (2 Cor. 8:5).

Deuteronomy 16:18-17:20

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved ... who correctly handles the word of truth. - 2 Timothy 2:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his book entitled *Jesus the Pastor*, John Frye observes that today's church is often tempted to look to models other than Jesus to guide its leaders. "I am not saying that Jesus has been totally neglected, rather, he has been relegated to other dimensions of Christian and local church experience," he explains. "Jesus is shoved into our shadows as we read our management books, do our cultural surveys, attend our leadership seminars, and applaud or criticize one another's endeavors."

In many ways the problem that Frye identifies is not a new one. Israel's new-found freedom brought the challenge of establishing corporate leadership structures that reflected God's value system. Immediately, they faced the challenge of selecting judges capable of handling the inevitable problems that come when people live in community and are responsible for governing themselves. There were also religious questions and disputes that had to be settled by the priests and Levites. What's more, God's people would face an even graver leadership challenge in the future.

Moses warned that Israel would not always be satisfied with the leadership structure God had established for them. Like today's church, the time would come when they would be tempted to turn to secular examples. Moses warned that in that day they would want to choose a king who was "like all the nations" around them (Deut. 17:14). In view of these temptations, it was critical that God's Word should be their ultimate point of reference. Israel's leaders may have looked like those of the surrounding nations in certain respects, but they were not to be like them.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Think of the most effective leader you know. What parallels do you see between that person's leadership style and the leadership of Christ? Why not take a moment to write a quick note to them today sharing your observations and thanking them for their effort? Don't forget that the church is not the only context where Christ-like leadership is needed. Jesus should be our leadership model whether the context is the church, the home, or the workplace. Where do you need to lead like Jesus today?

Deuteronomy 16:20 Follow justice and justice alone. -

TODAY IN THE WORD

Second Presbyterian Church in Bloomington, Illinois, was gearing up for a capital building campaign when its new pastor proposed a different project—a homeless shelter. He convinced the congregation to support putting one in the church basement, persuaded union leaders to donate labor, and also prevailed upon government and local businesses to contribute. The Compassion Center opened in March 2004. Those in need can find job search and housing resources, GED classes, a sick bay, clothing, food, phones, computers with Internet access, and even washers and dryers for doing laundry.

Deuteronomy 17:20

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

BEWARE of pride! By that sin fell the angels. If they fell by it, how much more may we! When a man is raised from some lowly sphere to a position of commanding influence, he is greatly tempted to arrogance and pride. The adulation which he receives on every hand makes it all the harder to live humbly and unassumingly. But when once pride enters, it seems to close the heart to God. The proud man multiplies to himself chariots and horses, with the intention of making his position more secure; but he shuts out the help of the Most High. How necessary, therefore, that our hearts should not be lifted up!

The corrective suggested here is meditation on the Word of God. The king was to write out a copy with his own hand, and meditate on it all the days of his life; this would keep him in the lowlands of humility. The Bible is so true in its analysis of the heart; like a mirror it reveals a man to himself. It gives such exalted views of the greatness and holiness of God, compared with which the greatest human state is like the royalties of an ant-heap. It assures us that we must receive everything as the gift of God's grace. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law--of works?" No, but by the grace of God which bringeth salvation, apart from merit.

May God make us humble, with a transparent humility, which is not conscious that it is humble, like the utter unconsciousness of the little child, who does not bend back on herself. Still and quiet your soul, dear child of God, as a child weaned from its mother; and be sure to feed humility on the sincere milk of the Word.

Deuteronomy 17:16, 1 Kings 10:14-29

The king ... must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself. - Deuteronomy 17:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

The advent of the nuclear arms race introduced problems for the powers involved—the United States and the Soviet Union—as well as all the citizens of the world. In addition to pollution resulting from nuclear production, the threat of devastating damage from purposeful or accidental detonation looms even after the end of the Cold War. Disposing and disarming nuclear warheads is complex practically and politically. Now that they exist in such great numbers, nuclear powers rely on their terrifying weapons for their safety.

They didn't possess the destructive power of nuclear weapons, but in the time of ancient Israel, horses and chariots were a great equalizer for any nation—at least those nations that didn't have God as their great defender. But as Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land after their prolonged wilderness wandering, God wanted His people to trust in His strength, not that of horses. Long before the people asked for a king like the other nations had, Moses foretold a time of kings in Israel, and they were forbidden from stockpiling horses (specifically ones from Egypt) in large numbers (Deut. 17:16).

Solomon, however, was the king who did nothing in small doses. Today's passage catalogs his vast accumulation of material wealth, political success, and military strength. He had thriving revenue streams, a luxurious palace, and incomparable wisdom. Everything any ruler could possibly want, King Solomon had.

That was part of the problem. He reached a point when he no longer had to depend on his God for anything. A large reason for that: his 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses—imported from Egypt (vv. 28-29). Israel's old oppressor became a provider for Solomon's army. The majestic, powerful animals gave Israel a sense of security they should have received from God Himself. Perhaps this sense of self-sufficiency contributed to Solomon's willingness to intermarry with more than 700 women of foreign royal descent—and to surrender his heart to their false gods. With or without God's approval, Solomon confidently established peace using his own sordid methods. His submission to foreign gods was ultimately Solomon's downfall—he wasn't as secure as he believed.

APPLY THE WORD

Solomon should have heeded his father's words: "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God" (Ps. 20:7). We should do the same. We are tempted in this world to build up our own sense of security by amassing great wealth, possessions, and even information, but if we lack dependence on God, we're trusting things that are subject to decay, theft, and any number of threats. Put your trust in the eternal, infallible, omnipotent Lord.

Deuteronomy 18:1-14

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor. - 1 Timothy 5:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

Jerry was unhappy when he learned that his church had called a new pastor. "There's only one reason he decided to leave his old church and come to ours," he complained. "He came here because we offered him more money!" Many people agree with Jerry that salary should not be a factor in a pastor's decision to serve a particular church. Interestingly, they would feel differently about a Christian whose vocation was in a "secular" field, like engineering or retail sales.

The Bible warns the church's leaders of the danger of serving for material gain. Paul emphasized that an important qualification of one appointed to the office of elder in the New Testament church was that he not be a "lover of money" (1 Tim. 3:3). Yet the Scriptures also teach that God's people have an obligation to provide for those whose full-time calling is to minister to them. Those who served the tabernacle under the Law of Moses—the priests and the Levites—were not given an allotment of land like the other tribes. They were permitted to live in towns and to own individual plots of land, but their primary source of support came through the offerings brought by God's people. They lived off a portion of the tithes and sacrifices brought there.

Although the methods have changed, this same principle has been carried over to the church. Paul appealed to this Old Testament practice when he spoke of an apostle's "right of support" (1 Cor. 9:12–13). Jesus affirmed this when He declared that "the worker is worth his keep" (Matt. 10:10; cf. 1 Cor. 9:14). Although Paul did not choose to utilize this right while ministering among the Corinthians, he did accept financial help from other churches (2 Cor. 11:).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Most churches make their pastor's salary a matter of public record by publishing it in their annual report. Does your pastor's compensation indicate that your church feels that he is "worth his keep?"

Deuteronomy 18:1-22

They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them. - Deuteronomy 18:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Imagine that you're present at the reading of a will in ancient Israel. The lawyer clears his throat and begins: "I, so-and-so, being of sound mind, do hereby bequeath my entire estate to my children. May they live forever in its wealth."

Wow! What's the estate? Stocks, bonds, or real estate? No. Then perhaps gold, gems, or cash? No. Then what? Is he leaving them a profitable company? A valuable patent? A treasure map? No, no, and no.

You see, the man who died was a Levite. Levites didn't accumulate property or wealth. Instead, they served the Lord and He was their inheritance. What a fantastic bequest to leave their descendants!

As Moses turned his attention to Israel's religious leaders, he gave instructions concerning the Levites. Because they had been chosen to serve God and to minister at the Tabernacle, they were to have no other allegiances or preoccupations. They would live off the people's tithes and offerings, and receive towns to live in--out of the other tribes' land grants. The historical reason for this privilege is the golden calf episode, during which the Levites rallied to Moses and fought for God (Ex. 32:25, 26, 27, 28, 29). Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, acted similarly during a later crisis (Nu 25:6-13).

Levites served as Scripture teachers and possibly as judges, and also assisted the priests with sacrifices. For these leaders, purity was essential. Moses warned them in the strongest terms to avoid the "detestable practices" of the pagan religions. For example, unlike the Canaanites, they shouldn't look to divination for guidance, but to God's prophets, in whose mouth the Lord Himself would place His words (Dt 18:18). Moses' language here suggests a specific, special, future Prophet. Jews in Jesus' day anticipated one, and this may be why Jesus said Moses wrote about Him (Jn 5:46; 6:14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today, write out a prayer thanking God for the inheritance we have in Christ. As with the Levites, the Lord is our portion.

Deuteronomy 18:6

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

HERE is the inspiration of a noble purpose taking a man out from his quiet life in some distant village, far removed from the great sacred city, and plunging him suddenly into the very midst of its holy engagements and services. Other men were happy there. What more did they want than the quiet routine of buying and selling cattle, tending vines, and cultivating their fields? But for this man these could not suffice. There was a light that excelled beckoning him on; a voice, which only he could hear, calling to him. He was not asked to come; his name did not appear on the rota of the Temple servitors; the great Temple might seem perfectly able to dispense with him; yet because with all the desire of his soul he longed to be one of the Temple Levites, he might minister in the name of the Lord, as the others did; and be supported, as they, from the Temple funds.

It is a blessed thing to feel an impulse like this. It may prompt to home or foreign missions, to some enterprise of self-denying ministry to the helpless and sad, to service for God or man. It may come on you like a strong current, fresh from the ocean, sweeping up into some quiet river or harbor basin, and lifting the ponderous barges. But when it comes, be true to it, nurse it, reverence it, thank God for it, trust and follow it where it leads. You will find a niche awaiting you, and the portions by which life will be nourished and maintained; and the Holy Spirit will not fail to be your Guide and Teacher, leading you into all the truth. Until it come, wait upon God in prayer; commune with Him in the Holy of Holies; and spend much time in reading and meditating upon His Holy Word.

Read: Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Acts 3:22-26

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet... You must listen to him. - Deuteronomy 18:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

How would you like to try to fill the sandals of Moses? Talk about a tough act to follow. Moses was the first and greatest of the prophets, the liberator of Israel, the one person in his generation of whom God said, ""With him I speak face to face"" (Num. 12:8). Moses stood before the Lord and received His commandments when the rest of the people were so terrified by God's voice and presence that they begged Him to speak to them only through Moses (Deuteronomy 5:23, 24, 25, 26, 27).

If that isn't enough, the final verses of Deuteronomy say that no one has ever done what Moses did (Deuteronomy 34:10, 11, 12). So it was an amazing prophecy when Moses himself predicted that God would raise up another prophet like him.

The Jewish people eagerly looked for this one who became known simply as "the Prophet" (John 1:21). And when Jesus of Nazareth came on the scene fourteen hundred years after Moses, the Jews were still awaiting this mighty figure.

It's interesting that Israel's religious leaders thought "the Prophet" might be John the Baptist. When they asked him if this was the case, and he denied it. John was a mighty prophet, but Moses had said that the prophet like him would speak the words of God in a way no other prophet had ever spoken them (Deuteronomy 18:18-19).

After Jesus began performing miracles and, the consensus among the crowd was, "Surely this is the Prophet" (John 6:14). But before the next day was over, the crowd had deserted Jesus, leaving Him alone with the Twelve (John 6:66, 67).

Jesus was, in fact, the Prophet like Moses--greater even than Moses (Heb. 3:3-note), but the nation of Israel was blinded to this truth. So after Jesus' resurrection, Peter quoted the prophecy to support his claim that Jesus was Israel's Messiah.

The debate that erupted over Jesus in Jn 7:40, 41 shows that the Jews expected the Prophet and the Messiah to be two different people. But Jesus united these two great streams of prophecy in Himself, and in this fulfillment we can trace another root of our Old Testament heritage.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Did you notice the authority this Prophet carried? Anyone who did not listen to Him--that is, obey Him--would answer to God. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have heard Him in the sense of hearing and obeying the gospel. But we still have the daily responsibility and privilege of listening to Jesus. We hear His voice in the Word, and He speaks to us in prayer.

But God's voice is a "gentle whisper" we must listen for (1Ki 19:12). He will not shout over the noise of the distractions that fill our lives. Today, on the Lord's day, give Him your undivided attention.

Deuteronomy 18:15-21

In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. - Hebrews 1:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Each morning millions of people turn to the horoscope section of the newspaper for guidance for the day. They believe that the movement of the stars can predict their future. Some turn to sources like the obscure poetry of the sixteenth-century physician Nostradamus, who claimed to see far into the future.

God's people had no newspapers, but they did face the challenge of testing the validity of those who claimed to speak for God. The Lord promised that He would send prophets to Israel who would speak the words of God to them. Although these prophets often made predictions about the future, their primary mission was to call God's people to obedience. Predictions of the future were one of the means God used to authenticate their ministry of speaking His word. Scriptures condemn the practice of seeking guidance through horoscopes (Isa. 47:13-14). Astrology does not have the power to predict the future and those who turn to it for help are involved in "error" (Isa. 47:15).

Likewise, Scriptures condemn the art of divination--the practice of predicting the future by observing natural and supernatural phenomena (Lev. 19:26). In biblical times several forms of divination were common. Some people tried to see the future by examining the entrails of certain animals, interpreting dreams, or attempting to contact the dead.

These practices posed a problem for God's people. How were they to discern between God's true spokesmen and those who were impostors? The Scriptures prescribed two tests. The first was the test of accuracy. The predictions of a true prophet of God had to come true. Any prophet who made a prediction that failed to come to pass was to be regarded as a false prophet and executed.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The same God who spoke through the prophets in the past continues to speak to us today in His Word. According to the author of the book of Hebrews, God's ultimate revelation of Himself has come through His Son Jesus Christ. We do not need to turn to occult practices like astrology for direction.

Deuteronomy 19:1-21

When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers. - Proverbs 21:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last year (2001), Chicago led all American cities with a total of 667 murders, ahead of New York City's 642. Homicides went up in 15

out of 25 police districts, with most killings tied to gangs, drugs, and domestic violence. Total murders increased by 36 over the year before, the first such increase in eight years, despite the fact that general crime rates have been dropping.

Justice and order are key concerns of society in any age, past or present. We've seen this earlier in Deuteronomy, and it's here again in today's reading.

Cities of refuge had already been named east of the Jordan River (Deuteronomy 4:41, 42, 43; cf. Num. 35). Moses directed that additional such cities be designated on the west side after the conquest (cf. Josh. 20). If one person killed another inadvertently, he could flee to this place for protection from the "avenger of blood," a relative of the dead person who would seek vengeance. Such cities were specifically not for cases of premeditated murder, but only accidental manslaughter.

Another issue was boundary stones. To move them constituted an attempt to steal land, and was thus regarded as a serious crime (cf. Hos 5:10).

As we saw on July 16, one witness was not enough to prove a case. Furthermore, judges were responsible to probe for and punish malicious motives and false testimony. The punishment would be measured out according to the harm intended. Dealing with sin in this way would deter others and keep the nation pure.

The idea of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was not unique to Israel (Dt 19:21). Called the *lex talionis*, or "law of retaliation," this figurative language established the principle that the punishment should fit the crime. Jesus taught against the misunderstanding that saw "an eye for an eye" as a license to get even. On the contrary, turning the other cheek and going the extra mile should characterize everyday life (Mt. 5:38, 39, 40, 41, 42-note).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In response to today's devotion and the justice of God, find out more about prison ministries in your area. You might start by checking with your church missions committee, to see if the church already supports someone you could contact. You could also check the yellow pages or do a search on the Internet.

Deuteronomy 19:1-21

Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. - Jeremiah 22:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Jewish philosopher Philo once wrote, "Holiness toward God and justice toward men usually go together." We see this reflected in the Law of Moses. God's Law was not merely concerned about law and order—its aim was to move Israelite society in the direction of justice. One proof of this is seen in the rules laid down for the establishment of cities of refuge.

Once God's people had settled in the land, they were to establish cities in a central location and build roads to them so that people would have easy access. Anyone guilty of unintentionally killing another person and who took refuge there was guaranteed protection from the "avenger of blood" until the elders of the city judged his case.

The "avenger of blood" was the one charged with responsibility for executing the death penalty on those guilty of murder. The text doesn't say how this person was appointed. It is likely that he was a family member of the victim who was given the responsibility of seeing that justice was done.

If the accused was found guilty by the elders of the city, he was given to the avenger of blood. If found innocent, he remained there, serving a virtual life sentence until the death of the High Priest. This law balanced the community's responsibility to avenge innocent blood with its obligation to protect the rights of the accused.

In addition, the Law of God required the validity of all accusations to be corroborated by the testimony of two or more witnesses. Anyone who gave false testimony was liable to the same punishment that would have been executed on the one who had been accused.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God's holiness is reflected in His passion for justice. His justice is tempered with mercy. Both come together in the work of Jesus Christ. God did not lower the demands of the Law in Christ. Instead, He met them by sending His Son to suffer the death penalty that our sins deserve. As a result, Jesus has become a source of mercy for all those who trust in Him.

Deuteronomy 19:19

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THERE is a Nemesis in wrongdoing; evil comes home to roost; what we meditate against others returns on ourselves. They that take the sword shall perish with the sword. The publican who sells drink to debauch sons and fathers, lives to see the drink curse his own family. The man who is treacherous to women lives to see his own sons fall beneath their wiles. Haman erects a gallows for Mordecai, but is hanged upon it himself. Adoni-bezek cut off the toes and thumbs of captive princes, and confessed the rightness of the fate which overtook himself. England imposes opium on China, but presently discovers that it is eating out the heart of her own subjects in India and Burmah. "Whoso causeth the upright to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall. himself into his own pit."

And why is all this? Because God sits behind the slight curtain of the present, judging the acts of men. It is not necessary to wait for the conclusion of the present age to see the sentence inflicted. Now the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, and before Him the nations are gathered. Nineveh, Babylon, Capernaum, Tyre, Pompeii, the power of Spain, the Empire of Napoleon, have already been condemned to Hades. Now the judgment is set, now the books are opened, now the "Come, ye blessed," and "Depart, ye cursed," are being uttered. God has so made the moral world that the seed of punishment lies hid in each unkind word, each unchristian act; and it is only necessary to give time enough to show that the man who has sown to his neighbor's hurt will reap that hurt in his own life. To every man will be rendered according to his deeds, even in this life.

Deuteronomy 20:1-21:9

The Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory. - Deuteronomy 20:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

When the Confederacy added iron plates to the captured U.S.S. Merrimac, the renamed C.S.S. Virginia steam frigate temporarily dominated naval encounters in the Civil War. But the Union side soon built a similar ironclad boat, the U.S.S. Monitor.

On March 9, 1862, the two ships engaged in the first battle between ironclad naval vessels in history. After four hours of firing, it ended in a draw. Two months later, the Virginia crew blew up the ship rather than allow it to fall into enemy hands.

As we see in today's reading, when Israel went into battle, Moses said that they should put their confidence in God, not in their military prowess, numerical advantage, or superior weaponry (even if they had any of these things). He would be their Defender, the only Warrior they needed (Dt 20:4; cf. Isa. 42:13). He already proved His mighty power in liberating them from Egypt and in the preliminary battles east of Jordan.

We might wonder about the question of when war is just or right, but this passage does not address that question. It's just assumed to be part of life in a fallen world. Thankfully, wars will one day pass away completely (Ps. 46:9; Isa. 2:4).

Instead, Moses' guidelines dealt with pragmatic issues. For reasons of compassion, those with new brides, houses, or vineyards were exempt from military service; for reasons of practicality, men who were afraid were also excused. Priests didn't go to war, since serving before the Lord took priority. Because of the danger of idolatry, nearby enemies were to be completely destroyed.

God also wanted His people to be good stewards of creation, even in the midst of a war. How do we know this? Because He instructed them not to cut down fruit trees during a siege. They might be tempted to cut down all the wood in an area for burning or building siegeworks, but they should leave alone fruit trees that would benefit them after the peace was won (Dt 20:19).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We've already given two applications about Scripture memorization this month, but the emphasis on having God's Word in our hearts is so strong in Deuteronomy that we'll offer another today.

Deuteronomy 20:1-20

And without faith it is impossible to please God. - Hebrews 11:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the turbulent days of his government, Oliver Cromwell sent one of his envoys to Sweden to represent his interests. The official stopped at an inn while in route, accompanied by his servant, but the envoy found that he was so troubled by the affairs of state that he could not sleep. He tossed and turned until his servant finally spoke up. "Sir," the servant asked, "Do you not think that God governed the world well before you came into it?" "Undoubtedly," the envoy replied. "And sir," the servant continued, "do you not think that He will govern it quite as well when you are gone out of it?" "Certainly!" snorted the envoy—a little irritated at being asked the obvious. "Then sir, excuse me, but do you not think you may trust Him to govern it quite as well as long as you live?" The envoy promptly turned over and went to sleep.

For Israel, the secret to success in taking possession of the land that God had promised to them didn't lie in human strategy or military might. Ultimately it was a matter of faith. The directives laid down for God's people in today's passage echo the message of the gospel song that declares, "faith is the victory that overcomes the world."

If this was true for God's people in a time of literal warfare, it is even more important in the spiritual warfare all believers encounter today. God's people continue to face a formidable opponent: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). These same spiritual powers were created by Christ and for Christ (Col. 1:16).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do the obstacles you face seem overwhelming today? God is more than equal to the challenge. His message to Israel as they were about to confront their enemies was essentially this: "I am in charge and I am able to accomplish my purposes through you." Make a list of the "enemies" that are arrayed against you today. As you pray, commit each one to the Lord. When you have finished sing the chorus, "He is Able, More than Able" and thank Him for accomplishing His will in all that concerns you today.

Deuteronomy 20:2

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

WHEN Abraham returned from the slaughter of the kings, the priest of the Most High appeared to welcome him, and to prepare him for the still more subtle encounter which awaited him with the king of Sodom. As Abraham drew nigh to that battle the priest approached.

Whenever a battle is imminent, look out for the

Priest.--Do not go to the war at your own charges, you cannot stand against the mighty power of your arch-adversary. Look around, and see the Priest stand. What Priest? The Apostle and High Priest of your confession. He will offer prayer for you, and anoint your shield with the precious oil, and put His hand upon your hand as you feebly draw the bow.

"What makes you so bold, my lad?" the captain asked of a stripling as he went into the fight. And the answer came quickly, "My mother put her hands on my head and blessed me ere I left our home."

Whenever the Priest has been near, anticipate a battle.--The best hours come to prepare us for the worst. The clove descends that we may be able to stand for forty days against the devil. Do not be surprised at this. And whenever some experience of unusual radiance and helpfulness has visited you, say to yourself, "This is God's sweet way of preparing me against coming trial. Let me walk warily, for danger is near. The Priest has been with me; I am drawing nigh to the battle. I know not what lies before me: but He is acquainted with the difficulties I have to face and the fierceness of the adversary I have to encounter. He alone can equip me for the fight."

Deuteronomy 21:10-22:30

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. - Hebrews 13:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

What's the state of marriage these days? A recent Gallup poll found that households comprising a married couple with children--a nuclear family, in other words--account for just 24 percent of all American households. Only 38 percent think that premarital sex is wrong, and more than half endorse "living together" as morally acceptable, with younger people holding much more permissive views than their elders. A majority prefer fewer children and view divorce as no problem.

Another survey reported that 63 percent of teenage girls have had sex before age 18. And one in six women say they've been involved in a pregnancy that ended in an abortion. Sin leads to the breakdown of the family in society. That's why God provided rules about marriage and family for His chosen people: to keep sin at bay and His holiness at the center. We're not sure of the exact reason for every regulation in today's passage, but we do know that purity was the primary focus.

As today's verse indicates, "Marriage should be honored by all." Women should be treated with dignity, even if they'd been captured in battle. A new husband who slandered his wife (falsely accusing her of not having been a virgin prior to their marriage) would be fined twice the typical bride-price and forbidden to divorce her. A son shouldn't marry his father's former wife, for that would dishonor the family. The differences between men and women should be respected (Dt 22:5).

Marriage and family sins were to be punished severely. A rebellious son would be stoned to death. In cases of fornication or adultery, both partners would be executed. A man who raped a married woman would be killed, and one who raped an unmarried woman would be required to become her husband. (Regarding capital punishment and God's curse, compare Deuteronomy 21:23 with Gal. 3:13.)

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The Law covered every area of life, including marriage and family. What does the New Testament have to say on these issues?

Deuteronomy 21:1-17

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. - Philippians 2:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Hubert Humphrey once observed: "The moral test of a government is how it treats those who are at the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadow of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped."

Today's passage conveys a similar thought. It reveals that God expects His people to treat human life with respect. This expectation is reflected in laws that called for the community as a whole to take responsibility for the shedding of innocent blood. The Law also regulated cultural practices affecting some of society's most vulnerable members: captives, wives, and children.

What may surprise us most about these laws is their failure to speak against practices that most of us would condemn today. They regulate practices like polygamy and the taking of women as "spoils" in warfare. This doesn't mean that God endorses such things. The purpose of these laws was to introduce a redemptive dynamic into cultural practices that already existed. When compared to the customs of the surrounding nations in Moses' day, they are clearly more humane. Rape, for example, was a common feature of ancient warfare. The Law of Moses did not allow this. Instead of permitting a woman who had been taken captive to be treated as an object and then cast aside, she was to be treated with dignity and given an opportunity to mourn the loss of her family. Likewise, in an age when the husband possessed the right to divorce his wife or disown his children for virtually no cause, the Law of Moses required God's people to protect the inheritance rights of the first-born. This, in turn, protected the financial interests of the mother, who was both socially and economically vulnerable.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

While it is likely that the specific commands contained in today's passage do not reflect the kinds of situations you are going to face today, the underlying principle does. You can expect to come into contact with those who are socially or economically vulnerable and those whose interests need to be protected. It may be the homeless, the elderly, the unborn, or simply those who are lonely and overlooked in your church. What can you do today to show them that God is concerned about them and is looking out for their interests?

Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

TODAY IN THE WORD

Farouk I, the last king of Egypt, came to the throne as a sixteen-year-old in 1936 and was deposed in a coup led by Gamal Nasser in 1952.

At first the teenage king enjoyed his great popularity. But Farouk soon began to shirk his duties. He lived a life of luxury and gluttonous indulgence. The effects of the king's lifestyle were captured in side-by-side photos published after his exile. The first showed an elegantly slender young king walking beside a swimming pool. The second photo, also taken as Farouk strode beside a pool, showed a man so enormous he is scarcely recognizable.

Obviously we can't say that a gluttonous lifestyle was the only factor in King Farouk's fall. But gluttony certainly contributed to the loss of his throne. Gluttony, whether in food or drink, can reveal inner character flaws that manifest themselves in various ways. It wouldn't be surprising to find that an unabashed glutton is also out of control in other areas.

Deuteronomy 21 points out this connection—and reveals the seriousness of the sin of gluttony. Here we find that this sin may contribute not just to the loss of a kingdom, but to the loss of a life!

The Mosaic Law's provision for incorrigible juvenile delinquency may sound needlessly harsh to our modern ears, but it's a reminder that rebellion in the home leads to rebellion in society. The fact that Jewish tradition says this law was never carried out does not diminish its importance as a revelation of God's attitude toward sin.

Notice the charges that the father brings against a son who is uncontrollable. Among other things, he is a “profligate” (v. 20), the same word translated “glutton” in Proverbs 23 and 28 (see yesterday’s study). The fact that the son is also a “drunkard” fits perfectly with the picture of someone whose appetite is out of control.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How’s your spiritual appetite? Job said, “I have treasured the words of [God’s] mouth more than my daily bread” (Job 23:12). For most of us, that’s getting serious!

Deuteronomy 21:18-22:30

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity. - Ephesians 5:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

A little boy who had been given the part of a sheep in his school’s nativity play was asking others in the program about their roles. Coming to a little girl whose mother was helping her into her costume he asked, “I’m a sheep—what are you?” “I’m Mary,” she replied. With an air of solemnity, the boy declared: “It’s hard being a sheep, you know.” “Yes,” the little girl agreed. “But it’s also hard being a virgin.”

She could have been speaking for many of us. Whether our commitment is to abstinence as a single person or fidelity to our spouse as one who is married, it isn’t always easy being morally pure in today’s society. Impure practices are widely tolerated. They are a common feature in movies and on television. Advertising images frequently appeal to our sexual impulses to sell their products, and many implicitly endorse homosexuality. Instead of being seen as a covenant made for life, marriage is now widely regarded as a temporary social commitment that can be revoked at any time. Many people don’t see any need for marriage at all.

Today’s passage contains an assortment of commands whose purpose, in some cases, is not always easy to understand. The intent of the command to help a neighbor whose ox or donkey has fallen in the road is clear enough. So are the commands that protect a woman’s reputation from false accusations about her moral behavior. What, however, are we to make of the others? Why did God care if an Israelite took the mother bird along with the young from her nest? Why did He command His people not to wear clothes of wool and linen woven together or to plant two kinds of seed in a vineyard?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Spend some time watching prime time television (or scan the channels). Note how many programs portray in a positive light those situations that violate biblical principles of morality and purity. As you do, consider whether your own values are shaped more by popular practice or biblical standards. Do you find the limits God has set too confining? Are there some you have deliberately ignored? If so, what steps will you need to take to bring these areas in line with God’s Word? Pray about what action you should take, and ask God for His strength to follow through on this commitment.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23; Galatians 3:1-14

Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse. - Deuteronomy 21:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1941, more than one thousand men died aboard the U.S.S. Arizona from the attack on Pearl Harbor. All but 75 of them remain buried within the walls of that ship, which is now the site of a poignant memorial in their honor. This place will always be saturated with the memory of the people who died, and no visitor will ever overlook the horror that took place there. Indeed, such burial shows respect for the sanctity of life and depicts the harrowing nature of death.

As Deuteronomy 21 shows, burial was also a meaningful ritual in ancient Israel. Executed criminals could be impaled on a pole (here called a “tree”) for public viewing, perhaps to deter others from committing their crimes. But no one “hung on a tree” in this manner was to be left unburied over-night, or the land would be polluted (v. 23). The flourishing of the land and moral life are linked in the Scriptures. The person under God’s curse, that is, the condemned criminal, represents God’s rejection of evil-doers, who need to be removed from the community. This picture of the tree as a curse ought to trigger an emotional reaction in us as we think of our Savior.

In Galatians Paul links Jesus’ death by crucifixion (a Roman form of execution) with the earlier Old Testament practices of displaying executed criminals on poles or trees. Jesus in His death became the accursed one, removed from community and rejected by God (Heb. 13:12–23). In becoming accursed for us, Jesus absorbed the full force of God’s judgment and freed us to be justified by faith. His death on a tree gives us access to the Tree of Life; His death enables our blessed life.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How do Paul's questions to the Galatians apply to you today? Having begun with the Spirit, are you "now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (v. 3).

Deuteronomy 21:23 Luke 9:1-62

Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. - Deuteronomy 21:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Romans used crucifixion as a punishment for non-Romans or slaves, and part of the degrading ritual involved the carrying of the crossbeam. The prisoner was subject to mocking, scourging, and complete ridicule, and the Jews of that day would have been particularly horrified by the process because of the stigma that accompanied hanging on a tree (Gal. 3:13).

But even before dying on the cross, Jesus used the image of carrying a cross to describe following Him on a daily basis; let's be honest—this is not exactly a motivational speech. But the crux of today's reading is the almost irreconcilable contrast between the glorious identity of Jesus and the horrible path He would have to walk to fulfill His mission.

As the theories of who Jesus was began to crystallize in the minds of kings (vv. 7-8) and commoners (v. 19), the Apostles realized that He was the Christ. Jesus didn't want that fact popularized, because no one, not even the Twelve, was prepared for the reality of what had to happen. The coming of the Christ meant the coming of the kingdom, so the imminent death of the Christ just didn't compute in the Jewish mentality. Their struggle to understand is illustrated by Peter's desire to celebrate at the Transfiguration (v. 33) and the comparison and competition for spots of greatness in the kingdom (vv. 46-50).

It's no coincidence that the dispute over kingdom greatness came shortly after Jesus confirmed that He was the Christ. The Twelve preferred to focus on their own reward rather than the penalty that Jesus had just announced He would suffer (v. 45). But to be fair, no one but Jesus could have understood what awaited Him, much less the idea that His followers would suffer as well. As He discussed at the end of this chapter, the expectation for a follower of Christ is complete, uncompromising allegiance, even if doing so requires unthinkable suffering.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you ever tell Jesus, "I will follow you, but ..." and place some condition on your obedience? Sometimes we wait for finances or confidence or a resolution to a particular conflict. But postponed obedience is disobedience. Whatever God asks you to do, do it without hesitation. He can tie up the loose ends better than we can. If you wait for the time to be just right, you could spend the rest of your life avoiding God's will for you.

Deuteronomy 21:23

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THIS law on the Jewish statute-book hastened the awful tragedy of Calvary. No body must be left to rot on the cross on which it had been impaled. The corpse of the malefactor must be taken down at nightfall. But how little did the Pharisees and Scribes realize that the remainder of this verse had so pertinent a reference, and was having so remarkable a fulfillment. The Apostle quotes this verse as giving the inner rationale or meaning of the death of the blessed Lord (Gal. 3:13). "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." On Jesus fell the reduplicated curses, that were deserved by the race, and by each.

The curse of the broken law.--"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the Book of the Law." None had kept, all had broken that law. None was righteous, no, not one. Man's lot was cast under Mount Ebal. The race was guilty and silent before the bar of infinite justice. But Jesus, by virtue of His relationship with the entire human family, was able to stand before God charged with that sin, bearing that curse, and put them away forever. There is no barrier, therefore, now to the outflow of God's free grace.

The curse due to individual transgression.--The whole race had broken away from God, and was under the curse; so that each of us shared in the solemn accountability to God, for the whole and for our part. But He became sin for us; cursed, that we might be blessed; cast out, that we might be forever welcomed; naked, that we might be clothed; hungry, that we might feed on His flesh; poor, that we might be enriched; dying, that we might live beyond the range of the curse forevermore.

Deuteronomy 22:8

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THE householder was not to be content with what would be safe for himself; he must see to it that the undefended roof of his house should not be a source of danger to little children, the weak, or the careless. He might be able to walk on the roof of his house with so sure a foot as not to need the parapet or trellis-work, warning him from the edge; but what he could do might be impossible for feet less sure than his. Hence the need of the battlement! Each new house must have its battlement around the margin of its roof.

This should be the law for each new home.--Wherever a household is constituted, battlements should be built to protect, as far as possible, the weak and tempted. The pace of the household should be that of the feeblest of its members. You are careful to have the balustrade and the little swing gate, not that the grown-up require them, but for the protection and safety of young and feeble life. Similarly build the battlement of total abstinence, of the discountenance of worldly amusement, of the habit of family worship. Guard against exposure to needless temptation, and occasions for falling.

This should be the law in older households.--It becomes the master of the home sometimes to go around his household, to study his own character, to inspect the condition of the battlements. Is there laxity, inconsistency, need of precaution? Let us search our hearts and lives, our habits, and the ordering of our homes, that the battlements may be strengthened where they are weak, or erected where they are wanting. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Deuteronomy 23:1-25

From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind. - Psalm 33:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his classic book entitled *Holiness*, nineteenth-century Anglican bishop and evangelical leader J. C. Ryle asks his readers to consider whether it would be possible to be happy in heaven without holiness. "Suppose for a moment that you were allowed to enter heaven without holiness," he writes. "What would you do? What possible enjoyment could you feel there? To which of all the saints would you join yourself, and by whose side would you sit down? Their pleasures are not your pleasures, their tastes not your tastes, their character not your character."

Today's passage emphasizes a similar theme. Just as there is no happiness in heaven without holiness, it is equally true that those who are most at home among God's people live holy lives. The regulations in the Mosaic Law set limits on those who were permitted to join God's people when they were assembled for worship. In many cases, the conditions of exclusion were related to pagan worship practices. Other stipulations, however, provided direction for handling a range of daily concerns, from the charging of interest to picking grapes from a neighbor's vineyard.

Living as we do in a culture that tends to separate the spiritual from the mundane, such matters may seem strangely unrelated. What do necessary bodily functions, the practice of community hygiene, and the economy have in common? Most of all, what do they have to do with holiness? While they are not directly related to one another, they are all part of the same lifestyle. Holy living demands that we be careful in all our actions. Even the most private behavior comes under God's scrutiny.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Read through today's passage and identify the major areas of life that are addressed. When you are finished, identify some of the major categories in your own life. Some examples might be "Holiness in the neighborhood," "Holiness on my job," or "Holiness in the use of my body." Record each category and underneath write a paragraph that describes what you think the practice of holiness should look like for that area of your life. Are there changes you need to make in the way your life is structured in order to make this a reality?

Deuteronomy 23:1-24:22

Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. - Psalm 119:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

In a commencement address, writer and theologian J. I. Packer said the following about the Puritans: "The Puritan ideal was that all of life, the individual, the family, the church, the worlds of politics and economics, philosophy and science, social structures and education, personal relationships and the arts, should at every point be, to use the biblical phrase, 'holiness to the Lord,' and that everyone should be pursuing with all their might the reality of practical, experiential, conscientious, determined, hopeful, vigorous, hardworking, humble, visionary, prayerful, enterprising godliness in the fellowship and service and power of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit."

In seeing all of life as holy, the Puritans followed in the footsteps of Deuteronomy. As we've seen, God's choosing of Israel to be His

people affected every area of their lives.

Today and tomorrow, as we reach the end of Moses' second sermon, we'll cover various laws and regulations that don't necessarily lend themselves to a topical approach. But the context is the same--these are the covenant responsibilities of God's people; this is how they are to live as His people in His presence.

The concerns in today's reading touch on topics we've already dealt with. Recently, we've reviewed God's expectations and commands about marriage and family, warfare, the justice system, political and religious leadership, tithes and debts, and worship feasts. Many of the examples here deal with community love. For example, one Israelite couldn't charge another interest on a loan. Debtors and laborers shouldn't be exploited. Grain should be left in the fields for the poor to glean. Other laws deal with worship, such as the note that money earned from prostitution shouldn't be used to pay a vow to the Lord.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The situations in today's reading mostly deal with the theme of brotherly love and examples of how it should be lived out. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (Rom. 12:10).

Deuteronomy 23:14

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

AT all times Israel needed to keep from evil, but especially when her embattled hosts went forth to war; for in the conception of her prophets and saints her battles were not to be fought or won by herself. The Lord God of hosts was there. It was a joint campaign. This was specially revealed to Joshua, when he beheld the captain of the Lord's host, with a drawn sword, beside him. So, Christian soul, remember, in thy war against the evil of the world, and the solicitations of thine own wicked heart, that the battle is not yours, but God's. He is in the midst of thee; thou needst not be moved! He has sworn to deliver thee by His own right hand, and by His holy arm, and to give up thine enemies before thee.

There was one condition, however, on which the presence of God amongst His people was possible--the camp must be holy. No unclean thing might be seen in any of its borders. The veil of mother-earth must cover all impurity. Thus, as God went up and down the long avenues of the tents, He would see nothing to offend His gaze and make Him turn away. How deep a lesson! God is ever patrolling the avenues of our life. The most secret processes of our daily existence, our innermost relationships, the thoughts and intents of our heart, are all manifest to Him. There must be nothing to make Him turn away in holy abhorrence, else we cannot count on Him to deliver us, to give up our enemies before us.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart:

Try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be any wicked way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting."

Deuteronomy 24:1-22

He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord. - Proverbs 19:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

"All the arguments which are brought to represent poverty as no evil show it to be a great evil," Samuel Johnson noted. "You never find people laboring to convince you that you may live very happily with a plentiful fortune."

God's concern for the poor is a consistent theme in the Scriptures. Far from romanticizing the plight of the poor as some in the church have occasionally done, God's Word acknowledges that the poor are often taken advantage of and need society's protection. The Law of Moses included many regulations that protected the rights of the poor and offered them a kind of social safety net. The regulations found in Deuteronomy 24 reflect this priority, as well as a general concern for others who were vulnerable in Hebrew society: women, orphans, and foreigners. Commentator J. G. McConville explains, "The movement in the chapter, from marriage to other measures protecting family life, and thence to commands protecting the poor and disadvantaged, is part of the laws' connected reflection on what it means to be the people of Yahweh."

Why should we care about the weak? First, we should care because God cares about them. He has an abiding interest in those that society has overlooked. This was reflected in Christ's ministry when He accepted as His disciples those that Jewish society

despised.

Second, we should care about the weak because we were once weak (1 Cor. 1:26). It is true that such a concern contributes to a more humane society, but that is not primarily why we as Christians show an interest. Our concern is an expression of the gratitude we feel for God's grace shown to us. It is an expression of our longing to have a heart that reflects God's own heart.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It is easy to be so overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems caused by poverty that we fail to do anything about it. Individually, we may not be able to change the social structures and injustices that cause poverty. In fact, it is unlikely that we will. Jesus said that we would always have the poor among us (John 12:). This does not mean, however, that what you do is insignificant—it's important to the people who are touched by your actions and to God. Ask your pastor for suggestions about practical ways you can "remember the poor."

Deuteronomy 24:10-22 Lev. 25:35-43

Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. - Psalm 112:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

On a hot, sticky day in the middle of summer, a businessman pulled change out of his pocket in order to pay for a cold drink at a gas station. Among the coins was a small white cross and the surprised clerk muttered, "What a strange place to carry a cross." "It's really not all that strange a place," replied the businessman. "When I'm tempted to spend money foolishly, I'm reminded that the cross has first claim on it."

Today we are constantly being told how to spend our money. Utility providers insist we pay our bills, children insist on growing and needing new clothes, our families insist on eating dinner ... and among these legitimate expenses, advertisers of every possible kind insist we need the latest and the greatest products on the market. In the middle of all these voices demanding their share, how often do we stop to consider the proverbial cross in our pocket?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Take out last month's credit card statement or your checkbook's balance record. Scan the entries to get a sense of what you spend your money on. Evaluate your spending in light of Scripture. During your time in prayer today, ask the Lord to show you how to be a better steward of your resources and how to use your money in a way that glorifies God. Are there areas where you would have to cut back spending? Over the course of this month, as you do your shopping, keep these areas in mind.

Deuteronomy 24:10-22

It will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God. - Deuteronomy 24:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Pastor Cole Huffman wrote in Discipleship Journal: "Whether our money stories are shaped by our families, culture, or innate preferences, a new chapter gets written when we are reborn into Jesus' kingdom." If we follow in Christ's footsteps, "Our checkbook ledgers should tell a story of Jesus' ongoing transformation of us. We keep and spend not just for personal necessities like food and utilities, but also to do beautiful things for those we love or feel compelled to help."

One kingdom principle guiding our financial stewardship is that money must be handled with justice and respect. As mentioned on January 6, profits and material benefits are not the bottom-line justification for our financial choices. Instead, godliness and moral concerns must govern our handling of money. Two such concerns, justice and respect, are identified in today's reading. Both are based on the doctrine of creation—the fact that people are intrinsically valuable to God as beings made in His image (Gen. 1:27). Each person carries individual responsibility in this matter (v. 16).

Three examples get the point across. In the first example, the fact that one person is giving another a loan does not give the first person the right to show disrespect to the other (vv. 10-13). When the loan collateral is the borrower's personal clothing, the man's needs and dignity are more important considerations than money.

In the second example, the fact that one person is another's employer does not give the first person the right to pay wages when it's convenient (vv. 14-15). Not paying wages promptly amounts to exploiting one's workers (cf. Mal. 3:5). In fact, all who are socially vulnerable should be treated fairly (vv. 17-18). In the third and final example, the fact that one person owns a field while another is a poor gleaner does not give the first the right to maximize his harvest by leaving nothing to be gathered (vv. 19-22). In that culture, it would have been cruel to be overly thorough and efficient with the harvesting. People made in God's image deserve better

treatment from their fellow human beings.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Money must be handled in ways that show respect and practice justice in order to please the Lord. What might this principle mean for you in your context? Do you allocate some of your resources to share with the needy? Do you treat others, especially those in need, with dignity and respect? We still need to apply this lesson within the context of the stewardship responsibilities God has given us. If we're not sure how, He has promised to give us wisdom when we ask (James 1:5).

Deuteronomy 24:11

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

WHAT courtesy and respect for the feelings of another prompted this injunction! The poor man needs a loan, and for this purpose goes to his rich neighbor. It would be possible for the latter, in the pride of his purse and position, to go ruthlessly across the threshold of the poor man's house, look contemptuously around its penury, and lay his hand with indelicate haste on the treasures of the poor man's family life. This, which had been dear to his father! That, associated with happier, better days! Such conduct might not be, said the divine precept. If the poor man asked a loan, he must choose, his own pledge, and fetch it from his house with his own hand; it must be his act.

God respects the nature with which He has endowed us.--He will not force an entrance on any man. Though He made us, He waits for us to give Him right of entrance. He stands at the door and knocks. He asks for our consecration, that we should give Him our whole being in pledge, and in return for the loan of infinite grace; but He will not take till we give, or count on aught belonging to us as His property, until we have surrendered spirit, soul, and body, at His invitation.

God expects us to respect the nature of others.--Let us reverence that wonderful soul-life which is the perquisite of each individual. We have no right to break in with the mailed foot of the politician, or the furtive tread of the priest. The father-confessor has no right to stand within the sacred precincts of conscience. No man has a claim on his brother save that which love supplies. If we have partaken of the grace of God, we must be gracious to our fellows.

Deuteronomy 25:1-19

Do not pervert justice. - Leviticus 19:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

In June 2000, Genevieve Simenon murdered her lover by bashing in his skull. She called a close friend who was a doctor and told him that her lover had suffered a heart attack and had hit his head while falling. The doctor wrote out a death certificate without examining the body and cited "natural causes" as the cause of death. However, the mortician became suspicious and called the police, and Simenon confessed to the crime. Two years later, after hearing testimony about her difficult past, a jury sentenced Simenon to psychiatric evaluation and five years of probation.

Some would say that Simenon's case exemplifies a key component of the American judicial system in our day--clear protections of the rights of the accused. In God's legal system, even the rights of the guilty were protected. They were punished, but limits were set to ensure that the penalty was commensurate with the crime. Care was taken, not only to see that justice was done, but to make certain that the guilty would not be degraded in the process (Deut. 25:3).

This concern is a striking example of the importance of preserving the human dignity of others--even those who seem to be the least deserving of such protection. Likewise, the rights of animals were to be protected, as well as the inheritance rights of widows.

Mosaic justice, however, was not soft. A woman who unfairly helped her husband gain advantage in a fight was punished severely, and the sins of the Amalekites during the Exodus were remembered long after they took place. Overall, though, divine justice was tempered by God's mercy, while His economy had more than the "bottom line" in view. In His eyes a just society is one that protects the rights of all, even those who deserve to be punished. It has a special concern for those who are easily taken advantage of by others who possess more power or position.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In simplest terms, justice involves doing the "right" thing. It is concerned about protecting the interests of others. Use a concordance or the search function on your Bible study software to see how often the term justice appears in the Bible. You will discover that God has more than a passing interest in it. You can emulate that interest on a personal level by speaking up for the rights of others when

you see that they have been overlooked and by offering a biblical perspective to those leaders who are responsible for making certain that justice is carried out.

Deuteronomy 25:1-26:19

Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. - Psalm 119:34

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the mid-eighteenth century, Sir William Blackstone became the first man to explain English common law in a way understandable to a layperson. His lectures, first given at Oxford University, were expanded to four volumes and published as Commentaries on the Laws of England. These books sold very well, and the concepts they expounded later served as a cornerstone of the American Constitution. Due to this groundbreaking work, Blackstone achieved lasting fame.

The Law God had given at Sinai wasn't nearly as obscure as English common law, but the Israelites still needed many points explained. Even more, they needed to be encouraged and exhorted to obey what they knew. This was the motivation behind Moses' sermons in the book of Deuteronomy. As he wrapped up his second address in today's reading, his final comments urged the people toward righteous living.

Although this section contains many miscellaneous regulations, one ongoing theme was to remember history in dealings with other peoples. They should be kind to strangers, since they'd been aliens in Egypt. As former slaves, they shouldn't oppress the poor. They shouldn't hate the Edomites, for the descendants of Esau were their brothers. The Amalekites, on the other hand, should be wiped out as punishment for their irreverent attacks on God's people. And the Ammonites and Moabites were forbidden to enter the assembly because of their treatment of Israel during the Exodus.

The people were also to remember history in their dealings with God. Individuals were instructed to bring the firstfruits of their first harvest in the Promised Land before the Lord, and in their worship to recite a creedal summary of how God had worked nationally and individually (26:1-11). For leading them from slavery to a land "flowing with milk and honey," God deserved all the glory!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Deuteronomy 26:5-10 is an inspiring summary of Jewish identity. Since we also have been chosen by God, our identity as His children and as followers of Christ should be equally exciting!

Deuteronomy 25:4

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

"GOD taketh care of oxen," is Paul's comment on this text; and so God did. These pages are filled with tokens of His thought--for the ass that might not be overtaxed by being set to plough with an ox; for the ass or ox which were to be helped up if they had sunk on the road overpowered with their burdens; or for the bird sitting on her nest. Here the ox, as it went around the monotonous tread of the mill, was to be allowed to take a chance mouthful of corn.

The care for dumb creatures is part of our religious duty. It is one of the elements of religion to think for the dumb creatures, who are not able to speak for themselves, but suffer so patiently the accumulated wrongs heaped on them by man. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." Oh, when will the travail of creation cease! Man's sin has indeed worked woe for the lower orders of creation.

The Apostle used this injunction to remind his converts of the necessity of caring for their spiritual teachers. Some are called to plough, others to thresh; but "he that plougheth should plough in hope; and he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (1 Cor. 9:10). They that serve the altar should live by the altar; and those who proclaim the Gospel should live of the Gospel.

But there is sweet encouragement here for those who are anxious about their daily bread. God takes care for oxen; will He not for you? Shall the oxen browse on the wolds and pasture-lands, and be nourished to fatness, and will He leave to starve the soul that really trusts and serves Him?

Deuteronomy 26:1-19

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. -

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his book Holiness By Grace, Bryan Chapell tells of the time he gave his father a tie rack for his birthday. It was made from a

rotten log shaped like a horse's head. "I attached a length of two-by-four board to that log head, attached a rope tail, and stuck on some sticks to act as legs. Then I halfway hammered in a dozen or so nails down the two-by-four, put a bow on it, and presented it to my father" Chapell writes. "When he took off the wrapping, he smiled and said, 'Thank you, it's wonderful ... what is it?'"

Chapell's father used the tie rack for many years. From a child's point of view, Chapell explains that he believed that his gift to his father was as good as it gets--a true work of art. In time, however, he came to see it differently: "I understood ultimately that my father had received and used my gift not because of its goodness but out of his goodness."

This is the same perspective we should have as we give to God. When we give to God we are not trying to supply Him with something He needs or to bribe Him for favors. Instead, we are acknowledging His faithfulness in providing for our needs and declaring our dependence upon Him. In the Law of Moses such confidence in God was expressed in a concrete way through laws that commanded God's people to offer firstfruits and tithes.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When God's people brought their offerings to the chief priest, they were to make a public declaration of God's faithfulness (Deut. 26:3, 5-10). The two statements focus on concrete examples of God's care for His people. They served as reminders to Israel of God's call, His concern for them during their suffering, and of their ultimate deliverance by His powerful hand.

Deuteronomy 26:11

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

Do not be afraid of joy! There are some who only sip of the sweet draughts which God puts to their lips, afraid of drinking long and deeply. When good things come into their lives, they are always thinking of some bitter make-weight, possibly some impending trouble. This is a mistake. We must be prepared to learn the lessons of dark hours when God sends them; but we need not hesitate to learn those of bright and happy ones, when they, too, are meted out to us. As we give ourselves up to sorrow, we should give ourselves up to joy! As the soul descends into the grave, it should have great joy in its resurrection and ascension! If the soul-planet must travel to a wintry distance, let us hail those halcyon hours when it returns to stand in the summer spheres of joy! In the life of consecration our joy is considerably enhanced by sharing it with our Lord. Just as our burden of care is lightened by rolling it upon Him, in the same proportion our joy will be increased when He is permitted to partake of it.

We cannot always be on the strain. It is not possible to live on one side of our nature without impairing the health of all. David must bring his harp, and play in the presence of the soul, when its fits of depression return. There is necessity that we should cultivate tracks of our soul that lie toward a southern aspect, filling them with flowers, and fruits, and beehives, and things that children love.

Open your heart to joy, when it comes in the morning with jocund voice; by the back-door weeping will steal away. She only came to sojourn for a night.

Deuteronomy 27:1-26

Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. - Leviticus 25:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

The world's largest collection of hearing aids and "ear trumpets" is housed at Kent State University in Ohio. An "ear trumpet" was a device used to amplify sound for the hearing-impaired, but it was only somewhat successful. When the electrical hearing aid was patented in 1880 and made available to the general public by about 1900, it was a major improvement. Electrical hearing aids offered not only amplified sounds, but they also increased the range of sounds. Nowadays, modern hearing aids can even be fine-tuned to meet the needs of particular individuals.

Hearing God's Law was important for Israel. But even the best "hearing aid" wasn't all that was needed--obedience had to follow.

This is the start of Moses' third sermon. Yesterday we saw a formal renewal of the covenant at the end of his second address; in this new sermon he wanted to impress upon the Israelites the seriousness of their commitment--the big-picture benefits, responsibilities, and consequences of their covenant relationship with God. Moses drove the point home dramatically! Half the tribes were to stand on Mt. Gerizim to read the blessings, and half on Mt. Ebal to read the curses. These mountains, both about 3,000 feet high, are located in the central hill country of Israel. One end of the valley is narrow enough to envision such readings, which no doubt would have felt formal or serious and may even have increased accountability.

Also, at the base of Mt. Ebal is Shechem, where the Lord first appeared to Abram and where the patriarch built his first altar (Ge

12:6, 7). So the site would also have served as a reminder of God's promises and faithfulness. That reminder was to be reinforced with memorial stones inscribed with the Law and a special altar on Mt. Ebal. The people would make fellowship offerings there, and hold worship feasts to rejoice in their special relationship with God (cf. Josh. 8:30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Why not volunteer to read Scripture at a worship service at your church? If the schedule is already full, see if it's possible to read Scripture in another setting, such as a prayer breakfast or a Sunday School class.

Deuteronomy 27:1-26

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. - Psalm 78:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Several years ago media mogul Ted Turner expressed his opinion about the Ten Commandments by saying, "If you're only going to have ten rules, I don't know if adultery should be one of them." Whether he was serious or not, his comment reflects the rejection of moral absolutes. It's not a denial that morals exist. Rather, some believe that ideas of right and wrong are so personal and subjective that they can't apply to anyone else. For them, nothing is "written in stone."

God's laws for Israel, however, were written in stone, both literally and figuratively. They weren't open for debate by God's people. Once Israel finally entered the land of promise, they were to renew their covenant with God by listening to the Levites recite the blessings of obedience and the consequences of disobedience as promised in the Law. God's people were then to acknowledge their accountability to this standard by responding with an "Amen" to each promise or threat.

Many aspects of the Law of Moses, however, were instructional and temporary. For example, the Mosaic Law declared some foods clean and others unclean in order to drive home the need for God's people to distinguish between what is holy and what is unholy. When Jesus came, He declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19). The animal sacrifices and offerings required by the Law were fulfilled by Christ (Heb. 10:1). These sacrifices were "shadows" of Christ's sacrifice and were never meant (or able) to remove sin. Instead, they pointed to the suffering of Jesus Christ who would offer Himself "once for all" (Heb. 7:27; 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Ultimately, the same moral standard lies behind both Testaments. That standard is righteousness as God defines it-and He alone has the authority to define it. Can you identify the principles that lie behind the warnings in today's reading? For example, what would be a modern equivalent to moving a neighbor's boundary stone? What universal moral principle informs the commands that deal with sexual practices in these verses?

Deuteronomy 27:6

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THE obvious intention of this precept was to prevent idolatry, lest the people should think more of the altar than of Jehovah who was worshipped there. Beware of anything that would divert men's thoughts from God.

Build your Addresses of unhewn stones.--When speaking to men, Paul determined to erect structures of unhewn stones, eschewing worldly wisdom, that the power of God might burn more conspicuously on the altar of his words. He knew that his speech and his preaching could never be in persuasive words of human wisdom, and it was his fixed determination to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. If you spend too much time in cutting the stones of your address, your hearers will probably be more occupied with their artistic grace than with the Divine fire that should burn upon them.

Build your Prayers of unhewn stones.--The expressions of some men in prayer are so exquisitely chiselled that you keep wondering what they will say next, and how. Their prayers stand as beautiful altars on which there is no fire. Oh for the strong cryings and tears of a Spirit-taught man, expressing the real need of his nature, rather than the exquisite beauty of an oration to God!

Build your Inner life of unhewn stones.--Do not keep looking to see how you are performing the acts of consecration, confession, devotion. The least you think of these the better, that your entire thought may be concentrated on t, he great God and His Presence. There must be sincerity in our acts of consecration. One inch of rising flame is better than yards of chiselled stone!

Deuteronomy 28:1 Ezra 6:13-22

If you fully obey the Lord your God ... [he] will set you high above all the nations on earth. - Deuteronomy 28:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Sometimes God's people are very slow to learn the lessons He teaches. Israel's centuries-long infatuation with idolatry is Exhibit A of this fact. It took the destruction of the temple and seventy years of Babylonian captivity before God's chosen people finally put away the false gods of the pagan nations. Idolatry was never again the problem for Israel the way it had been before the exile.

The returning leaders of Israel learned this lesson so well that one of the recurring themes in Ezra and Nehemiah is their determination to worship and live in accordance with God's commands (vv. 18, 20–21). It was this commitment, and God's promise to restore and bless His people following their captivity, that brought the Jerusalem temple to completion in 515 B.C. This was more than four years after the work was resumed at the urging of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and about twenty-three years after the first exiles arrived in Jerusalem.

The joy at the temple's dedication is easy to understand. The people had seen God turn a potential threat, Tattenai and his officials, into their "bank account" for the needs of the work. When the foundation had been laid, the older men cried because the new temple was so much smaller and less glorious than Solomon's. One indication of this is the smaller number of animals offered in sacrifice at this dedication as compared to Solomon's offerings (v. 17, cf. 1 Kings 8:62–63).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Reflect for a few minutes on some of the lessons God has taught you recently. Write them down if it will help you recall the circumstances, people, and Scripture that God used to show you an important truth about your work, finances, family, or some other issue. Then consider some questions about your list. For instance, were you quick to learn the lesson, or did it come to you with difficulty? Have these experiences made you more sensitive to and aware of God's leading? Finish your time of reflection with a prayer for wisdom to "fully obey the Lord" at all times and to discern God's direction.

Deuteronomy 28:1-14

The LORD will open the heavens ... to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. - Deuteronomy 28:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

During his ministry as a pastor, Dr. Joseph Stowell was approached by a successful young businessman in the church. This man was advancing in his career, having become the head of a large cable television company. But he was also growing in his Christian faith, and finally came to a crossroads. He had come to the conviction that he was helping to "market unrighteousness" through his company, and he didn't feel that he could continue and still honor God and be a righteous man. Not long after, this young executive resigned his position, even though he had no other job lined up. The financial security his job offered could not compare to the security of a guilt-free conscience.

Yesterday we saw the dangers of forgetting God. Today we're looking at the other side of the coin--the benefits of honoring God. The promises of blessing are abundant in these verses, but notice that this entire section is conditional, dependent on the opening clause, "If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands" (v. 1).

This is addressed to Israel and is a national promise in its immediate application. But this principle--that obeying God brings blessing--is woven throughout the Scripture. One example is 2 Corinthians 9:8-11, part of a passage we studied last week (see the August 8 devotional). The obedience in this case relates to our giving, which is another way we can honor God through our work.

If you're in a job where putting God first is possible, or even encouraged, you have a reason to thank the Lord. But what if you face conflict like the executive in the opening story? There is not one simple, all-inclusive guideline that can be applied in every situation.

But that's doesn't mean we are left to figure things out on our own. God was clearly doing a work in that executive's heart. God showed him what had to be done, even without the immediate security of another job.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This is a good day to memorize some Scripture that God may use to help you make an important decision.

Deuteronomy 28:1-68

What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! - Romans 6:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Newton's third law of motion states: "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." According to Newton's law, every

action has the potential to set something in motion. This is also true in the spiritual realm-but the consequences of obedience or disobedience are not always equal to the actions that set them in motion. The blessings we receive from obedience are often greater than our small efforts to please God. Likewise, the consequences of disobedience reach beyond us to affect those around us, and even have the potential to affect generations to come.

Two striking features characterize the curses in today's reading. First, most threaten to reverse the promised blessings. The Lord warned Israel that if they broke His covenant He would treat them the same way He had treated their enemies. Although they would not cease to be His chosen people, they would forfeit many of the benefits they had enjoyed as a result of that relationship. Second, we see that the curses seem to outnumber the blessings.

Certainly, this underscored the seriousness of disobedience. But it also pointed to the ultimate purpose of the Mosaic Law-as God's instrument to show us our need for redemption from sin. Although the commands of the Law were intended to bring life, the reality of sin means that they are only able to produce death (Rom. 7:10). When God's Law comes into contact with the sinful nature the result is toxic. Sin produces within us the very things God's Law forbids (Rom. 7:7-11). This is the reason no one can be justified by trying to obey the Law (Gal. 3:10-11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The blessings and curses in today's passage allowed God's people to think through the consequences of their choices before making a decision. We can do the same by meditating on the past consequences of some of the sinful choices we have made and comparing them to the blessings we have experienced as a result of obedience. If you were to divide your past experiences into "blessings" and "curses," what would your list include? Who, besides yourself, was affected by these consequences? What motivation do they offer for future obedience?

Deuteronomy 28:1-14

All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God. - Deuteronomy 28:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Medical research suggests that natural substances found in tea help stop blood clotting, balance the damaging effects of oxygen (such as fatty deposits in the arteries), and boost the production of disease-fighting enzymes.

According to one study, a daily cup of black tea reduces the chance of a heart attack by 44 percent. Another study found that drinking tea can protect against or slow down the growth of some forms of cancer. Yet another study discovered that people drinking one or two cups of tea per day lowered their chances of arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) by 46 percent.

Moses prescribed a more powerful health tip to the Israelites: obeying God. The precise sequence of public reading is unclear in Deuteronomy 27–28, but these blessings and curses were definitely meant to be read on public occasions. Yesterday, the Israelites agreed that there were consequences to the covenant; today, they recited the good consequences of obedience. Lists of blessings and curses for keeping or breaking a covenant were part of the form of the suzerain-vassal treaty (see July 1 study).

If the people obeyed the Lord, staying on His straight and narrow path, they would be blessed everywhere they went and in everything they did: in their homes, in their fields, in battle, and in any endeavor they undertook. "The Lord will make you the head, not the tail ... you will always be at the top, never at the bottom" (Dt 28:13).

Does this mean good people never suffer? No, but it does mean that God unfailingly works for our good, and that obedience is always the best choice (Ro 8:28-note).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

To dig deeper into the idea of blessings and curses surrounding obedience and disobedience, we urge you to do a follow-up study in the New Testament. Using a Bible handbook or concordance, search out and make a list of at least ten New Testament statements about the significance and consequences of obedience and disobedience to God (for example, Heb. 2:2-note and Acts 5:29). How do these verses compare to Deuteronomy? What key truths do both reveal? Share what you learn with a friend or family member.

Deuteronomy 28:15-29:1

All these curses ... will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord. - Deuteronomy 28:45

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the worst natural disasters in history demolished the ancient Greek coastal city of Helike in 373 B.C. An earthquake followed

by a giant tidal wave pulverized the city and swept it into the sea. For centuries, the ruins could be seen just offshore, but eventually the city's location was extinguished.

Until now. Greek and American researchers believe they've located Helike, at a once-submerged site that's now about half a mile inland. They have uncovered a road that they hope will lead them to the city center, and are digging for more. It took only one night for Helike to fall victim to natural disaster. Similarly, warned Moses, Israel could speedily succumb to spiritual disaster. How? By disobeying the terms of God's covenant.

The curses found in today's reading form a mirror image to yesterday's blessings. This section is longer, in part because it seems that this was normal in such covenants, and perhaps as a foreshadowing of Israel's failure to keep the covenant. Deuteronomy 28:49 and following could very well be a prophecy regarding the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. The description here matches well with later history, even including the horrible detail of cannibalism (Dt 28:53; cf. 2Kings 6:24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30).

The images in these verses are startling and graphic, and the rhetorical style--pounding and relentless. Disobey, warned Moses, and they'd suffer disease, drought, oppression, and madness. There would be no one to rescue them, as the Lord did in Egypt. In a cruel irony, the Israelites would suffer the diseases of Egypt (including boils, one of the plagues). There would be suffering, misery, desperation, and degradation. Instead of being a witness to the nations, they'd become a "thing of horror" and an "object of scorn and ridicule" (Dt 28:37). Scattered in a worldwide diaspora, they'd be always anxious, weary, and unsure of their lives.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Whether or not you listed it in the Bible study recommended in yesterday's "Today Along the Way," we know that the ultimate consequence of disobedience is hell. Those who persist in unbelief will receive the wages of sin: death.

Deuteronomy 28:47-48

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

WE must serve. It is our nature. Our Lord never suggested a third course as an alternative to the service of God or mammon, as though it were possible to escape all service whatsoever. We either yield ourselves servants of righteousness unto holiness, or of iniquity unto iniquity; and to whom we yield ourselves servants to obey, his we are.

It is a solemn thought: if we are not serving God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, we are serving things which are our worst enemies. A man has no worse foe than himself when he lives to serve his own whims and desires. These habits, and appetites, and fashions, are luxurious and pleasant just now; but their silken cords will become iron bands.

On the other hand, if we would be secure from the service which hurts us, let us give ourselves to the Lord to serve Him with joyfulness and gladness. Do you ask the source of these? Remember, He will put gladness into thy heart; joy is the fruit of His Spirit. When thou art in a healthy state, joyfulness and gladness rise spontaneously in the soul, as music from song-birds. When the sacrifice begins, then will the song of the Lord begin.

The heart finds the well-spring of perennial blessedness when it has yielded itself absolutely and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ. If He is Alpha and Omega; if our faith, however feebly, looks up to Him; if we press on to know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship Of His sufferings; if we count all things but loss for the excellency of His knowledge--we may possess ourselves in peace amid the mysteries of life, and we shall have learned the blessed secret of serving the Lord "with joyfulness and with gladness of heart."

Deuteronomy 29:2-29

Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do. - Deuteronomy 29:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the former Soviet Union, the government frequently published maps that were deliberately falsified or erroneous. Towns, rivers, and roads were misplaced or mislabeled. Places were left out. Street maps were inaccurate.

Why? National security. The reasoning was that the less people knew about these things, the more trouble foreign spies and soldiers would have in undermining or invading the country. It was part of a concept called "maskirovka," meaning misdirection, camouflage, misinformation, or diversion. Such a strategy mostly led to confusion and inefficiency. To get where they're going, people need accurate maps. For God's people, the covenant recounted in Deuteronomy was a roadmap for living, one that was wholly accurate and truthful.

Deuteronomy 29–30 is the climax of Israel’s renewal of the covenant. Moses charged the nation, formally standing in the presence of God, the initiator of the covenant, to fulfill carefully their duties and obligations under the terms of the covenant (Dt 29:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15).

In Moses’ sermons, the people had heard reminders from their own history, summaries of the Law’s regulations and requirements, and the consequences for obedience and disobedience, interwoven with exhortations to obey and to praise God’s greatness. Interestingly, Moses noted that the nation hadn’t been given the spiritual faculty to comprehend or respond rightly to their experiences (Dt 29:4; cf. Ro 11:7, 8-note). As his life drew to a close, he took one last shot at persuading them that their future was wrapped up in their covenant relationship and identity.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses exhorted the Israelites to remember the Lord their God, to be mindful of His commands, and to be dedicated to living out their covenant relationship with Him. With this in mind, ask the Holy Spirit to probe your heart today. How’s your commitment? Has it grown a little cool toward the things of God? Have you lost your “first love” (Rev 2:4,5-[note](#))? Do you treat salvation as some sort of “fire insurance” and do what you please? Are you living out your holy calling?

Deuteronomy 29:19

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

SO man's foolish heart reasons. He hears the curse pronounced against sin; he knows that the man who turns from God is threatened with gall and wormwood, and yet he persists in his evil ways, secretly blessing himself, and laying the flattering unction to his heart that he at least will come off scot free. Such an one is an abomination to the Lord, and shall not escape: "The Lord will not pardon him, but His anger shall smoke against him." It is still true of the wicked, "that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually."

The only way to peace is by abjuring the stubbornness which sets up its own will and way against God's. Is not this the secret of the unrest of your soul--that you have never perfectly yielded to God? You know that if others did as you do, and cherished the dispositions that you permit, you would instantly condemn them, and assure them of the incompatibility of soul-rest and such things as these; but you bless yourself, and say, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart."

Ask God to take the stubbornness out of you, to rid you of your hard heart, to bring you into loving, gentle subordination to Himself; to fulfill His promise in your experience, "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh." Return and submit. Take His yoke and learn of Him. Bow down at His feet. Let every step of your daily walk be taken in the track of His holy will. So shall you find rest unto your soul; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7, R. V.).

Deuteronomy 29:24 1 Kings 9:1-9

All the nations will ask: “Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?” - Deuteronomy 29:24

TODAY IN THE WORD

When storms ravaged the South and Midwest this past spring leaving hundreds dead, some asked whether this devastation could be a sign from God. A few suggested that these disasters were evidence that the end of the world was near. The difficulty with drawing conclusions like this is that we have no sure way of testing whether our interpretation of events is correct. Without some clear indication from God, we cannot be certain whether a storm is just a storm, a result of natural weather causes, or something more. Every difficulty is a solemn reminder of our need for grace and forgiveness, but not every disaster is an act of divine judgment (see Luke 13:1-5).

After Solomon finished the temple the Lord appeared to him. This was the second time the Lord had appeared to Solomon. The first time He offered to grant the young king anything he wanted. Solomon asked for the wisdom to lead (1 Kings 3:7-10). The second time the Lord appeared with a warning. God’s choice to manifest His presence in the temple at Jerusalem would not excuse Israel from the consequences of their sin. In the same way, the Lord’s promise to grant David a dynasty did not relieve Solomon of the obligation to obey. If he or his sons chose to follow other gods, judgment would follow. Israel’s expulsion from the land and the desolation of the temple would be the proof that these things had been done by the hand of God.

Sadly these words were both a foreshadowing of the future and a warning to Solomon. Despite God’s gift of wisdom, Solomon chose to serve other gods (1 Kings 11:1-4). His unfaithfulness was the beginning of a long downward spiral that would culminate in

Israel's exile and the destruction of the temple.

As the Lord promised, this serves as a warning that we should not take the grace of God for granted. The Lord loves His own but He also disciplines them (Heb. 12:6). Although divine discipline is painful, it is proof of God's abiding love; it is for our good, and His ultimate goal is to make us holy (Heb. 12:10).

APPLY THE WORD

How can we tell whether our circumstances are divine judgment or simply the suffering common to all? It's often easier to interpret Scripture than to interpret our experiences. It means that our focus should be on the certainties of God's Word, not on our circumstances. We depend on wisdom from God's Spirit, which we gain from spending time with Him in prayer and in His Word. No matter what our situation, it is always appropriate to turn to the Lord in prayer as His children

Deuteronomy 30:1-20

Now choose life, so that you and your children may live. - Deuteronomy 30:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Following the terrorist attacks last September 11, Americans were looking for some security, some peace of mind. Many bought survival self-help books, ordered gas masks, and stockpiled first aid equipment and medicine.

Some exotic products were also rushed to market. By hiding under a "bomb blanket," for example, a person can be shielded from the shrapnel and fragments of an exploding bomb. For those trapped at the top of a skyscraper, there's the "Executivechute," an emergency parachute designed to be used from tall buildings.

How about us? Where do we find security? In what do we put our trust? When life is on the line, what do we do? That's the question Moses put before the nation in today's reading.

In addition, he predicted their faithlessness. Despite the consequences of life and death, he basically assumed Israel would disobey and suffer what was described in the curses. At that time, the people should recall to mind the covenant and take it to heart, returning to the Lord with renewed vows of obedience. For His part, God would be merciful and would hear them when they call; He would return them to the land and to a state of blessing and prosperity. He'd delight again in His people, and circumcise their hearts (Dt 30:6). On their own, they're unable to love God wholeheartedly, so He'll do for them what they're unable to do for themselves.

This "forgiveness clause" isn't found in other Near Eastern covenants or treaties. But with God, a broken covenant can be restored. There's hope. God's mercy never runs out. No matter how far away His people have been exiled, He can bring them home (Dt 30:4). His Word is in their hearts--He Himself has given them the power to obey (Dt 30:14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As it had been for the Israelites, life is also at stake for people today in their relationship with God. Are you rightly related to Him?

Deuteronomy 30:1-20

Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved. - Psalm 80:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

Early one February morning while Leyla Nordby slept, her 13-month-old daughter Erika slipped quietly out the door of the home where they were staying and wandered off, clothed only in a diaper and a pink dress. Several hours later her frantic mother found her lying face down in the snow. Erika's body temperature had dropped by more than half, her veins were frozen, and a cardiac monitor failed to register any measurable pumping action by her heart. Clinically speaking, Erika was dead. Doctors had prepared a heart-lung bypass to try and warm her blood when something remarkable happened. Little Erika's heart suddenly began beating again on its own. "How that happened," the paramedic on the scene later observed, "is a mystery to everyone right now."

Moses foresaw a time when Israel would share a similar experience. He promised that after suffering the consequences of their own disobedience, Israel's fortunes would be restored. Their cold hearts would begin to beat once again for God. Turning back to God, however, would require more than a mere act of the will. It would need intervention by God Himself. He would have to give them "a mind that understands," "eyes that see," and "ears that hear" (Deut. 29:4).

This promise of reconciliation was contingent on Israel's future repentance. Before it could come to pass, they would need to "take to heart" all the blessings and punishments they had experienced at God's hand (Deut. 30:1). Moses made it equally clear that such a repentance was itself a work of divine compassion. God alone was able to "circumcise" their hearts and create within them an

ability to love Him with their hearts and souls (Deut. 30:6).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Read Deuteronomy 29:1-29. How did God expect Israel to respond to His Word? What did He expect them to learn from their experiences? One of Israel's problems seems to have been their inability to process their experiences through the grid of divine truth. Consider using a spiritual journal to keep you from making the same mistake. As you record your experiences, think about what God's Word has to say about your circumstances and try to discover the spiritual lessons He has hidden in the ordinary events of your day.

Deuteronomy 30:6

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

CIRCUMCISION is the sign of separation. It was enjoined on Abraham and his children that they might be God's peculiar people, chosen from all the nations of the earth. Similarly, the circumcision of Christ, which is made without hands, of which the Apostle speaks, is a putting off, a separation from the sins of the flesh, a participation in the grave and burial of Christ (Col. 2:12-note).

We must be separated from the spirit and temper of the world. Between us and its sins, ambitions, methods, there must be not only an outward, but a heart severance. We were separated in the purpose of God when Jesus was cast without the camp to die. But we must be separate in our personal behavior. Wouldst thou have this? Then claim that this promise should be fulfilled, and ask that God would circumcise thine heart--the seat of thine affections, the hearth of thy soul-life.

Then thou wilt love the Lord with all thine, heart. This is why we love God so little. The force of our love is spread over too wide a sur-face-it is like the river Orinoco, which is lost in swamps as it approaches the sea. If only we were really separated from all that is alien to God, and, given up to Him wholly, we should find all the capacity of our hearts becoming filled with His love. We should love all things and people with a tenderness and glow which were steeped in colors obtained from His.

You will never succeed in overthrowing the strongholds of Satan, Christian worker, till God has taken away your self-reliance, and has brought you down into the dust of death: then, when the sentence of death is in yourself you will begin to experience the energy of the Divine life, the glory of the Divine victory.

Deuteronomy 31:1-29

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. - Deuteronomy 31:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

At many churches, job descriptions for volunteer positions often include a line something like this one: "In consultation with church leaders, find, mentor, and train an appropriate replacement for this ministry." In other words, part of answering a call and accepting the responsibilities of a ministry, whether large or small, is to make sure the work continues after you've moved on.

Moses understood this principle well. In these last four days of our study, we'll see him finish his 120-year pilgrimage and wind up his affairs. Naturally, the issue of succession was key. Though it was God who'd done the real work, and though Moses knew that and had given Him all the glory, when a leader leaves, there is a vacuum. That was certainly true with Moses, the only human leader the recently liberated nation had ever known.

Joshua would be the one to take his place. Chosen by God, appointed by Moses, and publicly commissioned in today's reading, he was already known as a skilled military leader. It might have been tempting for the people to put their faith in his abilities, so Moses reminded them to trust in God alone for victory in the Promised Land. To Joshua, stepping into some very big shoes, Moses said, "Be strong and courageous," a theme that carries into the book of Joshua (Dt 31:7, 8, 23; cf. Josh. 1:6, 7, 8, 9).

Another important matter was writing down the Law. God had entrusted His words to Moses, and Moses in turn entrusted them to the Levites. The covenant was the foundation of Israel's existence and their guide to a right relationship with the Lord. A copy of a suzerain-vassal treaty was customarily placed at the nation's religious center; in Israel's case, a copy of the Law was placed before the Ark of the Covenant. But the Word wasn't a museum exhibit! Every seventh year, it was to be read publicly to the entire nation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We hope that during this month's study of Deuteronomy you've also gained greater insight into and respect for the life and character of Moses. He was a dynamic leader and a powerful intercessor; he had an all-consuming love for God and His people.

Deuteronomy 31:1-8; Numbers 27:12-23

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. - Deuteronomy 31:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

In many countries, the transfer of power is neither regular nor peaceful. Military coups, civil wars, or dictators who refuse to leave office contribute to unstable or violent conditions. We should not take for granted the peaceful transfer in the United States; every four years in January, the occupant of the White House greets the newly elected President and then graciously leaves.

As the time approached for Moses' death, the transfer of power was peaceful. Joshua was commissioned as Moses' successor by the command of God. He had been referred to often in Scripture as Moses' assistant. He had been at Moses' side at the most crucial times of the Exodus. He had privileges that no one other than Moses had, specifically those that allowed him access to the presence of God. He had met with God at the Tent of Meeting. He ascended with Moses to the top of Mount Sinai. Moses had the confidence to lead the Israelites based on the assurance that God was with him, and this guarantee was now given to Joshua. Joshua had also proven his capacity for leadership. He successfully led the military effort against the Amalekites. He had also shown courage when the twelve spies returned from their exploratory mission to the Promised Land. He and Caleb were the only ones with the faith to believe that God's power trumped the giants in the land. He had seen God act miraculously to bring them out of Egypt, and he believed that God had the power to bring the Israelites into the Promised Land.

These were qualifications that Joshua needed to lead the people. Deuteronomy 31 reiterates that God, not Moses and not Joshua, was ultimately the leader of the Israelites. He was the one going before them, the one who ensured their victory.

But Moses recognized that the people were a hapless bunch of lost sheep, and they needed a shepherd. So God invested His authority in Joshua, just as He had in Moses.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If we are in positions of leadership, one of our most important jobs is to train the next generation of leaders. We need to be investing ourselves intentionally in those promising leaders of tomorrow. Like Moses, we can do this by extending an invitation to come alongside us in the work of ministry that we do. We can also delegate certain responsibilities to others now, while we can yet oversee and guide them. Finally, we can commission them publicly for leadership, conveying our confidence in their call and capacities.

Deuteronomy 31:7

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

JOSHUA is ever the type of our blessed Jesus. Joshua not only won Canaan for his people by his faith in the gift of God, coupled with his strenuous efforts, but he caused them to inherit it. Jesus not only won the wealth of the heavenlies for His Church by His death and resurrection, but He waits to cause us to inherit it through the Holy Spirit which He gives.

How great is our heritage! Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ! All things that pertain to life and godliness await our appropriation! All spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus! There is no conceivable grace or virtue, no fabric of the Divine looms for the soul's dress, no ornament of heavenly jewellery for the soul's adorning, no weapon of celestial temper for the soul's equipment, no salve or balm of Divine comfort for the soul's healing, which is not ours in Jesus. The Father has given Him to have life in Himself that He might give us life more abundantly. He is full of grace and truth, that out of His fullness we all may receive. He received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, that He might pour Him forth in Pentecostal fullness. But we do not possess our possessions. We are like people who have sent all their valuables to the strong-room of a bank, and never by any chance make use of them.

This is a lack which Jesus can also supply. He can cause us to inherit: first, by His Spirit He reveals the lavishness of the Divine possession; next He excites an appetite of desire; next, He begets the expectant faith that claims; and, lastly, He becomes to us each one of these things, so that we are enriched in Him, and possessing Him, find that all things are really ours.

Deuteronomy 31:30-32:52

He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. - Deuteronomy 32:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Many Asian cultures value and nurture filial piety, which, in part, means honoring and obeying one's parents and grandparents and

putting family duty above personal desires. Many Asian proverbs capture the idea that children can never repay their parents, especially their mothers, for giving them life. Even today, a Chinese college student on her birthday might telephone her parents to thank them. In such cultures, a child's ingratitude is especially heinous. Few worse forms of selfishness and wickedness can be imagined.

Something like this is behind the father-child relationship described in Moses' psalm (cf. Rev. 15:3, 4-note). Though this passage is often called the "song of Moses," perhaps it should be called the "song of God," since it seems to be the song referred to in Deuteronomy 31:19, 20, 21, 22. In those verses, God had spoken about a song that would be a reminder or a witness against the people's future rebellion. And indeed, this song acknowledges the nation's covenant responsibilities and the justice of God's judgment upon them for disobedience.

The psalm starkly contrasts God and Israel. He is worthy of praise, the Rock, just, perfect, faithful, upright, and holy. He'd sovereignly chosen Israel from among the nations, and nurtured it as the "apple of His eye." He'd taken care of the nation like a mother bird cares for her chicks, and richly provided for all their needs (Dt 31:10,11). But blessing and comfort brought forgetfulness, and Israel abandoned God. They failed to honor and worship Him, and betrayed their identity as His children (Dt 31:5, 6, 18).

Though the nation acted senselessly, after God's just anger and judgment of its apostasy, the Lord would have compassion on His people and vanquish their enemies. "He will avenge the blood of His servants ... and make atonement for His land and people" (Dt 31:43).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you wish, respond creatively to today's devotion by writing a song of your own. You could imitate Moses by including praise of God; spiritual summaries of personal, family, and national history; and rhetorical questions about how following God is the only option that makes sense. Be sure that your psalm or song puts God and His glory at the center. God is pleased when we make new songs (Ps. 40:3)!

Deuteronomy 32:1-33:29

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. - Ephesians 5:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Ira Sankey was the song leader and hymn writer for D. L. Moody's evangelistic campaigns. On one occasion Sankey was traveling on a steamer down the Delaware River when a group of passengers asked him to sing a hymn. Sankey led the group in the hymn by William Bradbury entitled, "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us."

When he had finished, a man stepped forward with a question. "Were you ever in the army, Mr. Sankey?" he asked. "Yes, I joined in 1860," Sankey replied. Hearing this, the man asked another question: "Did you do guard duty at night in Maryland, about 1862?" "Yes, I did," Sankey answered, wondering why the man wanted to know such a thing. "Well, I was in the Confederate army," the man explained. "I saw you one night at Sharpsburg. I had you in my gun sight as you stood there in the light of the moon. Then just as I was about to pull the trigger, you began to sing. It was the same hymn you sang tonight. I couldn't shoot you."

Songs of worship have the power to shape our thinking about biblical truth. Corporate worship is a divinely ordained vehicle for instruction. It can teach us about God's faithfulness and remind us of our need for His grace. In view of this, it is fitting that Moses concluded his ministry to Israel with a song. It recounted God's dealing with His people from Israel's birth as a nation to the present. Its recurring themes revolved around the contrast between God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness. Moses' song also served a prophetic function by predicting Israel's future rejection of Yahweh to follow the gods of the surrounding nations.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Moses' song offers a helpful corrective in an age where the quality of worship is largely defined by how good it makes us feel. But there is more to God's blessing than feeling good. He may want to use worship to convict us of our sin. He may want use it to teach us some new truth from His Word, or remind us of an old truth we've forgotten. He may even want to use it to change our behavior. Find a hymnal and spend some time reading or singing through it. Ask God to speak to you, and resolve to listen to what He says even if it feels uncomfortable.

Deuteronomy 32:1-9

He is the Rock... A faithful God who does no wrong. - Deuteronomy 32:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Colonial leader William Penn was determined to deal with the American Indians in his region as equals, taking no land without their consent. At the treaty ceremony with the Delaware nation on June 23, 1683, Penn said: ""We are met on the path of mutual respect and fair dealing. No advantage will be taken on either side, but there shall be openness and love... We are as if one man's body were divided into two parts.""

The Delaware leaders answered: ""While the sun shines and the river runs, we will keep peace with William Penn and his children.""

It's refreshing to read about a human pact based on honesty, trust, and even love. No wonder the peace that was secured that day lasted seventy-five years! Examples of this kind of faithfulness between individuals and nations are all too rare in history.

But when we consider the way God has dealt with His creation, the record reveals unbroken faithfulness. Near the end of his life, as he spoke to a nation poised on the edge of the Promised Land, Moses had a message he wanted to burn into the Israelites' hearts.

The theme of this address was straightforward. ""God has been faithful to Israel. If we will obey and serve Him, He will continue to bless and protect us. If we disobey and dishonor Him, we will face His judgment.""

Moses put his message in the form of a song (see 31:30) that called on heaven and earth to acknowledge his testimony. Then Israel's liberator gave a stirring tribute to Israel's faithful God.

This is the first of several passages we will encounter this month that either feature someone praising God for His faithfulness, or urge us to do so ourselves. If your heart is so full of gratitude to God that you don't think you can contain it any longer, you don't have to! Share what you know. Introduce someone else to the God who keeps His Word and will ""save completely"" anyone who comes to Him through Christ (Heb. 7:25).

Moses was full of praise to the God who can do no wrong, whose dealings with us are always perfect and just (vv. 3-4). God is faithful to Israel; He will be faithful to you.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Did you notice Moses' word of warning to the people in light of God's faithfulness (vv. 5-6)?

What a timely word to our country, our neighbors, and all the nations of the world. To paraphrase Moses, acting unfaithfully toward God by allowing sin and corruption to flourish is a poor way to repay God for His goodness. Today, let's pray that God will forgive our unfaithfulness and give nations around the world a new reverence for His holiness and a renewed sense of the awfulness of sin.

Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 139:7-16

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. - Psalm 139:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his work *Metaphysics*, the ancient philosopher Aristotle sought to explain the world around him—its different qualities, quantities, and movements. He concluded that if all things are set in motion by something else, then there must be some original Being which itself is unmoved. Later on, the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas used a similar idea as a proof for the existence of God. Behind the world stands God as the great Unmoved Mover.

For many Christians and non-Christians alike, this notion of God as Unmoved Mover translates into a distorted picture of a distant, powerful, yet impersonal deity behind the world. While "God-behind-it-all" may be an effective apologetic tool in certain situations, it pales in comparison to the God of the Bible. The God of Scripture not only created the world and us, but He also seeks us out and calls us into relationship with Himself as our Father.

Psalm 139 gives us a wonderful description of God's creative power and presence. God, says Scripture, is everywhere. There is no place where we can escape His presence (139:7-12). In fact, as today's passage declares, it was God who made us, who "knit me together in my mother's womb" (v. 13). Nothing is hidden from God's eye, including our very conception and birth (v. 15). Even the very days of our life "were written in your book before one of them came to be" (v. 16). Lest we think we are our own makers, today's psalm reminds us of our true creator and sustainer: God.

The second text for today, from Deuteronomy, reveals something further. The one who "made you and formed you" is deemed not just Creator, but also "Father" (Deut. 32:6). There is an intimate relationship with our creator God whether we realize it or not. He is not just a powerful deity who forms us and steps away. He fashions us and then, astonishingly, calls us into relationship, reminding us that he is our Father as well as Creator.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Advent marks the season when the church meditates on the coming of Christ long ago and also prepares us for His coming again in the future. Make this first week in Advent a time of contemplation on God the Creator-Father who cared enough about His creation to send His only Son into the world for our salvation. Try reading all of Psalm 139 today in light of God's fatherhood, reflecting on how His presence and intimate knowledge of us reflects His care for us as our Father.

Deuteronomy 32:9-29 Plan Your Departure! - Our Daily Bread

Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! Deuteronomy 32:29

All of us need to make specific plans for our departure from this life. If we don't, we can be left in a predicament similar to that of a young man who became stranded in an Alaskan wilderness. His adventure began in the spring of 1981 when he was flown into the desolate north country to photograph the natural beauty and mysteries of the tundra. He had photo equipment, 500 rolls of film, several firearms, and 1400 pounds of provisions. As the months passed, the entries in his diary, which at first detailed his wonder and fascination with the wildlife around him, turned into a pathetic record of a nightmare. In August he wrote, "I think I should have used more foresight about arranging my departure. I'll soon find out." He waited and waited, but no one came to his rescue. In November he died in a nameless valley, by a nameless lake, 225 miles northeast of Fairbanks. An investigation revealed that he had carefully mapped out his venture, but had made no provision to be flown out of the area.

In the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy we read that the Israelites made a similar mistake. For a while they had all they needed, but it soon became obvious that they had given no thought to the outcome of worshipping false gods and living for their own enjoyment. They failed to consider "their latter end."

Have you thought about your exit from life? Trusting Christ as Savior and living for Him each day is the only way to be sure we have prepared for our departure. -M.R.D.II

O Lord, You'd have us ponder this,
One truth You'd have us see—
It's in this life we chart our course
For all eternity.-D.J.D.

You can't repent too soon, for you know not how soon it may be too late.

Deuteronomy 32:35, Acts 5:1-16

Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. - Acts 5:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

Reciting the text of Deuteronomy 32:35, 38-year-old Jonathan Edwards opened what would become his most famous sermon: "Here the Lord warns us that sudden destruction falls upon the wicked. There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell but the mere pleasure of God. O sinner, consider the fearful danger you are in." The sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," left the congregants of Enfield, Connecticut, quaking with fear, some even crying aloud for God's mercy.

That's the kind of fear inspired by today's story. Luke, the author of the book of Acts, records for us a turning point for the early Christian church. The followers of Jesus were just beginning to understand their new identity in Jesus. They were figuring it out day by day as they met together for meals and worship and to sit under the Apostles' teaching. They knew the gospel of Jesus Christ demanded a sharing of resources, and they became radically generous with one another. Wealthy disciples sold property and donated the proceeds to the church. The poor were being cared for in their midst.

Ananias and Sapphira saw this generous outpouring. They, too, sold property, but rather than donate all of the proceeds (which was not commanded), they chose to hold back a portion. Their sin was not in withholding some of the money from the sale; rather, their sin was in claiming that they had turned over all the proceeds to the disciples.

The consequence for their sin was swift and severe. It sent shivers down the spine of every believer and nonbeliever alike. God knew the secrets of men's hearts. And not only that, He was revealing those secrets to the Apostles! The church was altered by this event, for now it was unmistakable that the gathering of believers in Jesus was a holy assembly where God's presence was real.

APPLY THE WORD - What would it look like for the church today to walk in the fear of the Lord? What would change if we became acutely aware that God was witness to all we said and did? Pray for the leaders in your church today, that they would walk in the fear of the Lord. Pray that your church would experience growth as the result of new believers being added to your numbers when they marvel at the visible work of God in your midst.

Deuteronomy 32:11

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THREE references are made to the eagle in this passage.

She stirs up her nest.--When her fledglings are old enough to fly, but linger around the few bits of stick, dignified as a nest, the mother-bird breaks it up, and scatters them. How much better this, than that they should miss the luxury of flight on outspread pinions in the blue vault, and of basking in the eye of the sun. So when the Father sees His children clinging to earth's bare rocks, captured and held by the poor sticks they have gathered, and missing the ascension-glory, He breaks up the nest. The fortune is dispersed, the home broken up, the aspect of the life changed. We are then able to enjoy the bliss of life in the heavenlies with Christ Jesus.

She flutters over her young.--They stand scared and wretched on the edge of the rock, but she careers gently above them, now edging around, now mounting, then dropping far below to rise again. So would she allure them to follow her example. Here again we have an emblem of God's efforts to make us imitators of Himself, to teach us the possibilities that await us in Jesus.

She spreads forth her wings and takes them.--Incited by the mother's endeavors, the eaglet may venture on the untried air, and lo! the unaccustomed wings fail beneath its weight. It falls, but not far, for the mother swoops beneath, and bears it up and away. Trembling soul, God is beneath thee. If thy faith fails, and thou art falling, like another Peter, into a bottomless abyss, He will catch thee, and bear thee up, and teach thee the mystery of the more abundant life.

Deuteronomy 32:39 Hosea 5:8-15

There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal. - Deuteronomy 32:39

TODAY IN THE WORD

Judging from the number of advertisements for pharmaceuticals and weight-loss products, it appears that Americans are increasingly focused on getting physically healthy—or at least thinner. Even as obesity rates climb and many poor people find access to health care restricted, the obsession with an ideal standard of health and fitness sells magazines and gets television viewers to tune in.

The people of Israel were more concerned with their physical health than their spiritual well-being, and their search for healing was desperate and futile. On many occasions, God showed His power to heal those who called out to Him for mercy. But God also showed His power by bringing affliction to people who rebelled against Him. God compared Himself to a moth and to rot (v. 12)! His glory had not diminished at all, but His relationship with Israel had switched from healer to destroyer.

Today's passage references Israel's attempt to find help from Assyria, their future captors. But even the greatest human king could not save Israel from the wrath of God, whether it came in the form of disease (v. 13) or violence (v. 14). Israel's decision to turn to a foreign ruler instead of their own sovereign Lord illustrated just how clouded their minds had become.

Verses 8 and 9 raise an alarm of panic in Israel about the judgment coming to them, but God made it clear in verse 15 that He would not be rushing in to save them. He was done playing the role of healer and protector for a reckless nation. The prophecy from Hosea was God's final call to the people of Israel. For some time following Hosea's ministry, God would retreat into silence and wait for a trembling, hurting people to return to Him. In His omnipresence, God could never leave Israel alone, but in His holy justice, God would seem infinitely distant from the culture so steeped in wickedness. If His Word would not turn Israel back to Him, God's actions would bring on a change of heart.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Some believers presumptuously attribute any natural disaster or epidemic to a specific judgment of God. On the other end of the spectrum, many people naively exclude the possibility of any divine judgment in our world today. Consider these two principles: first, before turning your requests to God in prayer, turn your heart to Him in obedience; and second, instead of trying to interpret the incomprehensible sovereignty of God, follow the Word He has clearly revealed. God will never punish obedience to His commands!

Deuteronomy 33:1-29

Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? - Deuteronomy 33:29

TODAY IN THE WORD

What are you afraid of? What causes your palms to sweat and your heart to beat faster? A Gallup poll taken last spring says the

most popular answer is snakes. More Americans (51 percent) fear snakes than anything else on a list of thirteen items read to them in random order. Runners-up included public speaking, heights, being confined in a small space, spiders and insects, and needles and getting shots.

“Be strong and courageous,” Moses exhorted. “Do not be afraid or terrified because of [the Canaanites], for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6). As believers, we do not live in response to our fears, but on the foundation of our faith.

That’s the message Moses left with the Israelites before he died. In today’s reading, we find his last recorded words—not the bitter prophecy in chapter 31, nor the exhortation in chapter 32, but these words of blessing. The best blessing Moses could give Israel was the Lord who loved them and kept them safe in His hand (Dt 33:2). He came to them at Sinai and revealed His Word. He was their true King (Dt 33:5).

This formal blessing has an almost patriarchal feel to it, and resembles Jacob’s blessing in Genesis 49. Like Jacob, Moses went tribe by tribe, though not all were mentioned. Judah was associated with military success, and Moses prayed that God would “be his help” (Dt 33:7). Levi was commended for faith and zeal and given the privilege of ministry. Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) was blessed with the “fruitfulness of the everlasting hills” and the “favor of Him who dwelt in the burning bush” (Dt 33:15,16; cf. Ge 49:25,26).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Psalm 90 was written by Moses, at the end of Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness. We suggest today that you read it. Though it acknowledges the difficulty of the wanderings and the justice of God in punishing the nation this way, it also shows great faith and love: “Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations... Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days” (Ps. 90:1, 14).

Deuteronomy 33:8

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

WHAT a contrast between the blessings of Jacob and of Moses! In Jacob's farewell charge, we find the ominous words, "Cursed be Levi"; and he foretells that this tribe should be divided and scattered in Israel. But here the curse is turned into a blessing; and the scattering is transformed into a holy ministry for the whole of Israel, "They shall teach Jacob thy judgments and Israel thy law." See to what a place of privilege they are exalted! "They shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt-offering upon thine altar."

If ever there was an illustration of the power we have to turn a curse into a blessing, it is here. Step by step the results of that awful sin, for which Jacob cursed his sons, are changed into benedictions. Where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded; indeed, it has reigned, it has broken out into radiant and royal glory. Do not sit down hopeless, because of the consequences of an early sin that threaten to follow thee to thy grave. Thou mayest yet get honey out of the lion's carcass.

The way to this was by entire devotion to the call of God. After the sin of the golden calf, Levi said of his father and of his mother, I have not seen them; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his children. The cause of God, which Aaron had so ruthlessly betrayed, was dearer to him than the tenderest ties of blood. So he came into God's secret counsels of love, and knew the Urim and Thummim answers of the One whom he loved. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." It is only to those with whom He dwells that He can communicate His blessed will and purposes. Oh, may such bliss be mine!

Deuteronomy 33:25 - Secret of a Happy Life - Our Daily Bread

These two Scripture verses prompted someone to write, “One secret of a happy Christian life is living by the day. It’s the long stretches that tire us. But really, there are no long stretches. Life does not come to us all at once. Tomorrow is not ours; but when it does come, God will supply both daily bread and daily strength.”

As Pastor Philip Doddridge was walking along the street one day, he was feeling depressed and desolate, for something had happened to burden his heart. Passing a small cottage, he heard through the open door the voice of a child reading the words found in Deuteronomy 33:25, “...as your days, so shall your strength be.” The Holy Spirit used that truth to bolster his sinking morale. He was encouraged not to look too far ahead, but just to go on living for the Lord from moment to moment in the consciousness that God would care for him.

Apparently D. L. Moody also learned that secret, for he said, “A man can no more take a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough today to last him for the next 6 months, nor can he inhale sufficient air into his lungs with one breath to sustain life for a week to come. We are permitted to draw upon God’s store of grace from day to day as we need it!”

God never gives His strength in advance, so let's stop crossing bridges before we come to them. The Heavenly Father will graciously supply our every need—one day at a time!

Don't try to bear tomorrow's burdens with today's grace.

Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 40:27-31

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God. - Isaiah 40:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

At the time when most people his age have long ago ridden off into the sunset, Bruce Brown is still in the saddle as a volunteer mounted sheriff's deputy in Oklahoma City. At 85, Mr. Brown is believed to be the oldest mounted sheriff's deputy in the country. He spends many hours on his quarter horse, patrolling public events, helping investigators search for evidence, or visiting with children's groups.

People like Bruce Brown are newsworthy because they seem to defy the norm. Our physical limitations usually become more obvious and tend to take over as we get older. Teenagers may think they're immortal, but that illusion fades as the decades add up. Our days on earth are definitely limited.

Imperfect, powerless people like us need a God who does not wear out, run down, or give up. There's only one God who qualifies; the ""eternal"" or ""everlasting"" God of Israel. Only a God who is eternal is able to stand apart from and above every created thing, untouched by the passing of time and the winding down of His creation.

So while our limitations and weaknesses may frustrate us, our eternal God never suffers any loss at all. Here's another name of God in which we can take real comfort. In fact, comfort is the theme of Isaiah 40: ""Comfort, comfort my people, says your God"" (v. 1).

The people of Israel in Isaiah's day needed comfort. The ten tribes of the northern kingdom were under threat from the Assyrian empire, and would be conquered and taken into captivity in 722 B.C.

This was God's judgment for Israel's sin, but those who remained faithful to Him needed to know God had not forgotten them. Even in the middle of judgment, He would give strength to the weary and restore those who had lost their strength.

It was obvious where Israel needed to put its trust. God's people had been carrying on an illicit love affair with idols for many years, but these manmade gods could not compare to the eternal God. They would rot, tarnish, and topple over (vv. 18-20). Israel's trust was misplaced. Where is your trust today?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you belong to the eternal God, His ""everlasting arms"" are underneath you today.

That reality should help put life's concerns in perspective. What is your biggest need right now or your most worrisome circumstance? It may help to write it down on a card, then put beneath it today's Scripture references. Put the card where you will see it often, and remind God of His promise to uphold and strengthen you when you are weary.

Deuteronomy 33:27 Fall Into His Arms - Our Daily Bread

The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

Deuteronomy 33:27

As I was reading the words of today's text from Deuteronomy, I recalled an old song written by Ada Habershon. "When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast; when the tempter would prevail, He can hold me fast." Say, that's good theology!

A lady who was facing difficult trials and troubling circumstances came to W. B. Hinson at the close of a sermon and said, "I'm very much afraid I might fall." Hinson replied, "Well, why don't you do it?" "But Preacher," she protested, "where would I fall to?" "You would fall down into the everlasting arms of God, came his reply. Then he said, "I have read in the Bible that His everlasting arms are underneath His children. And you know, I believe that if you fall down upon those everlasting arms, it is sure and certain that you will never fall through them."

Yes, the believer can rest in the unflinching strength and support of the omnipotent Father. God bolsters this assurance with a progression of truth in Isaiah 41:10 when He says through the prophet, "I am with thee." "I will strengthen thee." "I will help thee." "I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." And in John 17:11 we read this prayer of our Lord: "Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me." His request will not be thwarted because our Savior has given every believer into the keeping, safeguarding power of the Father. So even when we stumble, we fall into the everlasting arms of His

grace. -P.R.V.

He who to the wind and wave
Commanded, "Peace, be still!"
Stands with arms outstretched to save
And keep you in His will.-Stairs

When we get to the place where there's nothing left but God, we find that God is all we need.

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

And the things you have heard ... entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. - 2 Timothy 2:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his book *Leadership Is an Art*, Max DePree characterizes leadership as a stewardship. "Leadership is a concept of owing certain things to the institution," he explains. "It is a way of thinking about institutional heirs, a way of thinking about stewardship as contrasted with ownership." Moses understood this principle. It was a measure of Moses' humility that he could "walk away" from leadership at the end of his ministry. He knew that God's blessing would not end with the completion of his ministry and that God's people were not dependent upon any single leader, no matter how great that leader might be.

This doesn't mean that every leader is the same. Deuteronomy 34:10 says that Moses was unparalleled as a leader. Imagine how intimidated Joshua must have felt following in his footsteps! While it was true that Joshua was no Moses, it was equally true that he had one great advantage. Joshua was empowered by the same Spirit that had enabled Moses to be effective. He did not need to be Moses. Indeed, it is likely that at this stage in Israel's development as a nation they needed a very different kind of leader. Moses had brought God's people to the threshold of the land of promise; Joshua would bring them into the land and help them settle it. Moses had been an instrument of divine revelation; Joshua would ensure that Israel remembered all that had been revealed.

The stewardship of leadership also means that leaders are responsible for developing other leaders. Moses understood this and trained Joshua to succeed him. If Moses' graceful handling of leadership succession speaks of his humility, the fact that he did not try to turn Joshua into a carbon copy of himself speaks of it even more.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

You may not be the leader of an organization or hold a position in the church. Yet it is likely that you have been called to exercise leadership in some area of your life. It may be as a parent, as a committee member for your church, or in your workplace.

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

You know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. - 1 Corinthians 15:58

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Charles Dickens's story, *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge lives a pathetic and miserly life. He acquires great riches for himself, none of which he shares. On the night of Christmas Eve, soon after the death of his business partner, three spirits visit him. They show him Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Future. When Scrooge sees that after his death none mourn him and some even mock him, he repents and becomes a changed man.

We won't have the opportunity to hear what is said of us after we die. Perhaps if we could hear the words spoken at our funerals, we would have the will to change our legacy.

Our reading today brings us to the final scene of Moses' life. He, like us, made his mistakes and had his regrets. God mercifully grants him a look at the land that the Israelites were preparing to invade and occupy. But he cannot enter because of his sin at Kadesh (see Feb. 25). In his final moments, we might imagine that Moses' mind replayed the scene at Kadesh and wished he could have written it.

Even this mistake, however, does not overshadow the heroic and faithful legacy that Moses left behind. The words recorded here in Deuteronomy 34 ensure that no one would forget the important role that Moses played as the Lord rescued His people from Egypt. He would serve as a standard for the Israelite people from this time forward. His prophetic power and authority were never to be rivaled in the Old Testament. Only in the coming of Jesus Christ was Moses finally replaced by someone of superior position.

As Moses prepared to die, he heard God's voice a final time. Just as He had all throughout Moses' life, God revealed Himself to Moses. He reassured Moses that all he had worked for, all he had believed, was being fulfilled. "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham" (v. 4). Moses could die knowing that his labor had not been in vain.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Moses' story encourages those of us who feel that our lives have been a mixed bag of regrets and successes. Psalm 90, written by Moses himself, encourages us with a realistic perspective on our own lives and our human frailties. The psalm concludes with an earnest prayer: "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands." Like Moses, we must work diligently at whatever God has called us to do, but ultimately, we rely on God for the results—and our own legacy.

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants. - Deuteronomy 32:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

What legacy do you hope to leave behind? In *Starting Well: Building a Strong Foundation for a Lifetime of Ministry*, author Richard Clinton gives this answer:

"I want to be a Christian leader who has a personal, vibrant relationship with God. A leader who continues to learn throughout my whole life. A leader who has Christlike character and lives according to biblical convictions and promises from God. A leader who accomplishes God's destiny and purposes for my life, which will involve leaving behind a lasting legacy that testifies to the goodness of God. I want to be a leader who finishes well!"

Amen! On that well-struck note, we arrive today at the death of Moses and the conclusion of our month's study of Deuteronomy.

Why couldn't Moses enter the Promised Land? Because his sin of disobedience at Meribah dishonored the Lord (cf. Ps 106:32, 33). As a result, when Israel was about to enter the land promised to their forefathers, Moses wasn't allowed to go with them. Instead, at God's direction, he climbed Mt. Nebo, and from there God graciously showed him the land.

Moses died in Moab in good health at the age of 120. His last moments were spent privately with God, surveying the Promised Land and no doubt meditating on the greatness and faithfulness of the Lord. God Himself buried His friend and servant, and to this day the location of the grave remains unknown. Back in the Israelite camp, Joshua picked up the torch of leadership, "filled with the spirit of wisdom" from God (Dt 34:9).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Imagine that you have somehow been given the honor of designing a tombstone for Moses. What would it look like? What would the epitaph read? How would you summarize the life of this great man of God?

Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Hebrews 11:23-29

TODAY IN THE WORD

Since World War II the remote Russian island of Sakhalin has been "home" to tens of thousands of Koreans. Now the surviving members of this sad story want to go home.

During the war, when both Korea and Sakhalin were in Japanese hands, the Japanese brought some 60 Koreans to the island to work in its factories and coal mines. The Koreans were left behind after the war, and Russia prohibited them from leaving until 1988. But permission to go home means little to the elderly Koreans. Because they spent their youth in slave labor, they have no money for the trip home.

Moses would certainly identify with these people taken from their homeland and forced to perform slave labor for a despised enemy. Although he spent his early years in Egypt as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses eventually identified with his own people and their sufferings and made his choice accordingly (Heb. 11:25-26).

To say that Moses finished well is like saying the Pacific Ocean holds a lot of water. We could spend the entire month reviewing Moses' life and accomplishments as the great miracle-worker, liberator, lawgiver, patriarch and prophet of Israel.

Besides Moses' measurable achievements, we are reminded that the Lord knew Moses and spoke to him "face to face" (Deut. 34:10). No wonder God took personal charge of Moses' funeral arrangements and felt no obligation to reveal where He had buried His faithful servant.

But even in Moses' case, Scripture does not ignore the other side of the story. Deuteronomy 34:4 reminds us that Moses was prohibited from entering the Promised Land because of his disobedience at Meribah (Num. 20:1-13). He died gazing into Canaan,

with God's promise in his ears.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Maybe you feel a little like Moses today, standing on the pinnacle of 1996 and looking over into the new year, wondering what lies ahead.

Since none of us can see into the future, we need to cling to Him whom we cannot see, our never-failing God whose love and abiding care is more real than anything we can see, taste or touch.

Deuteronomy 34:7

F. B. Meyer

Our Daily Homily

THIS was true of Moses as a man. He had seen plenty of sorrow and toil; but such was the simple power of his faith, in casting his burden on the Lord, that they had not worn him out in premature decay. There had been no undue strain on his energy. All that he wrought on earth was the outcome of the secret abiding of his soul in God. God was his home, his help, his stay. He was nothing: God was all. Therefore his youth was renewed.

But there is a deeper thought than this. Moses stood for the law. It came by him, and was incarnated in his stern, grave aspect. He brought the people to the frontier of the land, but would not bring them over it: and so the Law of God, even when honored and obeyed, cannot bring us into the Land of Promise. We stand on the Pisgah-height of effort, and view it afar in all its fair expanse; but if we have never got further than "Thou shalt do this and live," we can never pass into the blessed life of rest and victory symbolized by Canaan.

But though the law fails, it is through no intrinsic feebleness. It is always holy, just, and good. Though the ages vanish, and heaven and earth pass away, its jots and tittles remain in unimpaired majesty. It must be fulfilled, first by the Son, then by His Spirit in our hearts. Let us ever remember the searching eye of that holy Law detecting evil, and its mighty force avenging wrong. Its eye will never wax dim, nor its natural force abate. Let us, therefore, shelter in Him, who, as our Representative, magnified the law and met its claims, and made it honorable.