



▶ *God's Power* ◀

BELIEVERS CAN LIVE WITHOUT FEAR KNOWING
THAT THEY SERVE THE ONE TRUE GOD.

DEUTERONOMY 33:1-5,26-29

In this scene, we may have been the parent or the child. The child is standing on the side of the pool. The parent is in the water, arms outstretched and saying, “You can do it. I’ll catch you. I promise you’ll be fine.” The child is hesitating. “Ready? On the count of three.” Still hesitant, but finally the child lunges and is grabbed safely just as he reaches the water.

 **What is the connection between fear and insecurity?
Between trust and security?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

DEUTERONOMY 31:1–34:12

Deuteronomy records what occurred while the Israelites stood at the threshold of the promised land. They had left Egypt forty years before.

The story involving Egypt actually began when Joseph's jealous brothers sold him into slavery. He ended up in Egypt. While there, Joseph experienced a complete reversal of status. He went from being a nobody to a somebody, becoming the second in command in all of Egypt. Joseph, and eventually his entire family, came to know the luxuries of the house of Pharaoh. For 400 years, Joseph's descendants, the Hebrews, remained in Egypt.

During that time they also experienced a complete reversal of status. They came to know the misery of back-breaking, forced labor. They knew what it was to have no home, no land to call their own.

God, though, would raise up a man who would lead them from Egypt to the land He promised to Abraham and his descendants. Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers record events that occurred during their journey.

Once again, the Israelites' situation was about to completely change. They had been sojourners; they were about to be inhabitants of Canaan. The people had known only Moses as their leader. But Moses's successor, Joshua, would lead them into Canaan.

Deuteronomy 31:1–34:12 contains the last recorded words of Moses. It tells of his commissioning Joshua to be his successor. Chapter 32 contains a hymn that extols God's goodness and calls His people to live faithfully by the covenant. Chapter 34 tells of Moses's death.

This week's study focuses on God's blessings for His covenant people—His protection, presence, and provision. The text will include words and concepts we encounter in the New Testament: blessed, loved, happy, everlasting, and saved. It affirms the great message of Scripture—none other is like our Lord; He alone is God and worthy of our worship.



As you read through Deuteronomy 31:1–34:12, highlight the words that would have offered courage and comfort to the Israelites as they were about to enter Canaan.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

KING (DEUT. 33:1-5)

¹ This is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, gave the Israelites before his death. ² He said: The LORD came from Sinai and appeared to them from Seir; he shone on them from Mount Paran and came with ten thousand holy ones, with lightning from his right hand for them. ³ Indeed he loves the people. All your holy ones are in your hand, and they assemble at your feet. Each receives your words. ⁴ Moses gave us instruction, a possession for the assembly of Jacob. ⁵ So he became King in Jeshurun when the leaders of the people gathered with the tribes of Israel.

VERSES 1-2

Jacob, on his deathbed, gathered his sons and spoke his blessings on them (Gen. 49:1-27). He spoke prophetically about the challenges and victories they would experience. As Moses approached his life's end, he spoke a blessing—not to his sons but to the descendants of the sons of Jacob, the Israelites. Although Moses had led the Israelites for a generation, he had no authority to proclaim a blessing; the authority behind his words came from God.

This is the first time the phrase *the man of God* appears in Scripture. Moses used this title for himself in a prayer he wrote (Ps. 90). Nehemiah referred to David as the man of God (Neh. 12:24,36). Scripture also refers to Samuel and Elijah in the same way (1 Sam. 9:6; 1 Kings 17:18). The apostle Paul used the term to describe a minister of the gospel. Additionally, he used it to refer to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:17).

Looking at those who carried this title, what did it mean? It referred to someone with a vibrant and close relationship with God, who lived righteously and proclaimed the Lord's message.

Verse 2 depicts God as a Divine Warrior. The imagery would encourage the Israelites as they faced military opposition on the other side of the Jordan. They would not be going alone or under their own power; God would be going before them (Deut. 31:3,8).

God marched, leading His people from Mount *Sinai*. This is the only time the mountain goes by this name in Deuteronomy; otherwise, it is called Horeb. The *them* is the Israelites mentioned in verse 1. *Seir* is the southern wilderness of Edom, which at the time

began at the southern tip of the Dead Sea and stretched southward toward the Gulf of Aqaba (Red Sea). Today, we associate this region with ancient Petra. **Mount •Paran** is the wilderness region west of Moab. The emphasis in this verse, though, is not on the geography or route; the focus is on the Lord as He led His people.

That God **shone** on His people refers to His gleaming brilliance (see Ps. 104:2; Hab. 3:4). Some scholars believe the **ten thousand holy ones** were angelic beings. The New Testament teaches that angels were involved in transmitting the Law to God’s people (Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). Others believe the holy ones were God’s people, the Israelites. God had called them to be holy as He is holy (Lev. 11:44; 20:26). The second option is the more likely one; the lightning in God’s **right hand** was **for them**.

BIBLE SKILL: Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words and concepts.

In Deuteronomy 33 Moses blessed the tribes of Israel. Focus on the word “blessing” in verse 1. Look up the word in an English dictionary to discover its basic meaning. Read the article on “bless, blessing” in a Bible dictionary to discover the biblical usage of “bless.” Write any insights you learn in the space below. Read examples of blessing others in Genesis 27:27-29; Numbers 6:22-27; 2 Corinthians 13:13; and Hebrews 13:20-21. Finally, on a separate sheet of paper, write a blessing for each member of your family.

VERSES 3-5

Verse 3 further supports the “holy ones” being God’s people. The verse starts by referring to **the people**. This echoes what we read earlier: “you are a **holy people** belonging to the LORD your God. The LORD has chosen you to be his own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Deut. 14:2, emphasis added).

The text also declares that God loves His people. Giving evidence of that love, the Lord's having His people in His hand meant they belonged to Him; He protected and provided for them.

In response, God's people assembled at His *feet*. This was where the student sat—at the feet of the teacher. Sitting there was an indication of humility and loyalty to the teacher. At God's feet, His people would receive His words.

In verse 3, the pronouns change person from third person *he* to second person *you*. The shift indicates a heightened sense of intimacy. No longer were the words about God, they were to Him. God's action and theirs—His holding and their listening—had caused the relationship to go deeper. God's words came through Moses. He was the conduit through which God conveyed His message.

God gave His words to the Israelites, here called *the assembly of Jacob*. The term pointed back to Jacob calling his sons while on his deathbed. This unique word of instruction was for the Israelites. Earlier, God asked through Moses, “And what great nation has righteous statutes and ordinances like this entire law I set before you today?” (Deut. 4:8). Both in content and intent, God's instruction to the Israelites was unlike any other religious teaching. It remains so today. God's Word is a light that illuminates our lives (Ps. 119:105). It is our source of spiritual nourishment (1 Pet. 2:2). It is a sword that penetrates to the core of our being (Heb. 4:12-13). It is a mirror that reveals to us our true selves (Jas. 1:23).

These verses began by identifying God as the Victorious Warrior. In verse 5 He was also proclaimed to be the *King in Jeshurun*, which is a poetic name for Israel. It means “upright one.” The title *King* underscores God's ultimate authority. That God is King is a theme throughout Scripture. His dominion was first celebrated after His victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:18). The Bible declares that God is the King of heaven, the King over all the earth, and the King of glory (Dan. 4:37; Ps. 46:6-7; 24:8-10). He is an eternal King (Ps. 29:10).

The King had the authority to gather the leaders and the tribes unto Himself. He did this to speak His blessings over them (Deut. 33:7-25). Because God alone is King, He could fulfill those blessings.

The declaration that God is King is significant. Reading through the story of Moses, one of the things we notice is that the Pharaoh of the exodus is not named. He is called either Pharaoh or the king of Egypt (Ex. 5:1,4). Biblical scholars have long speculated about his identity. Egyptians believed their pharaohs were divine; they worshiped them as gods. Omitting the pharaoh's name was

intentional; the only King and God who mattered was Yahweh. God alone was (and is) worthy of worship.

God's being King should give us security and comfort. We have put our trust in the only One with the authority, power, and resources to fulfill all His promises.



Why do you think the Bible portrays God in so many ways, such as a Warrior, King, and Shepherd? Which biblical portrait or title comes to mind first when you think of Him and why?



KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

There is one and only one living and true God. (See Isaiah 46:9; 1 Timothy 2:5.)

DWELLING PLACE (DEUT. 33:26-29)

²⁶ There is none like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to your aid, the clouds in his majesty. ²⁷ The God of old is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He drives out the enemy before you and commands, “Destroy!” ²⁸ So Israel dwells securely; Jacob lives untroubled in a land of grain and new wine; even his skies drip with dew. ²⁹ How happy you are, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is the shield that protects you, the sword you boast in. Your enemies will cringe before you, and you will tread on their backs.

VERSES 26-27

Verses 6-25 record Moses's blessing the descendants of Jacob and their tribes. Verses 26-28 focus not on the descendants of Jacob but on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The declaration begins triumphantly, proclaiming that no other god is like Him. Although the gods of Egypt were worshiped ceremonially in lavish temples, the partial ruins of which still stand today, none could compare to Yahweh. He was the Creator; they were created, fashioned by human hands (see Ps. 115:4,7; Acts 17:24-29).

God riding *the heavens* and *the clouds* meant He was the triumphant King riding his stallion either to war or in victory. Being the triumphant King, He alone could give Israel (here called Jeshurun), aid. He alone was clothed in majesty. The same could never be said of the pagan gods, idols, and deities from the land behind or before them, Egypt and Canaan.

Not only would God provide aid, He would also be a refuge for His people. Again, this was declared in contrast to the so-called gods of the Egyptians and Canaanites. Only the Lord could provide the security His people would need. Only He would have *everlasting arms*.

Some commentators link God's *dwelling place* with the heavens and clouds mentioned in verse 26. Thus, this verse highlights that God is above His people and His *everlasting arms* are beneath. Nothing could better picture God's dependable protection and security for His people. Like a strong and loving Father, He safeguards His own in His caring embrace.

At the same time, He drove out the enemy before them. Thus, God was above them, His arms were beneath them, and He was at work in front of them. It is the picture of complete security. The New Testament takes this a step further. God is not only above, below, and before His people. The beloved disciple wrote, "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Which *enemy*? Significantly, it is not named. Thus, the correct answer would always be "the next one." They will be destroyed.

***God was above them, His arms were beneath them,
and He was at work in front of them.***

VERSES 28-29

The Hebrew verb translated *dwells* carries the idea of settling down and abiding. Since God would drive the enemy out and destroy it, Israel could settle down and live securely and untroubled in the land. This, of course, was speaking in the most idealized of terms; God's people would experience battles and struggles. Israel's real security would come only in God.

The land would provide both peace and plenty. Moses here spoke of the abundance of the land. God would provide both food and drink. The harvests and the heavens would supply the people's needs. This echoes what God had promised earlier (Deut. 7:13-14).

To people who had eaten manna for forty years, the thought of grain and drink had to be incomprehensible. Something besides manna would fall from the sky! It's hard to imagine what the people thought.

Whereas verses 6-25 contained God's blessing on the individual and named tribes, verse 29 announces God's blessing for the named nation and people, **Israel**. How blessed they would be because they were God's people!

Verse 26 declares that there was no god like the God of Israel. Verse 29 declares there was no people like the people of Israel, whom the Lord had saved.

Some ancient texts translate this as "the people saved by the LORD," rather than **a people**. The difference, albeit small, would highlight God's exclusive relationship with Abraham's descendants. They were the only ones who would live in the promised land. They were the only ones whom the Lord had **saved** by delivering them from Egyptian slavery.

God was their **shield** and their **sword**. The shield was for protection; the sword was for fighting. He was both defender and warrior, battling on behalf of His people. The image harkens back to the description of God as the Divine Warrior. The Jews could be assured that they would have victory, regardless of what they might face in the land of Canaan.

That their **enemies** would **cringe** before them indicates the enemies' previous boasting would be silenced in defeat. To place one's foot on the **backs** of the conquered opponent was the ultimate symbol of victory. The victorious Israelites did tread on the backs of their defeated. Joshua instructed his soldiers to each place a foot on the necks of five defeated kings. "So the commanders came forward and put their feet on their necks" (Josh. 10:24).

The Israelites had been victims in Egypt. By God's hand and power, they would enter Canaan and be victorious!



What does it teach us about God that He is our "dwelling place"?

Jesus's Use of Deuteronomy

Speaking to Israel at the end of his life, Moses said, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him” (Deut. 18:15). Peter identified Jesus as the One who fulfilled this prophecy (Acts 3:22). Readers of the Gospels should not be surprised, therefore, to see that Jesus quoted frequently from Deuteronomy.

THE WILDERNESS OF TEMPTATION

Deuteronomy consists of a series of three messages Moses delivered to the second generation of Israelites after the exodus. The first generation failed to enter the land (Num. 14:22-23) and died in the wilderness after forty years of wandering. Deuteronomy was a warning to Israel not to make the sinful choices of the first generation and not to forget the Lord when they entered the promised land.

Jesus, like Israel, faced temptations in the wilderness in preparation for His public ministry (Matt. 4:1). His responses in the

wilderness, however, were quite different from those of unfaithful Israel. Jesus faced three temptations from the devil, and after each one He responded with a quotation from Deuteronomy. In each instance Jesus demonstrated obedience to the Father in contrast to the Israelites' failure in their wilderness experiences.

In the first temptation to turn stones to bread (Matt. 4:2-3), Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 8:3, which referred to God's provision of manna for Israel in the wilderness. The Israelites grumbled and complained when they lacked food or water (Ex. 16:2). Jesus trusted the father to take care of His needs and refused to yield to the devil's suggestion.

In the second temptation (for Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple) Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16. This verse warned young Israelites not to test God as their fathers had done at Massah. Israel had grumbled against the Lord when they lacked water at Rephidim (later named “Massah,” Ex. 17:1-2). God provided water

but only after a rebuke for their lack of faith and testing of Him (v. 7). Jesus demonstrated His trust in God's promises and refused to test Him by jumping from a great height.

In the third temptation, the devil offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down to him. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20, which command worship of God alone. Israel turned to idolatry at Sinai (Ex. 32:1-6) and later at Moab (Num. 25:1-3). Jesus maintained His obedience to the Father and did not deviate from absolute submission to His will.

Jesus succeeded where Israel failed by steadfastly trusting the Lord in the wilderness and keeping His commands. He was the "true Israel" who obeyed. He demonstrated His agreement with the commands of Deuteronomy as He wielded "the sword of the Spirit" to defeat Satan (Eph. 6:17).

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

During His public ministry, the scribes and Pharisees interpreted Jesus's rejection of their human

traditions as a violation of the Mosaic law (Matt. 15:1-2). Jesus responded by dismissing their rules as human inventions and charged them with specific violations of the Mosaic law (vv. 3-9). He said He had not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (5:17-18). Unlike anyone before or after Him, Jesus obeyed the law of God in its entirety. He was supremely qualified to answer every question about the meaning and proper application of the law.

In Matthew 22:36, an expert in the law asked Jesus, "which command in the law is the greatest?" Jewish scribes traditionally taught that the law contained 613 individual commandments. They differentiated between 365 negative commands and 248 positive commands. Jesus did not hesitate; He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 as the greatest of the commandments.

Deuteronomy 6:4 begins with the Hebrew verb "listen" (*shema*). Verses 4-9 became the most famous Old Testament passage in Judaism (often referred to as "the Shema"). Verses 4-5 taught two essential truths. Verse 4

"Love and obedience are inseparable."

described the uniqueness of the one true God who revealed Himself to Israel. Verse 5 commanded believers to love God supremely. If we love God with the greatest love, we will seek to obey all of His commands. Love and obedience are inseparable, as Jesus taught His disciples (John 14:15). This is the greatest command because it is the basis for obedience to every command.

In Deuteronomy, Moses challenged Israel to love the Lord and obey His commands. They were to impress their children with God's Law for their safety and well-being. Deuteronomy was written in the form of the suzerainty treaties of the Ancient Near East. The king would establish laws, and the people accepted the responsibility of obeying them. Obedience would bring blessings and disobedience curses. God framed His covenant with Israel as their King. Israel failed repeatedly until God removed them from the land and sent them into exile.

Moses was a type of Christ. He led Israel out of the bondage of Egyptian slavery, baptized them in the Red Sea, and led them to the promised land (1 Cor. 10:1-2). Hebrews states that Jesus is superior to Moses because Jesus built the house (people of God), whereas Moses was only a servant in the house (Heb. 3:4-6). Moses revealed the law of God as the mediator of the Old Covenant, but only Jesus fully obeyed the

law of God. Moses gave the law, but grace and truth were realized through Jesus (John 1:17).

Jesus did not quote Deuteronomy 6:5 to offer a way of salvation through obedience to the law. Everyone has broken the perfect law of God (Rom. 3:23). Jesus revealed the law to demonstrate sinners' need for grace and to make obvious the necessity of His substitutionary atonement. The elaborate institution of an Old Testament sacrificial system and priesthood pointed to the universal violation of the law. Deuteronomy 6:5 uniquely described the eternal relationship of God the Son with God the Father (John 14:31). Perfect love resulted in perfect obedience—making Jesus uniquely the only acceptable sacrifice for sin.

We should not be surprised at the prominent place Jesus gave Deuteronomy in His private life and public ministry. He echoed Moses's words and amplified them through obedience to every divine command. He revealed that love—not fear—was the motivation of every genuine believer. He summons us to resist temptation and love God more than sin so that we (the Church) may be His holy people who love and obey His commandments as well (Deut. 7:6-13; John 14:21-24).

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COMING **NEXT QUARTER**



MATTHEW 1-13

Session 1: **Affirmation** (Matthew 3:13-4:11)

Session 2: **Invitation** (Matthew 4:12-25)

Session 3: **Worship the King** (Matthew 2:1-12)

Session 4: **True Righteousness** (Matthew 5:13-20,43-48)

Session 5: **Treasure** (Matthew 6:19-34)

Session 6: **Authority Acknowledged** (Matthew 7:15-29)

Session 7: **Every Life Valued** (Matthew 8:1-4,14-17; 9:1-8)

Session 8: **Mercy Extended** (Matthew 9:10-19,23-26)

Session 9: **Loyalty Tested** (Matthew 10:16-20,26-34)

Session 10: **Confronting Doubts** (Matthew 11:1-6,16-24)

Session 11: **Rejecting Legalism** (Matthew 12:1-14)

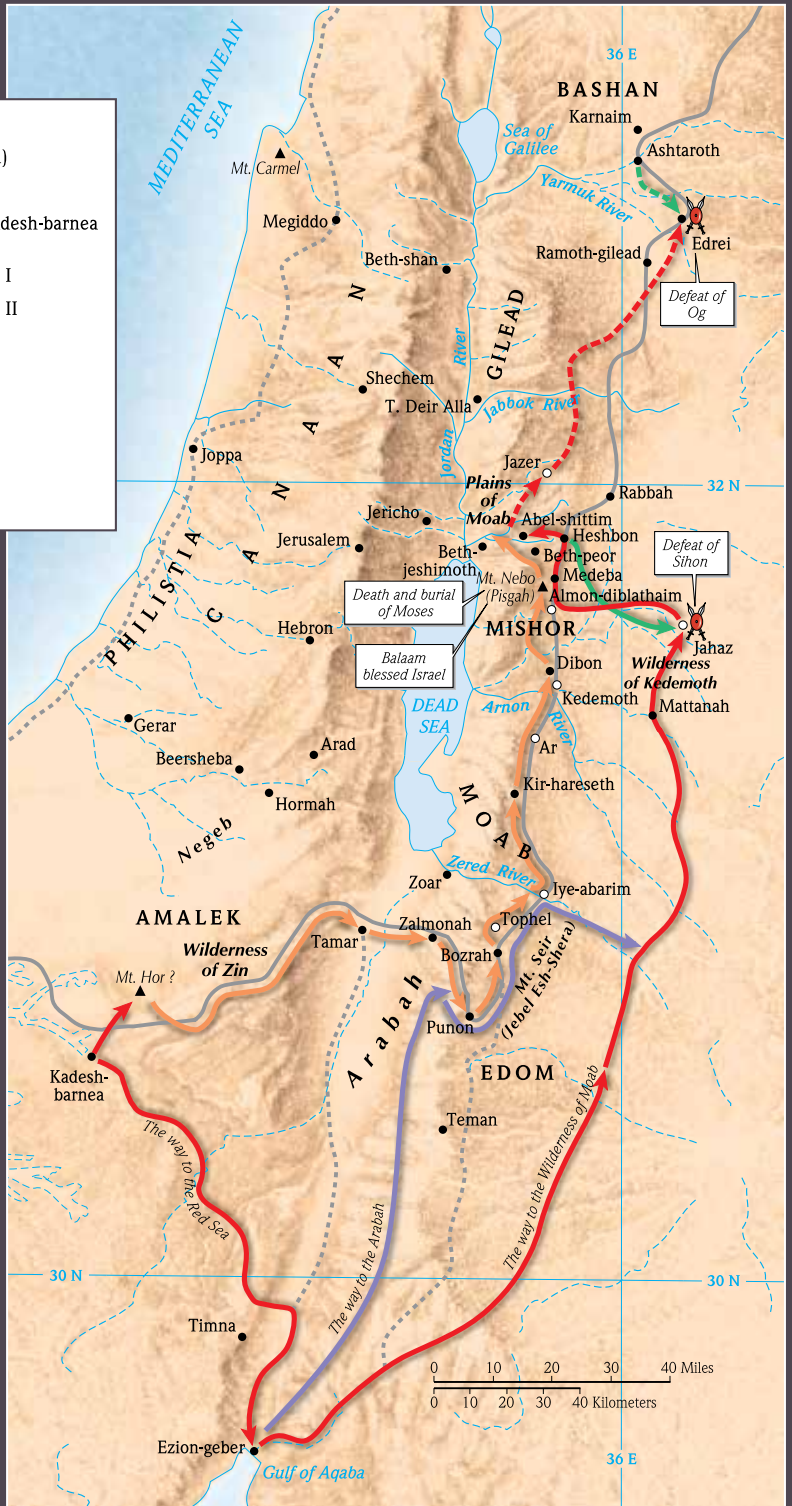
Session 12: **Judgment Coming** (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43)

Explore

“You will seek me and find me when you search for me
with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13

The Journey From Kadesh-Barnea to Moab

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- ▲ Mountain peak
- ← Possible routes from Kadesh-barnea to the Plains of Moab
- ← Possible alternate route I
- ← Possible alternate route II
- ← Israelite battle missions
- ← Sihon attacks
- ← Og attacks
- ⚔ Battle
- King's Highway
- - - Other routes



"The Journey from Kadesh-Barnea to Moab" is taken from the Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1998), p. 71. Used with permission.

NUMBERS AND DEUTERONOMY

As road trips wind down, travelers start thinking about the work waiting for them back home. The ancient Israelites were no exception. The books of Numbers and Deuteronomy recount how the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness for four decades and how God taught them to be His people as they approached the promised land. He wanted to remind them how much still needed to be done once they got “home.” As you study these final two books of the Pentateuch, ask God to show you what He longs to accomplish in you and through you. Learn how to avoid a life of spiritual wandering and embrace the best He has to offer.

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