

# DEUTERONOMY 1; 6–8; 15; 18; 29–30; 34

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## Deuteronomy 1

### *Deuteronomy 1:1–5. Covenant Renewal Pattern*

The book of Deuteronomy consists of a series of speeches given by Moses while Israel was camped on the plains of Moab—just across the Jordan from the promised land (Deuteronomy 1:1–5). It marks the culmination of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness (verse 3). In that time, the original Exodus generation had largely passed away, and those about to enter the land had either been children or not yet born when God made His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. Thus, in preparing this new generation to enter into the land of promise, Moses’s speeches are given as part of a covenant renewal ceremony, and the entire book of Deuteronomy is structured according to a covenant/treaty pattern commonly known and understood in the ancient Near East.<sup>1</sup>

The Covenant/Treaty Pattern of Deuteronomy	
Preamble	1:1–5
Historical prologue	1:6–4:44
General stipulations	4:45–11:32
Specific stipulations	12:1–26:19
Document clause	31:9–13, 24–26
Blessings and curses	28:1–29:1
Covenant ratification	29:2–30:20
Covenant witnesses	4:26; 30:15–20; 31:28

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God’s Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 234.

## Deuteronomy 6

### ***Deuteronomy 6:1–3. Commandments, Statutes, Judgments***

As part of the renewal of the Sinai covenant with the new generation, Moses repeated the Ten Commandments and the historical events surrounding their original reception (see Deuteronomy 5). Over the course of the next several chapters, Moses elaborated on each of the commandments, starting with the first: “I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me” (5:6–7). According to Mark Biddle, “Deut. 6–11 concentrates on the first commandment as the statement of the essence of Israel’s relationship with its God.”<sup>2</sup>

Before elaborating on the commandments, Moses stressed the importance of living by them (6:1–3). One of the ways he did this was by using several different synonymous (or near synonymous) terms together: “Now these are the *commandments*, the *statutes*, and the *judgments*, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you” (6:1; emphasis added). This repetitive language is a common stylistic feature in Deuteronomy and is also used elsewhere in the Old Testament (see, for example, 1 Kings 2:3; Psalm 19:7–9). Similar repetitions also show up in the Book of Mormon (see, for example, 2 Nephi 5:10; Alma 30:3).<sup>3</sup> Using several near synonyms together like this has a forceful, cumulative effect: it drives home the importance of total obedience to *all* that God commands and ensures that the covenant terms are comprehensive and complete, with no loopholes.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Deuteronomy 6:4–9. The Shema***

Moses began elaborating on the first commandment with what is often called the Shema, so named because that is the first Hebrew word in this passage. This word is usually translated as “hear” or “listen.” Reciting the Shema as part of prayer has been part of daily worship for Jews since antiquity, although exactly when this practice began is uncertain. Jesus quoted the Shema and said it was “the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:36–38; Mark 12:28–30), thus establishing the importance of this passage within Christianity as well. “The Shema calls for radical, total, whole-hearted, full-bodied devotion” and thus “paraphrases the first commandment and extends it to radical limits.”<sup>5</sup> It demands complete, covenantal loyalty to the Lord.

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2 Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 116.

3 John W. Welch, “Statutes, Judgments, Ordinances, and Commandments,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1992), 62–65; John W. Welch, “A Steady Stream of Significant Recognitions,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 353–356.

4 Book of Mormon Central, “Why Does the Book of Mormon Use So Many Different Terms for ‘Law’?” (Alma 30:3), *KnoWhy* 568 (July 7, 2020), available online at <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-does-the-book-of-mormon-use-so-many-different-terms-for-law>.

5 Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 116.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson gave three reasons *why* this first and great commandment must come before all the others. First, it is foundational. Loving God gives our lives purpose, direction, and meaning and anchors our love for others in divine purpose and power. Second, to ignore the first commandment or prioritize other commandments risks creating imbalance in our lives and facilitating dangerous deviations from the covenant path. Loving and submitting to God provide a check against corrupting virtues. Third, we risk harming others when our attempts at love are not grounded first in God’s truth. “The first and great commandment provides the true paradigm for life.” Elder Christofferson also explained *how* we can give this first commandment priority in our lives and discipleship: by being obedient to God, promoting His cause on the earth, praying and studying the scriptures, and being accountable to Him.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Deuteronomy 6:10–19. Remember the Lord***

Moses then extended his discussion of the first commandment by talking about how the people must continue to “fear the Lord thy God, and serve him” after they inherit the land and “not go after other gods” (Deuteronomy 6:13–14). The concern expressed here is that Lord’s initial blessing for Israel of a land “full of all good things” (verse 11) that the people did not have to work for “may seduce [them] to forget that these blessings were the unmerited gift of God’s grace.”<sup>7</sup> They must remember the Lord by diligently keeping all the commandments, testimonies, and statutes that He has given them. Moses again used multiple near-synonymous terms to emphasize the importance of obedience to God (verse 17).

### ***Deuteronomy 6:20–25. Why All the Testimonies, Statutes, and Judgments?***

Sons asking their fathers what the testimonies, statutes, and judgments commanded by the Lord mean (see Deuteronomy 6:20) eventually became a ritual enshrined in Judaism as part of the Passover festivities, going back to ancient times.<sup>8</sup> Fathers would then respond by rehearsing Israel’s bondage and redemption from Egypt by the hand of Lord and His binding them by covenant to keep these commandments (see verses 21–25). Exactly when this practice was first implemented is unknown, but it may be reflected in the counsel Alma gave his sons in the Book of Mormon (see Alma 36–42).<sup>9</sup>

The essence of the exchange recorded here and enshrined in ritual is that the Lord *first* loved Israel by using His might to set them free and giving them a promised land; thus, Israel must show love *in return* by

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6 D. Todd Christofferson, “The First Commandment First” (Brigham Young University devotional, March 22, 2022), [speeches.byu.edu](https://speeches.byu.edu).

7 Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 117.

8 Fred O. Francis, “The Baraita of the Four Sons,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42, no. 2 (1974): 280–297.

9 Gordon C. Thomasson and John W. Welch, “The Sons of the Passover,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1992), 196–198; Book of Mormon Central, “Did Alma Counsel His Sons During the Passover? (Alma 38:5),” *KnowWhy* 146 (July 19, 2016), available online at <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/did-alma-counsel-his-sons-during-the-passover>.

keeping all that the Lord commanded of them. Elder D. Todd Christofferson likewise taught, “God, who commands us to love Him, first loved us.” He continued, reaching all the way back to the pre-mortal life to illustrate the point: “Beginning from our primal state as intelligences, our Heavenly Father has centered Himself and His work in us—in our immortality and eternal life. He sees it as His work and glory to do so. . . . Is it too much to ask that in return we center our lives in God and love Him as He has loved us, with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength?”<sup>10</sup>

## Deuteronomy 7

### ***Deuteronomy 7:1–26. “Utterly Destroy”***

Continuing with the emphasis on the first commandment—to be totally loyal to the Lord and not worship other gods (Deuteronomy 5:6–7; 6:4–5)—Moses instructs the people that when they enter the land promised to them, they must “cast out” and “utterly destroy” the nations that were already occupying the land, refrain from intermarrying with them, and destroy items connected with their idolatrous worship practices (7:1–3, 5). It is important to understand that “utterly destroy” (Hebrew *herem*) does not mean that the Israelites were to kill every individual Canaanite but rather that they were to destroy the *national identities* of those non-Israelites living in the land.<sup>11</sup>

In antiquity, national identity was intrinsically linked to the gods a nation worshipped. The nation of Israel’s identity was forged by the Exodus from Egypt and the covenant on Mount Sinai; the Lord had chosen Israel “to be a special people” (verse 6), and thus their identity was linked to the exclusive worship of and loyalty to the Lord (verses 6–11).<sup>12</sup> Competing national identities had to be “utterly destroyed” from the promised land, otherwise the nations would turn the hearts of the Israelites away from the Lord and cause them to go after other gods (verse 4)—thereby putting *Israelite* national identity at risk of being “utterly destroyed.” As John and Harvey Walton explained, “with a non-Israelite community nearby, it is possible that Israelites will marry outside their community and thus lose the Israelite identity marker and vanish . . . [and thereby] subject themselves to *herem*.”<sup>13</sup>

To underscore the value of preserving Israel’s national identity and loyalty to the Lord by not being assimilated into the nations that worship other gods, Moses also enumerated the blessings that are promised to Israel by the Lord if they stay faithful to Him and keep His commandments (verses 12–26).

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<sup>10</sup> D. Todd Christofferson, “The First Commandment First” (Brigham Young University devotional, March 22, 2022), [speeches.byu.edu](https://speeches.byu.edu).

<sup>11</sup> See John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 179–194.

<sup>12</sup> Walton and Walton, *Lost World*, 182–183.

<sup>13</sup> Walton and Walton, *Lost World*, 191.

## Deuteronomy 8

### ***Deuteronomy 8:1. Obedience as a Central Theme***

This entire chapter focuses on the central theme of obedience to the commandments “that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land” (Deuteronomy 8:1). The first part of the chapter focuses on the blessings and prosperity that will come if the people obey (verses 1–10), and the second part issues a warning should they forget the Lord (verses 11–20).<sup>14</sup> This is what one scholar called “the core assumption of Deuteronomy.”<sup>15</sup> It is also a central theme in the Book of Mormon, and the Lord’s covenantal promise to Lehi is a succinct summation of the covenant articulated in Deuteronomy: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence” (2 Nephi 4:4).<sup>16</sup>

Moses made this part of his exposition on the first commandment (to love the Lord and not worship other gods) by framing obedience and disobedience as remembering and forgetting the Lord, respectively. This is done, in part, by contrasting “conditions of extreme lack (vv. 1–10) and rich abundance (vv. 11–20).”<sup>17</sup> Under both conditions, the people must remember that they are dependent upon the Lord for their blessings and prosperity or else will face the same fate as the Canaanite nations that will be destroyed to clear space for Israel (Deuteronomy 8:20).

### ***Deuteronomy 8:2–5. The Wilderness as a Test***

Throughout most of the first five books of the Old Testament, wandering in the wilderness is presented as a punishment for disobedience. Here, Moses frames it as a test “to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no” (Deuteronomy 8:2). Of course, these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. The most effective punishments for bad behavior are the ones that provide opportunities for learning and growth. Mark Biddle explained, “Yahweh sought to teach Israel a fundamental lesson, namely, that in a situation of extreme want, when mere survival demands one’s total attentions and energies, Yahweh provides.”<sup>18</sup>

The Lord provided for Israel’s temporal needs, but “man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live” (verse 3). Jesus quoted these words when Satan

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 103.

<sup>15</sup> Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 103.

<sup>16</sup> Book of Mormon Central, “What Does It Mean to ‘Prosper in the Land’? (Alma 9:13),” *KnowWhy* 116 (June 7, 2016), available online at <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/what-does-it-mean-to-prosper-in-the-land>.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 118.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 118.

tempted Him to turn stones into bread (see Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4). To truly thrive, people need more than for their basic needs to be met; they need to be “nourished by the good word of God” (Moroni 6:4).

### ***Deuteronomy 8:6–10. Blessing the Lord after Eating One’s Fill***

Having learned to depend on the Lord in challenging circumstances, Israel should continue to lean on the Lord and keep His commandments, even as they enter “a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness” (Deuteronomy 8:9). As Biddle observed, “*in extremis*, even an everyday loaf of bread signifies God’s sustaining provision. How much more so, then, will the abundance and plenty of the promised land signify God’s abundant provision?”<sup>19</sup>

To remember the Lord and show gratitude for the abundance He will provide in the land, Moses admonished, “When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee” (verse 10). This instruction eventually led to a tradition, still maintained in Judaism today, of saying a blessing *after* a meal rather than *before* it (as is more common in Christianity).<sup>20</sup> This practice also appears in the Book of Mormon (see Alma 8:22).<sup>21</sup>

### ***Deuteronomy 8:11–20. Warning Not to Forget the Lord***

After the exhortation to remember the Lord and the promise of abundance and prosperity comes the warning for Israel not to forget the Lord and His commandments in order to avoid “perishing” like the Canaanites before them (Deuteronomy 8:11–17, 19–20). The transition from blessings to warnings loosely follows a chiasmic pattern:<sup>22</sup>

- A remembering how the Lord blessed them during the wilderness experience (verses 2–5)
- B remembering the Lord when surrounded by the abundance of the promised land; eating their fill and blessing the Lord (verses 6–10)
- B not forgetting the Lord and His commandments lest after eating their fill and building nice homes and abundant riches their heart is lifted up (verses 11–14)
- A forgetting how the Lord blessed and protected them during their wandering in the wilderness (verses 14–17)

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19 Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 118.

20 Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 392–394.

21 Angela M. Crowell and John A. Tvedtnes, “Notes and Communications—The Nephite and Jewish Practice of Blessing God after Eating One’s Fill,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 251–254; Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Alma Bless and Thank God after Eating? (Alma 8:22),” *KnoWhy* 115 (June 6, 2016), available online at <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-did-alma-bless-and-thank-god-after-eating>.

22 Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 397, likewise recognizes a chiasmic pattern in this chapter, though he presents it somewhat differently (and includes the entire chapter).

This sequence reversal creates a kind of “unremembering” effect. In the first instance, *remembering* the Lord’s blessings granted during the wilderness experience *leads to* remembering Him and keeping His commandments *after* living in the promised land and enjoying His blessings. But in the second half, Israel’s *forgetting* the Lord’s role in their prosperity in the promised land *undoes* their memory of the Lord’s blessings in the wilderness. The end result is their believing that they created their own “power and might” (verse 17). If this happens, the Lord warns, they will be destroyed like the Canaanites before them (verses 19–20).

## Deuteronomy 15

### *Deuteronomy 15:1–23. The Sabbatical Year*

When Moses reiterated the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, he worded the command to keep the Sabbath day differently and provided a different justification for the instruction. In Exodus 20, the commandment was tied to God’s resting on the seventh day after the Creation; in Deuteronomy 5 it is tied to the Israelites’ liberation from Egyptian bondage by the Lord’s “mighty hand” and “stretched out arm” (see table).

Exodus 20:8–11	Deuteronomy 5:12–15
Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.	Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee.
Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:	Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work:
But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:	But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.
For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.	And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

Here in Deuteronomy 15, Moses gave instructions regarding the Sabbath *year*, and he framed them as an extension of the commandment regarding the Sabbath *day*. He used much of the same language to do so

and tied it back to the Israelites' time in Egyptian bondage.<sup>23</sup> Thus in Deuteronomy, the seventh year is described as a year of release (15:1), with a focus on the release of debtors from their debts (verses 1–6) and of Hebrew slaves from bondage (verses 12–15). Like for the Sabbath day, the reason given for these Sabbath year stipulations was that “thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day” (Deuteronomy 15:15).

## **Deuteronomy 18**

### ***Deuteronomy 18:1–8. Caring for Levites***

The Levites were not to receive a land inheritance but instead would be allotted cities within the different tribal territories (see Numbers 35:1–8; Joshua 21:1–42). Thus, the Levites were dependent upon the people to provide for their needs and were allotted a portion of the sacrificial offerings to eat (see Deuteronomy 18:1–4). The surrounding community was supposed to provide for the Levites living in the area (see Deuteronomy 14:27), but once the central sanctuary (the temple in Jerusalem) was built, any Levite in Israel could come to minister there and be provided for (18:5–8).

### ***Deuteronomy 18:9–22. True and False Prophets***

The Israelites were forbidden from turning to the various spiritual mediums that the Canaanites used to determine God's will (Deuteronomy 18:9–14). Instead, the Lord promised to raise up a prophet like Moses to communicate His will (verses 15–19). Because of this promise, Moses became the prophetic archetype in ancient Israel, and later prophets such as Joshua, Samuel, and Jeremiah (among others) were portrayed in ways that emphasized their similarities to Moses. In the New Testament, Jesus is likewise presented as a new Moses in fulfillment of this prophecy (see Acts 3:22–23). Even Book of Mormon prophets Lehi and Nephi used this Moses typology.<sup>24</sup>

Moses also outlined a test for a true prophet: if their prophecies are fulfilled, they are true, but if not, they are false (see Deuteronomy 18:21–22). Richard Elliot Friedman explained, “Moses' instruction appears to mean that one should go by the prophet's past record. Even then, the people's inclination seems to be to disbelieve the true prophets. . . . So Moses' criterion for identifying false prophets may seem simple and obvious, but the psychological point is that people miss the obvious and turn instead to the comfortable.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 123–125.

<sup>24</sup> Noel B. Reynolds, “The Israelite Background of Moses Typology in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2005): 5–23.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah, with a New English Translation and the Hebrew Text* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2001), 624.



## Deuteronomy 29

### ***Deuteronomy 29:1. Words of the Covenant***

Deuteronomy chapters 29–30 represent the covenant ratification portion of Deuteronomy. It is here, after Moses laid out all the details of the covenant obligations, that “the present generation of Israelites bound themselves to the covenant and . . . emphasize the permanence of the agreement, both in the validity of its blessings and curses and in the ultimate triumph of YHWH’s [Yahweh’s] grace in reinstating Israel as his covenant people.”<sup>26</sup>

A covenant pattern similar to that of the entire book is manifest on a smaller scale in these two chapters:

Historical introduction	29:2–9
The covenant bond	29:10–15
Warnings/curses for disobedience	29:16–29
Promised blessings for obedience	30:1–10
Final call to obey	30:11–20 <sup>27</sup>

Mark Biddle argued that the “structure points to its homiletical nature: It discusses the covenant *past* (29:2–8), *present* (29:9–15), and *future* (29:16–29; 30:1–10) as the motivations for a *call to decision* (30:11–20).”<sup>28</sup>

### ***Deuteronomy 29:2–9. Historical Introduction***

Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses was constantly reviewing the events of the past forty years, reminding the people of the miracles preformed in Egypt and the things the Lord did for them in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 29:2–8). These events provide the historical “basis for Israel’s confidence in Yahweh’s gracious favor”<sup>29</sup> and thus the reason for trusting that if they keep their covenant with Him, they will prosper (see verse 9).

### ***Deuteronomy 29:10–15. The Covenant Bond***

The covenant forged a bond between Israel and the Lord, and Moses emphasized the comprehensive nature of the covenant bond here. It includes all the men, women, and children (verses 10–11); it includes their

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God’s Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 234.

<sup>27</sup> This is adapted from John W. Rogerson, “Deuteronomy,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 170.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 137.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 137.

ancestors, who previously entered into a covenant with the Lord (verse 13); and it goes beyond all those who were present at the covenant ceremony to include those that were “not here with us this day” (verses 14–15), which implies that *future* Israelites were also bonded to the Lord through this covenant. Thus, this covenant bond conveys a transcendent timelessness.

### ***Deuteronomy 29:16–29. Warnings and Curses***

Rather than reiterate all the curses mentioned throughout the book of Deuteronomy (most extensively in Deuteronomy 28:15–68), Moses warned that “all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon” anyone that turns their heart away from the Lord and imagines that they shall be an exception to this covenant. He continued, “And the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord shall separate him from all the tribes of Israel” (verses 20–21). The Lord further warned of utter destruction akin to that of Sodom and Gomorrah should the entire nation forsake the covenant (verses 22–29). The implication of mentioning both private and national apostasy together is that “private apostasy cannot be hidden from Yahweh; it will eventually have public ramifications.”<sup>30</sup>

## **Deuteronomy 30**

### ***Deuteronomy 30:1–10. Promised Blessings***

If the Israelites *remember* the Lord’s covenant promises even after they’ve been “cast into another land” as a consequence of disobedience (Deuteronomy 29:28), they will be able to return from captivity and once again enjoy the land and all the blessings attached to it (30:2–10). According to Mark Biddle, throughout this section is wordplay “on the Hebrew word that can be translated ‘to repent,’ ‘to return’ or ‘to restore.’” This wordplay is theologically significant and reinforces the message of the covenant: “When Israel *repents*, Israel can *return* because Yahweh will *restore*.”<sup>31</sup>

### ***Deuteronomy 30:11–20. Final Call to Obey***

Moses concluded this formalizing of the covenant with a call to action, a call to make a choice between the two paths provided by the covenant: “life and good” and “death and evil” (Deuteronomy 30:15). Moses urged the people to “choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (verse 19). This framing of the two choices between obedience and disobedience as ultimately being the choice between good and evil and life and death is a common framework from antiquity known as the “two ways.” It is found throughout the ancient world and other parts of the Bible and is also attested in various prophetic speeches given in the Book of Mormon.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 137.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Biddle, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 137–138.

<sup>32</sup> Mack C. Stirling, “The Way of Life and the Way of Death in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6,

## Deuteronomy 34

### ***Deuteronomy 34:1–6. The Death of Moses***

Deuteronomy concludes with a short note on Moses’s death and the passing of authority to Joshua. The description of Moses’s death is somewhat enigmatic. Moses ascended Mount Nebo to get a panoramic view of the land the people were about to enter (Deuteronomy 34:1–4). The text then says that he “died in the land of Moab,” but where he was buried is unknown (verses 5–6). Some ancient writers implied that Moses was actually translated. Josephus, for example, “described Moses’ entrance into a cloud and his disappearance, clearly hinting at his translation.”<sup>33</sup> The Joseph Smith Translation says, “For the Lord took him unto his fathers”—also suggesting translation instead of death (Joseph Smith Translation, Deuteronomy 34:6).

In the Book of Mormon, Alma the Younger simply left the land of Zarahemla and was never heard of again (see Alma 45:18). As with Moses, this led to later speculation about what really happened to Alma, and it was rumored that “he was taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses” (Alma 45:19).

### ***Deuteronomy 34:7–8. Moses’s 120-Year Life Span***

Moses was 120 years old when he died, which was a symbolic number that represented three times forty. Moses’s life can be divided neatly into three forty-year periods, as D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner explained:

1. Forty years as *prince*, when he received education and leadership training and discovered his life’s mission
2. Forty years as *pastor* or shepherd, when he learned the work of shepherding, received the priesthood, began raising a family, and met with God
3. Forty years as *prophet*, when he experienced many trials, overcame personal weaknesses, and performed a noble ministry of preparing himself and his people to return to God<sup>34</sup>

### ***Deuteronomy 34:9–12. No Other Prophet like Moses***

The authority to lead is passed on to Joshua—Moses had previously “laid his hands upon him” (Deuteronomy 34:9). However, “there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (verse 10). This may seem like a contradiction, especially since earlier, Moses was promised that the

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no. 2 (1997): 152–204; Book of Mormon Central, “Are There Really Only Two Churches? (1 Nephi 14:10),” *KnowWhy* 16 (January 21, 2016), available online at <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/are-there-really-only-two-churches>.

33 D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Old Testament*, vol. 1 of 2 (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2013), 324–325.

34 D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Old Testament*, vol. 1 of 2 (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2013), 325.

Lord would raise up a prophet like him (Deuteronomy 18:15–18). As noted earlier in my commentary, Moses became the prophetic archetype in the Old Testament, and later prophets—including Joshua—were presented as being like him in various ways (see commentary on Deuteronomy 18:9–22). According to Richard Elliott Friedman, “this need not be a contradiction. . . . The passage at the end of the Torah visibly means that no other prophet was as great as Moses. It is simply a linguistic matter: the range of expression ‘to be like someone’ is wide enough to have two meanings (and several more).”<sup>35</sup>

As the New Testament and Latter-day Saint scripture make clear, eventually Jesus rose up as *the* prophet like Moses in the full and complete sense.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah, with a New English Translation and the Hebrew Text* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2001), 623–624.

<sup>36</sup> See Acts 3:22–23; 1 Nephi 22:20–21; 3 Nephi 20:23.