

THE LONG WAY HOME
DEVOTIONS IN DEUTERONOMY

BY

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1. Keep Moving

You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance... (Deuteronomy 1:6).

We cannot reach the promised land by over-parking. Stops are necessary for a variety of reasons, but the march of faith must be resumed.

Some may try to homestead a parking lot because they treasure the past. If something wondrous has happened in that place, a shrine building tendency may grip the worshipers' hearts. Like the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, they may want to stay put.

Some may try to homestead a parking lot because they fear the future. There are rivers to cross, battles to fight and hardships to endure before Canaan can be entered and settled. The comfort of the familiar and the already achieved exaggerates the fear of the unknown and untried.

The holiest places along our sojourn are but camping sites. We seek an enduring city, one lighted not by Edison but Christ. We must say of the happiest intermediate stopovers, "long enough," and push on toward the goal. Journey with us, Lord! Break the trail and set the pace.

2. A Sad Disservice

Our brothers made us lose heart (Deuteronomy 1:28).

When we listen to human fears instead of divine promises our courage fails. We magnify our problems and shrink our resources. The enemies become giants; we become grasshoppers. The consequences are grumbling and rebellion that insult God and wreck us.

To reckon without God is to defeat ourselves. The Anakites prevail without having to strike a blow. A fearful people give the devil a day off--they do his work for him. How tragic when our brothers are the instruments of our despair and defeat.

To lose heart is to lose the battle. Battles do not begin with the first blow struck or the first shot fired. They begin in the heart where the "yes" of faith or the "no" of fear is spoken. Everything else flows from that.

Discouraged men are defeated men. That's why Jesus often said, "Take heart." If we look up to him instead of looking down on ourselves, nothing is impossible.

Lord, help us to trust you. Help us to encourage our brothers and sisters.

3. Carried by Our Father

The Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son
(Deuteronomy 1:31).

The Lord fought for Israel in Egypt and carried them in the desert. He did so "as a father," not reluctantly but joyfully. No good father resents the weight of a helpless child. Love does not make all burdens lighter, but love makes the burden bearers stronger.

There are times when God's children can march and can fight, and his word commands them to do so. There are also times when they must be carried, must be shielded, and he is glad to perform these services for them. He is the perfect Father.

Despite God's strong and caring love, Israel "did not trust" in him. How quickly they forgot! How ungrateful they proved! The modern church cannot judge ancient Israel. Our record is too dismal to allow us to be their accusers. Nor can any one of us condemn the church. Our personal failures lay fingers over our mouths when we are tempted to criticize others.

You have carried us, O loving Father! Help us to remember and to trust.

4. A Splendid Tribute

He followed the Lord wholeheartedly (Deuteronomy 1:36).

This is the Lord's own description of Caleb. He who knows the heart declared Caleb's loyalty to be wholehearted. No higher tribute could be paid to any person. What a splendid epitaph for a man's tombstone this text would be.

Unless one follows the Lord wholeheartedly, he will not follow at all sometimes. Where the Lord leads the half-hearted cannot follow. He does not always lead through green pastures and beside still waters. Sometimes he blazes a trail through rugged deserts and treacherous rapids. He is not committed to our comfort but to our holiness.

I recall the day when pioneer preacher D. M. Colson told me, "I have stepped into all kinds of danger for the Lord, and I would do it again." He was then ninety years old, truly a Caleb-like servant of the Lord.

Beside such men we feel small and worthless. We can only pray, "Make us willing to do your will at any cost--even when the majority counsels otherwise."

5. Encourage Your Leaders

Encourage him, because he will lead Israel to inherit the land (Deuteronomy 1:38).

Sometimes more grace is needed to encourage a successor than to achieve success. Moses encouraging Joshua is one of the most magnificent scenes in Scripture (31:7-8).

Too many have resented their successors, jealous of their acceptance with the people and of their achievements in the position. How easy it is to be small-minded and green-eyed. Those who have experienced the tough situations and costly battles should be the first to encourage their successors.

"Encourage him" is surely God's command to all his people over whom he has set leaders. Be thankful for all who have encouraged you and "pay it forward" by encouraging others. Our achievements owe more to others' encouragement than to our own efforts.

Lord, help us to be encouragers. May we help leaders and doers by cheering them on. We don't fit the role of critics or judges. Let us, instead, help to hearten those who labor for you.

6. Wasted Weeping

He paid no attention to your weeping (Deuteronomy 1:45).

The Lord is moved by tears of contrition. He is moved by the weeping of innocent sufferers and devastated mourners. His response to the tears of Peter, of the widow at Nain, and of Mary at his tomb evidenced his tender compassion.

Israel wept because her arrogant rebellion against God's command resulted in a bloody defeat at the hands of the Amorites, who chased them "like a swarm of bees." God "turned a deaf ear" to the wailing rebels.

To weep because we feel sorry, not for our sins but for their consequences, is a waste of tears. God will not encourage evil by reversing its disastrous results. His love is not soft. It does not sabotage his holiness and justice. Sorrow for sin is a prelude to forgiveness. Sorrow for self is wasted emotion.

Children often wail in an effort to gain assent to their wishes. They wail in an effort to avoid punishment or to solicit sympathy. God is not an unwise Father who can be influenced by phony tears. He is merciful but not gullible.

No joy comes in the morning for those who weep falsely in the night.

7. Divine Faithfulness

You have not lacked anything (Deuteronomy 2:7).

God's people lacked some things they wanted, but lacked nothing they needed. He watched over their desert sojourn, not as an aloof spectator, but as an involved Father. He blessed the work of their hands, and sustained them by the work of his hands. He supplied all their needs--including chastening when they grumbled and rebelled.

God has promised to supply all our needs (Phil. 4:19). Some have called this verse a blank check, drawn on heaven's bank, signed by Jesus and handed to us. That sounds clever but makes the Lord sound unwise. He would not entrust a blank check to weak, unwise and sometimes greedy and selfish people. His love does not operate at the expense of his intelligence. Why should we attribute to him an action we would brand as foolish in a human father?

By time we reach heaven we may exceed Israel's forty- year journey through the "vast desert," but we will be able to say, "We have not lacked anything needed"--including the chastening prompted by God's love.

8. Forbidden Prayer

Do not speak to me any more about this (Deuteronomy 4:26).

Children often win consent from parents through sheer persistence. They urgently repeat their requests until unwise parents finally say, "Oh, all right." The children then proceed with triumphant joy.

The Lord's wisdom is greater; his love is tougher. When prayer becomes a nagging protest he imposes silence.

To teach Israel that no man, not even one as wise and good as Moses, can displease God with impunity, he barred him from the promised land. How eager Moses was to enter Canaan! What a fitting climax to his long, costly, and faithful leadership that would be! Still, God said "No."

Often God had listened to Moses. Often God had answered his prayers. But in this matter he adamantly refused to listen. All involved must be taught that he listens to those who first listen to him. Obedience is a key to answered prayer.

The Lord often urges his people to pray. When he commands silence instead, the reason is serious indeed. Let us pay close attention to the lesson here. If Moses could forfeit Canaan, what might we not forfeit, being less wise and strong than he was?

9. The Fighting God

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

When God does the fighting, the fearing may be left undone. He is invincible.

We don't want to misread this passage. God fought for Israel by fighting with them. His presence on the field of battle did not permit their absence from it. He sent his people into battle and assured their victory by going with them.

That he fights for his people assures victory, but it does not mean they are exempt from conflict or from casualties. In "the good fight of the faith" one can be wounded or even killed, as were some of the apostles. But "the faith" triumphs even when its advocates are slain. The supreme demonstration of this truth was the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Armor, weapons and conflict are figures employed in the Scriptures for Christian life. That God fights for us does not mean that we will not fight or that we will fight unscathed. It does mean that the cause for which we fight will triumph. We can fight without fear.

How Near God Is!

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? (Deuteronomy 4:8).

A nation's greatness is not measured by its material wealth or political might. It is measured by the proximity of its god. A praying pagan can be close to his god, close enough to kiss an idol's feet, close enough to hold an idol in his hands, but that god cannot respond. False gods can never speak and act on behalf of their petitioners. The one, true, living God of Israel could do all this and more. He was closer to his people than they were to one another.

The Lord is as near to us as prayer heard and answered. Every idol is as distant as prayer unheard and unanswered. In our times of need, how great is the difference!

The Lord is close enough to hear and be heard. He may say "Yes" or "No" or "Wait," but any answer he gives should encourage us, for it reminds us that the Lord is nearer to us than anyone or anything else in our lives.

No 911 response has ever out-raced the Lord's. Hallelujah!

10. Teach the Children

Teach them to your children and to their children after them (Deuteronomy 4:9).

Moral distance is created by disobedience to God. Israel's greatness lay in the God who answered prayer and in "the body of laws" he supplied to govern their lives (vv. 7-8). The two are inseparable.

Unless we obey his commands we forfeit God's presence as the savior and protector of his people. The "far country," as Jesus taught, is not geographical but spiritual. The elder son slept under the same roof as his father, but was as alienated from him in heart as was the prodigal son in a distant hog pen.

Because God's words are so vital to our lives, how carefully they should be taught, learned and observed! We may have been poor instructors if some of our children refuse God's covenant and live as though he does not exist or does not matter. That breaks our hearts. We can only endure the chronic pain by God's forgiveness and our hope.

God is great and his law is great. He is worthy of devoted followers. Forgive, renew and strengthen us, Lord, or we cannot live.

11. A Consuming Fire

For the Lord your God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24).

The Lord's holy jealousy is a death knell to idols. An idol is never a thing apart from its maker. Like ancient Ephraim, men are "joined" to their idols. The judgment that befalls the idol, therefore, involves the idolater.

The Lord is a fire that cannot be extinguished. Evildoers have no refuge from, and no defense against, his judgment. No firebreaks can check his advance. No water or chemical can smother his blaze. Judgment is as inevitable as his existence.

The Lord is a fire that will consume sin or the sinner. He is the refiner of his people's hearts. The fierce heat of his love will cleanse the dross from our natures. He will purify us until he sees his reflection in our hearts, as a refiner's face was reflected in the molten gold within his crucible.

If the Lord's refining grace is rejected he is a fire that consumes the rejecter. Where he is not allowed to save, he cannot be stopped from destroying. Lord, consume our sin but save us sinners!

12. God Can Be Found

You will find him if you look for him with all your heart
(Deuteronomy 4:29).

The halfhearted cannot find the Lord. This is not because he is hidden but because they are blinded--blinded by false gods and false values and false life-styles.

The Lord gives himself to be found for he is "a merciful God." He is not aloof or elusive; he is as near as our breathing. When we are willing to break with our idols, we discover that he is already with us and eager to forgive.

He demands our whole hearts. He cannot demand less and truly be God. We cannot devote less and truly be human. Our hearts were created to be his abode, and he, the uncreated is the true home of our hearts. So long as we are torn between him and our idols we will never be fully ourselves. We find our identity and security when we find him--and he is found when our pursuit of him is wholehearted.

We are not hidden from him but our sin hides him from us. He has sought us in order to save us. We must seek him in order to be saved. He makes himself easy to find to all but the sub-earnest.

13. Perfect Hearing

The Lord heard you when you spoke to me (Deuteronomy 5:28).

The Lord's hearing is keen. He hears every word addressed to him and overhears every word addressed to others. Our faintest whispers are easily audible to him. Indeed, he knows the words that form in our minds but never escape our lips.

Israel pledged to obey God's commands, directing their words to Moses. God heard and pronounced their words "good." Would it not be wonderful if all our words could bear that label? Alas, they cannot, and we are sustained only by the words of forgiveness that he speaks and we hear.

His word teaches that we shall be judged for our words. He will not depend upon hearsay evidence, or upon the testimony of others. He hears every word himself and his recall is just as perfect as his hearing.

If we keep in mind the fact that he hears all we say to others, what a difference it will make in the level of our conversation! It would make an even greater difference in the number of our silences.

O Lord, post a guard at my big mouth. Amen.

14. First and Greatest

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Jesus called this the first and greatest commandment. It is the keeping of this one that makes the keeping of all the others possible. Apart from this one the others spawn a heartless legalism congenial to religious pride and vicious toward all dissenters. Everything flows from our relationship to God. Depending on the quality of that relationship, the stream of life is pure or polluted.

No wonder God's word was to be upon the hearts and lips of his people. Quotations from Scripture were bound upon their hands and foreheads and door posts. When this commandment was ignored or rejected only misery resulted. Every other relationship in life was shattered and soured. Bloody and enslaving chaos followed.

Lord, write your commandments upon our hearts. Shape our inner lives to conform to your will. Fill us with the Holy Spirit and let the fruit of love flourish in our thoughts, words and deeds. Nothing less than radical heart surgery can enable us to respond positively and obediently to this first and greatest of your commandments.

16. Unwise Marriages

Do not intermarry with them (Deuteronomy 7:3).

God did not forbid intermarriage on a racial basis. His people were not superior in "blood" to other nations. No, he forbade intermarriage because he was the true and living God, and the gods of the nations were false.

He knew what Solomon learned to his ruin--that pagan spouses brought their false gods into the marriages. Jezebels turn Ahabs away from God and fill their lives with idolatry and immorality. Good religion can be spoiled by bad marriages.

Marriage is a poor missionary strategy. Many well-intentioned Christian women have married unsaved men, hoping that within the context of married love they could succeed in winning their husbands to Christ. How seldom are such expectations fulfilled! Too often the hearts of Christians are turned from the Lord by the relentless pressure of a non-believer's influence.

We should fervently thank the Lord for Christian marriages, and for spouses whose devotion to God has been an encouraging influence.

17. Loving Election

The Lord has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6).

The chosen people were not choice in character but in privileges and possibilities. God did not choose them because they were wiser or better or stronger than other nations. In truth, they were small in number and undeserving in conduct--sinners as all people were. The reason assigned for God's choice was not their merit but his love (vv. 7-8).

Divine election was not a reward for merit achieved or for service rendered. It did, however, create potential for greatness and goodness. It also created a future of trouble and suffering, for those who serve the true God will always find the devotees of false gods hostile. This, in turn, brings temptation to syncretism and assimilation in order to avoid persecution.

The same reason and potential and danger that marked God's choice of Israel also characterize our election in Christ. We should pray to be kept loyal to the New Covenant at any cost. We must never forget that election is not a privilege earned but a responsibility conferred.

18. Promised Growth

He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers
(Deuteronomy 7:13).

Church growth is a hot topic and this passage conveys some simple but significant truths.

For one, love blesses obedience. God's love is never quenched, not even by our sins. But the channel of blessings is clogged by disobedience, and we become a self-deprived people, weak when we could be strong and stagnant when we could be growing.

God cannot bless, nor can people respect, a disobedient church. If he blessed disobedience, we would interpret his blessing as either indifference to sin or approval of sin. That would increase our folly and lead to chaos.

Another truth--obedience conditions growth. When Israel violated God's covenant, the consequences of their sin wrought havoc with their numbers. A variety of judgments decimated the population. Even so, the church that defies the lordship of Jesus will dry up and blow away as time passes. Sin is self-destructive.

Lord, help us to set before the world's example of obedience to you that insures spiritual blessing and growth.

19. Promised Invincibility

No one will be able to stand up against you (Deuteronomy 7:14).

God did not promise that an obedient Israel would live unopposed but that they would live undefeated. In this world there are no exemptions from conflict, but in God's word there are promises of victory.

Where there is conflict there will be wounds and there will be suffering. A holy people are not sheltered from life's painful realities, but they are not conquered by those realities.

The church Christ builds is invincible. The gates of hell cannot prevail against it, though they attack in force and with frequency. Death could not defeat or retain Jesus and he is the assurance of our unconquerable freedom. We are founded upon the rock that cannot be moved. We are held in a grasp that cannot be broken. Every assault against us fails because Jesus never fails.

As his people, as members of his church, we are invincible.

20. The Unwelcome

Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you will be set apart for destruction, even as it is (Deuteronomy 7:26).

An idol, and anything that becomes an idol, is detestable in God's sight. Let us not admit into our homes any rival gods. Let us not house anything that will change our priorities from God's glory first and our family's welfare next. When these priorities are changed our destruction is assured.

Let us not allow our television sets to become detestable things. Let us avoid all programs that would pollute our hearts and waste our lives. May nothing shown on television ever keep us from God's house or from his work.

Let us not allow our libraries to become detestable things. We should read to be informed and inspired and entertained. We should not desire or indulge what is corrupt. Everything that shapes human character and behavior may be of interest to us, but authors who cannot write without loading pages with filth are enemies of our souls. Our time, money and energy are too important to be sacrificed to the destructive effects of profanity, obscenity, and blasphemy.

Our houses are filled with what fills our hearts. Lord, grant us pure hearts and simple lives. Help us to place no welcome mats to detestable things at our doorsteps. We are not immune to trouble, but we are impervious to conquest. Hallelujah!

21. Feed Your Stomach and Soul

Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:3).

By living out this passage, and not merely quoting it, Jesus routed Satan in the wilderness of temptation. In his hungriest moments Jesus preferred the will of the Father to the satisfaction of his own desires.

We cannot survive without bread. Bodies will perish if denied their necessary food for long. Denied God's word souls will perish. Souls and stomachs alike need food.

The world too often ignores the soul, depriving itself of what is most important to real life--God's saving and guiding word.

The church too often ignores the stomach, offering God's word to those too dulled by starvation to desire or understand its vital message.

We need to underscore that word "alone," and to minister to the whole person. We need to both feed the hungry and evangelize the lost. The Lord will help us to demonstrate in daily life the greater significance of his word without discounting the necessity of bread.

Lord, give us our daily bread for stomach and soul, and make us quick to share both with the needy around us. Amen.

22. Loving Discipline

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

The Lord does not spoil his children. He responds to our needs, not our whims. His "no" is as decisive and loving as his "yes." His motive is always good and his methods are always wise. This is not true of many earthly fathers, whose uncontrolled anger permits "discipline" to become abusive, sometimes murderous.

Thank the Lord for his discipline. It comes unasked and unpleasant, but it makes us wiser and better persons. It toughens us for trekking through hostile territory, through a world where the Lord is hated, opposed and slandered. Soft Christians cannot survive a hard journey, and the countless casualties we have observed should deepen our gratitude for God's refining and restraining grace.

God takes no pleasure in the chastening he administers. He does take pleasure in what it produces--men and women of character and endurance who will populate his "better country." May he give us the grace and good sense to accept without whining his loving discipline.

23. The Source

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 8:10).

The Lord is the source of our daily bread. As Maltbie Babcock put it,

*Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,
And back of the flour the mill,
And back of the mill the wheat and the shower,
And the sun and the Father's will.*

Since the Lord is the subject of our blessings he should be the object of our praises, and our praises should be as daily as his mercies. May he help us not to be remiss in thankfully acknowledging him as the giver of "every good and perfect gift." May he spare us from both self-indulgence and ingratitude.

After dinner praises beat after dinner speeches. Do you ever weary of meetings where meals together are followed by speeches, not given because the speeches are either needed or desired but because custom must be honored? Many a good meal has been ruined, and many a poor meal worsened, by a speech. Lord, forgive me, that I have so often been the speaker!

24. Follow the Flame

The Lord your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire (Deuteronomy 9:3).

Crossing the Jordan, the chosen people would encounter enemies "strong and tall" in cities large and fortified. What chance did little Israel have of dispossessing them? Apart from the Lord, they had none. Following him, they had every chance. Intrepid Joshua who led them was a visible symbol of the invisible God who served as their vanguard. The Lord is a fire that none can extinguish. With the Lord leading them, ordinary people can achieve extraordinary victories.

Every life has its Anakites. We may encounter many towering persons and situations that threaten defeat. In the Lord we are tall enough to meet their level stares and strong enough to take their hardest blows. We who have followed the flame for many years have never dipped our colors to the enemy. In ourselves we would be laughingstocks; in the Lord we are invincible.

The Lord does not merely send; he leads. He crosses over our Jordans ahead of us. That's comforting security!

25. The Listener

But again the Lord listened to me (Deuteronomy 9:19).

When Israel rebelled, the Lord was "angry enough...to destroy" them. Moses pled for them and the Lord withheld destructive judgment.

He does not listen to everyone. He listens to those who listen to him. Moses hearkened to the Lord's commands and the Lord hearkened to his prayers.

There are a number of reasons for unanswered prayers, but the chief one is disobedience. When a man refuses to live by God's word he finds the heavens brass when he prays.

"I prayed," said Moses (9:26), and his intercession was the difference between life and death for Israel.

Two tragedies are haunting: the people who may have perished because no one prayed; and the people who forfeited the power of intercession because they lived contrary to God's word.

God listens to those who listen to him. Lord, engrave that truth indelibly upon our hearts. It will caution us against sin. It will encourage us to pray.

26. Written Again

The Lord wrote on the tablets what he had written before, the ten commandments (Deuteronomy 10:4).

Good things are worth repeating as the Lord demonstrated. Repeated creeds and prayers and even sermons can arouse minds and hearts to fresh labors of love and works of faith.

God's mercy is boundless. Instead of destroying the people who broke his laws, he patiently engraved his "ten words" on stone tablets again. We don't rid ourselves of God's laws by breaking them. We can break ourselves upon them, however. Nevertheless, God is as gracious to forgive sinners as he is to restate statutes.

To rebels his commandments are grievous and onerous. To subjects they are liberating. They vex the carnally minded but bring light and peace to the spiritually minded. Hated by those who oppose him, they are loved by those who trust and obey him.

Shattered tablets symbolize our rebellion. Replaced tablets symbolize his mercy and our hope. Thank God for a glorious repetition.

27. Your Own Good

What does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve... for your own good? (Deuteronomy 10:12).

The Lord's will is our welfare. Humanity self-destructs when it rebels against him. From the beginning the devil has sold people on the notion that God's restrictions were arbitrary and unfair, that the only way to self-fulfillment was self-autonomy. We bought the big lie and our self-inflicted wounds have been pouring life-blood ever since.

He commands our love, fear and obedience, not to satisfy his ego but to save ours. His "asking" arises out of our needs, not his. The railroads protect and fulfill the trains and the passengers, not the designer. They confine in order to free. They limit in order to save.

To walk in our way is to come nearer to ruin with every step. To walk in God's way is to tread a shining path that leads to noontide brilliance and joy. He graces our lives with his truth that we may escape Satan's lie.

God has redeemed us for the glory of his name. He guides us for our good.

29. Beloved Aliens

He...loves the alien.... And you are to love those who are aliens... (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

In this world all who serve the Lord are aliens. As Paul reminded the church at Philippi, "our citizenship is in heaven." Like the patriarchs of old, we are "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." The new Israel has "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven" for those who are kept on earth by the Lord.

Yes, this world is not our home. At best we are resident aliens. The lot of aliens is never easy. They are different, and therefore distrusted always and persecuted frequently. But God loves the aliens, and he joined them in Jesus Christ. What sustains us in our journey toward heaven is his forgiving, consoling and bracing love.

It is not enough that he loves us. We are to love one another. His love can seem abstract until his people model it in flesh and blood.

Lord, "circumcise" our "hearts" that we may love you perfectly and express a love like yours to the defenseless and homeless of earth.

30. Love Prompts Obedience

Love the Lord your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always (Deuteronomy 11:1).

Love inspired the law. The Lord gave the law to Israel in a context of grace. He prefaced the covenant demands with a reminder of divine deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Exod. 20:1-17).

Law given by love can only be kept by love. Love is the only adequate motivation for obedience. Duty, honor, fear and even "enlightened self-interest" will not suffice for obedience to God that is "always" and not merely sometimes.

Jesus said to his disciples, "If you love me you will obey what I command.... If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching" (John 14:15, 23). Love identifies his people and enables their obedience to his lordship.

Rebels may comply outwardly with law, but only lovers will keep the law truly--from their hearts. The Lord insures our obedience, not by enlarging our courage, but by cleansing us from all impediments to love.

31. Inward Truth

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds...
(Deuteronomy 11:18)

What is fixed in our hearts will rule our lives. We live from the inside out. God's word counsels us to "guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life." Our words and deeds flow from an inner source. If God's words control that source, our lives will be holy. Lord, enable us to say with the psalmist, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

God's word affixed to hands and foreheads and door-frames is good, but not good enough. The crucifixion of Jesus was engineered by men who faithfully used mezuzahs and phylacteries, but the word was not fixed in their hearts.

God's words written upon the hearts of his people is a new covenant promise. He fulfills that promise by filling us with the Holy Spirit.

I recall a preacher who never appeared in public without a huge Bible. He told me it kept "she-devils" from messing with him! He might as well have carried a phone book. His homely face and obese form would have repelled the flirts. It's not the Bible in the hand but in the heart that is our defense against sin.

32. Taking the Given

Every place where you set your foot will be yours
(Deuteronomy 11:24).

What God gave had to be taken, and the taking was difficult and costly. "No man will be able to stand against you" was a promise of victory, not an exemption from battle. The phrase "when you have taken it over" (v. 31), implied blood, sweat and tears.

Let us remember that Christianity is spiritual warfare, not a church picnic. We can be hurt and even killed by opposing the forces that oppose the Lord. Obedience to him makes us invincible but not invulnerable. Men and demons will try to stand against us, but they cannot defeat us. God's promises call for action and the actions will succeed.

(A stray thought: if every place I set my foot is mine I own my mouth. I've put my foot in my mouth on many occasions. Someone called Simon Peter "the apostle with the foot-shaped mouth." That is my claim to apostolic succession.)

Today, Lord, help us to enlarge our spiritual holdings by treading new ground in Scripture and practice.

33. Tested By Miracles

The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 10:3).

False prophets, utilizing "signs and wonders," tempted God's chosen people to worship false gods. The "miracles" they performed became a snare to the greedy and the gullible.

What's new? Recently the blatant dishonesty of celebrated television preachers has been exposed. Still those charlatans command a following of thousands. Most of these dupes are not simply gullible, but at heart dishonest. Because they are unwilling to live by God's word, their greedy hearts desire preachers who interpret godliness as a guarantee of material abundance and sensual pleasure. They want someone who will stamp their materialism and hedonism "approved by God." They want a popular Christianity--Christianity without a cross.

Miracles are not a proof of truth. Wrought by crooks they are a test of loyalty--God or mammon? Miracles are no excuse for idolatry. Lord, wed our hearts to your word so fully that no deceiver can sunder them.

34. Worship and Welfare

Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year (Deuteronomy 14:22).

The Lord made tithing a way of worship. It taught his people to revere him as the one who saved them from bondage and sustained them in freedom.

The tithe was his, not theirs, and to withhold the tithes was to rob him.

The Lord also made tithing a way of welfare. The tithes supported those who were unsupported by other means. Tithes rescued the poverty stricken from starvation, and freed the Levites to do their work for God's house.

Tithe-supported ministries and charities are God's plan for financing kingdom work. There has never been a successful substitute for that plan. All arguments against tithing reek of selfishness and greed. Their speech betrays those who advance such arguments. The accents of self-interest and self-indulgence are unmistakable.

Some have argued that tithing is Jewish. The Christian way, they say, is to give all, not a tenth. The "all" given by those who argue in this vein almost always turns out to be less than ten-percent of income.

Let us honor the Lord and help others with our tithes and offerings.

35. Openhearted, Openhanded

I command you to be openhearted toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy... (Deuteronomy 15:11).

Hearts and hands work as one. When the heart is open, the hands will extend help. When the heart is closed the hands will clutch possessions. Our giving to God and to others is always heart-conditioned.

We give to God by giving to others. What is done to relieve the needy is done to him. What is withheld from the needy is withheld from him. His love does not dwell in the close-fisted, whatever their lips profess (1 John 3:17).

God commands generous and ungrudging help for the needy. He loves cheerful givers and grateful receivers. That assures us that he can radically change hearts, for hearts by nature are selfish. Only by grace are they oriented toward others. How wonderful when God make drunkards sober and adulterers chaste. Equally magnificent, as a triumph of saving grace, is the making of skinflints generous.

Give us hearts like yours, Lord--unselfish, generous and joyfully so.

36. A Way of Death

Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous (Deuteronomy 16:19).

A bribe is the down payment on a person's or a nation's downfall.

When builders secure contracts by bribing officials, other bribes will allow them to do shoddy work with impunity.

When criminals escape sentences by bribing judges, felons rule and the righteous suffer.

The destruction wrought through bribery is beyond calculation, yet bribery is epidemic in this so-called Christian country. Bribery is a way of life widely practiced. More accurately, a way of death, for every perversion of truth and justice separates the guilty from God.

Judas is the name of every person who takes a bribe, for all bribery is a betrayal of the Christ who champions the poor and defenseless.

Keep us, Lord, from putting a price tag on character or a mortgage on the future by taking or giving bribes.

37. King of Kings

When he takes the throne...he is to write for himself...a copy of this law (Deuteronomy 17:18).

In Israel there was to be no absolute sovereignty but God's. The king had a king. The king was over the people as God's agent; he was beside the people before God's law.

To keep him reminded of his stewardship, to keep him from abusing his lordship, he was to copy, read, learn and follow God's decrees.

That all of Israel's rulers did not obey this command is a fact of history. That all who refused to obey brought judgment upon themselves is also a fact of history. The king who held himself above the law soon found himself under the lawgiver's judgment. The king of kings did not consider the monarch to be "better than his brothers" (v. 20). No earthly throne could exempt a man from heavenly justice.

What sorrows would be spared their subjects if all earthly rulers read and learned and followed God's word. Trees die from the top and nations are destroyed by the sins of their rulers. God grant us leaders who know that he is the king of kings and lord of lords.

38. The Prophets and the Prophet

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth (Deuteronomy 18:18).

There is a sense in which every true prophet in Israel's history partially fulfilled this ancient prophecy. The prophets were brothers to God's people and servants of God's words. They were living transmitters of his will, and their identity was authenticated by the fulfillment of their prophecies.

The Lord Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of Moses' message of promise. He is from the Father and for the Father. He is from us and for us. He is the word made flesh. The words he spoke on earth originated from the Father in heaven and terminated upon his followers (John 7:16; 17:8). His deeds, likewise, were from the Father (John 8:28-29).

We have chosen to live by Jesus' words. We bless God for all who have conveyed those words to us, for every teacher and preacher who has explained and applied his words for our lives. Our debt to them is next to our debt to him.

39. Access Roads

***Build roads to them* (Deuteronomy 19:3).**

The Lord mercifully provided cities of refuge, "centrally located," to which those could flee who had accidentally killed others. There they were sheltered from the pursuing "avenger of blood." Of these cities God commanded, "Build roads to them," for refuge is a mockery without access to it.

The Lord Jesus is the refuge of all penitent sinners. To him we flee for our pardon and life. In him alone can we escape judgment, for he died for our sins and rose again for our justification (Rom. 4:25).

Someone had to build roads to him or we would never have found the refuge. I thank God for the girl whose patient love and prayers and witness became my access road to the throne of grace. Through her the Spirit convicted me of sin and attracted me to Jesus. In him I found forgiveness, peace and life.

Lord, help us to be access roads for others. Help us to smooth their way to refuge. By words and deeds, may we show them how to seek and find you as their salvation and security. Amen!

40. Fear Is Contagious

Is any man afraid or faint-hearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too (Deuteronomy 20:8).

Fear is contagious. It spreads rapidly from person to person until whole armies are panicked and routed by it. As Gideon learned, 300 men of faith and valor were better than 32,000 infected by fear.

God's promise to fight for Israel and to give them victory (v. 4) should have erased their fears. In the absence of faith, though, the contagion of fear spreads unchecked and destroys morale.

Quarantine prevents the spread of fear. As in an epidemic, those who are diseased must be isolated from those who aren't.

While quarantine retards it does not cure. The cure for fear is faith. A psalmist declared, "When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid" (56:3-4). He recognized that fears will arise. They are erased, not by denying them, but by trusting in God's promises. Grant us the faith that overcomes fear.

41. Lifting the Curse

Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse (Deuteronomy 21:23).

No follower of Jesus can read these words without thinking at once of his death.

In the twisted minds of scheming politicians and a taunting mob, his death on the cross proved that he was accursed of God.

He was not bearing a curse; he was removing a curse. With spike-torn hands he was hurling into oblivion the curse upon our sins. He was bearing our sins in his body upon the tree (1 Pet. 3:24).

Men cursed him, but God did not. The Father was never more pleased with the Son than when his perfect obedience to the Father's will took him to that lonely outpost of hate and death for our sakes.

How blind are men in their sins! Until our eyes are opened by grace, we cannot see the cross as Jesus' glory, as does John in his Gospel. Instead, we attribute to him the curse deserved by us.

Forgive your unsighted and erring creatures, O Lord. We embrace today the apparent curse as your real mercy.

42. Slowly Made, Swiftly Paid

If you make a vow to God, do not be slow to pay it
(Deuteronomy 23:21)

The Lord teaches us that we should be slow to make but quick to pay our vows. He does not demand vows, but he respects them and requires their fulfillment. Vows freely made should be swiftly paid.

God's veracity is absolute. He takes seriously his promises to us, and he expects us to take seriously our promises to him. Talk is not cheap to him, nor should it be to us.

Foolish vows, whose fulfillment would be wicked and destructive, should be abandoned with a prayer for his forgiveness. He does not bind men to stupidity or cruelty. Think of the men who vowed to neither eat nor drink until they had assassinated Paul. Such vows honor him by being forsaken, not fulfilled.

Teach us, Lord, to be "quick to listen, slow to speak" (Jas. 1:19), swift to discharge obligations, slow to incur them. Teach us to hold our tongues until we have freed our brains.

43. Draft Exempt

If a man is recently married, he must not be sent to war (Deuteronomy 24:5).

Why not? Was this piece of legislation designed to protect the newly-married woman from instant widowhood? Does it reflect the fact that a newlywed soldier would be a high-risk warrior, being physically on the battlefield but mentally and emotionally at home? Did it allow for the preservation of a man's lineage by granting him time to beget a son? Or maybe--a cynical thought--veterans of marriage make the toughest combat troops.

These days, in most homes, the very fact of marriage sends a man to war. Happy are the homes where love and peace abound--and such homes are rare.

In any case, this law reflects God's interest in marriage and family. For this divine concern we should be grateful, and we should reflect it within our families. If God exempted newlyweds from war, he certainly doesn't want combat in our homes. If it's going on in your home, cease fire. Make love, not war.

44. Once a Slave

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt (Deuteronomy 24:22).

Those who remember bondage value freedom. God forbade his people to exploit "the alien, the fatherless, and the widow," reminding them that they had been mercifully redeemed from exploitation while they were defenseless slaves. The mercy we received we should show. The abuse we endured as victims we should not inflict as masters. This law was another expression of the Golden Rule.

Our heritage of political and social freedom is precious. We should be grateful for it but not proud. Our freedom was won and preserved by ancestors. It is both achievement and inheritance. When necessary we will fight to defend it, for we want this priceless heritage to be the blessing of succeeding generations.

Lord, help us to express our gratitude by refusing to approve the exploitation of the defenseless in our society. Most of all, keep us thankful that we have been redeemed from spiritual bondage by your grace. We are ex-slaves who have been freed at the cost of Christ's blood.

45. Honest Dealing

You must have accurate and honest weights and measures (Deuteronomy 25:15).

When I was a boy I sacked sugar for a grocery store. I scooped it from a number-three galvanized tub into five-pound sacks. "Speed it up," the boss said. "You needn't worry if there's less than five pounds in each sack." "Okay," I replied, "and I won't worry if there's more than five pounds." He transferred me to another task. It was all right to cheat the customers but not the company.

The history of commerce has been one of cheating. Ours is a "rip-off" society. "Caveat emptor" is a way of life. Against all this God's face is set in holy anger.

To cheat a person is to offend God for he is that person's creator and redeemer. We can never isolate our relationship to others from our relationship to God.

Honesty pays, men say. God demands honesty even if it costs. He detests anyone who "deals dishonestly." To cheat anyone is to incur his wrath. That makes every crooked deal a huge loss on the real "bottom line," the one that will be revealed in the final judgment.

46. An Awful Judgment

You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget! (Deuteronomy 25:19).

How odd! One memory is jogged so that another memory might be erased.

How odd! We might never have heard of Amalek apart from the Bible. It preserves the very memory that was to be erased.

All this is confusing, but one thing is certainly clear: Those who oppose God's people and God's purpose pay a terrible price. This makes us want all the more to be his people and to help further his purpose.

Being his can be costly. Hell rages against the church. It can cost everything, including life, to become the target of the Lord's enemies.

The Amalekites ambushed and butchered all the stragglers among the Israelites. In opposing God and slaying them, the Amalekites brought down upon themselves an awful judgment. It costs far more to be against God than to be for him. And we must choose to be for or against God; neutrality is impossible.

47. A Good Prayer

Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and bless your people (Deuteronomy 26:15).

This is a good prayer for the Lord's people in any age. We look up in prayer and he looks down in blessing. We look up in utter dependence and he looks down in gracious provisions.

The arrangement is unmerited but not unconditioned. The prayer is for those who obey the Lord's commandments (v. 13). His outpoured blessings reward obedience. His withheld blessings judge disobedience. Yet, even his judgments are tempered with mercy; they call us to repentance and reconciliation.

Lord, keep us reminded that you are "up" and we are "down." You are our sovereign; we are your subjects.

Where the Lord dwells is holy, made so by his presence. Dwell in our hearts as you do in heaven. Make us holy by your residence and presence in our hearts. This is the blessing we desire most of all--to be like you.

48. The Amen of Deeds

The Levites shall recite to all the people..."Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out." Then all the people shall say, "Amen" (Deuteronomy 27:14, 26).

Underline the phrase, "by carrying them out." God's words are upheld by the "amen" of practical response, not by the "amen" of verbal response. The spoken amen so easily becomes empty ritual. The lived out amen is what claims the blessings and avoids the curses of his covenant.

If lip service were translated into life-service, churches and communities would be reformed at once.

We are not immune to the temptation to make verbal amens the boundary of obedience. Lord, help us to honor you by deeds and words. Empty rituals are hollow and invite judgment.

"All the people shall say, 'Amen'!" There is no obedience by proxy. Even the obedience of Christ does not save the person who deliberately continues in sin. Calvary enables devotion to his words; it does not make that devotion unnecessary.

49. Heads or Tails

The Lord will make you the head, not the tail... you will always be at the top, never at the bottom (Deuteronomy 28:13).

God had a simple and sure-fire economic rule for Israel. Obedience to his covenant would insure national prosperity. Carefully following his commands, Israel would be lender but not borrower, the head and not the tail.

Disobedience would reverse the situation, producing tragic results detailed by Moses in an eloquent but awful passage. The sky would be bronze, the ground would be iron. Crops and people would perish in terrible droughts. Alien armies would decimate and enslave a covenant-breaking nation of apostates.

The blessings and curses alike would testify to the holiness of Israel's God.

Why would the people choose curses and death instead of obedience and life? The answer lies in Paul's phrase, "the mystery of iniquity." How blinding and binding is the power of sin. How wonderful and powerful is God's grace that saves from sin.

50. Which Yoke?

He will put an iron yoke on your neck (Deuteronomy 28:48).

Here is the choice--the iron yoke of judgment or the easy yoke of Christ. Each of us must wear one or the other. There is no autonomous person. Either sin or the savior rules each life.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Anarchy is a pipe dream. The self-ruled man, like the self-made man, is non-existent. The issue is not yoked or unyoked, but which yoke, that of sin or that of the Lord's?

We are glad and grateful for your yoke, Lord Jesus! We responded to your invitation. We came to you and found rest. We wear a yoke that doesn't chafe and perform a service that doesn't enslave. Your rule is our freedom.

The iron yoke destroys. Jesus' yoke saves and sustains us. We praise him for the truth that sets us free.

51. Things Revealed

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 29:29).

We cannot know everything about the Lord, but we can know something about him. Some things are forever his secret, for we have limited capacity to share his unlimited knowledge.

What we do know, we have not learned through investigation but through revelation. He has disclosed himself to us by acting for us. Revelation has occurred, not in response to our curiosity but in response to our need. The Lord has graciously revealed himself in order to save us from sin and receive us into his fellowship.

That revelation becomes a family treasure, to be possessed by each generation in gratitude and with joy. It becomes a guide by which all of life's relationships are defined and preserved in righteousness and truth.

Thank you, Lord, for what you have shared with us and for us.

52. Heart Change

The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live (Deuteronomy 30:6).

God's covenant will be as broad as our lives only when it's as deep as our hearts. A heart-deep covenant requires a heart-deep change.

What God seeks is not the robot-like obedience of the slave but the joyful obedience of a child. Such obedience can only spring from love; it is not the issue of duty.

Such love, in turn, requires an inner transformation. What we are by nature must be redeemed and transformed by divine grace. Sin has so marred and scarred our hearts that we cannot love the Lord as we should. We cannot even desire such love until he breaks the power of sin and strips its blinders from our souls.

He promises heart-change as a covenant sign. He can cleanse our hearts and enable us to love him purely and strongly. The covenant he has spoken in Christ and written in Scripture can be engraved upon our inner lives. Let us claim the promise.

53. The Word Is Near

The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it (Deuteronomy 30:14).

God's word conveys power for obedience, but only when it reaches, captures and purifies our hearts. It is not enough to have it in our mouths. We may read it, and even discuss it with others, but it must be more than a subject for study. It must engage our heads and hearts to exert saving and guiding power over our lives.

The issue is not the accessibility of God's word to us but the accessibility of our hearts to him. He has brought his word near. He has spoken the truth that liberates life. He has declared his will and promised his help. What remains to assure our spiritual triumph is the consent of our hearts to be ruled by his word.

We reaffirm that consent today, Lord. We read and ponder your word with full intention to believe and obey our gracious, speaking, covenant-making God. Your word is near to us; let our hearts be near to you.

54. Ultimate Choices

I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction (Deuteronomy 30:15).

Given such a choice, why did God's ancient people so often choose death and destruction?

Obviously, they did not believe the word that he brought near to them. Instead, they defined life and sought life on their own terms. They embraced idols, plunged into sin and thought, "This is living"--even as they destroyed themselves.

The same stupidity is rife today. People reject God's word, live by their own maxims, pursue their own pleasures and self-destruct. Their dreams are shattered, their relationships explode, and they curse the darkness they created by their refusal to hear and obey God.

Their search for solutions has only intensified their problems. They listen to every windbag that blows, experiment with every panacea offered by quacks, and finally opt for sedation instead of peace.

Lord, we have chosen to trust your word, and we have found life. Help us to share that saving, live-giving word today.

55. Choose Life

Now choose life...For the Lord is your life (Deuteronomy 30:19, 20).

Life is fellowship with the Lord. All else is death. Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Apart from the Lord's fellowship all the vain and noisy activities of the world are simply rigor mortis setting in.

Life must be chosen; it is not forced upon us. The Lord influences all, but he coerces none. His goodness induces repentance; his grace produces pardon, freedom, adoption--all the components of new life, life that is spiritual and eternal. He offers himself to us, saying, "Choose."

We make that choice when we are hungry for reality. We reaffirm that choice daily as we face the subtle alternatives proffered by the enemy. This morning, anew, our hearts exclaim, "We choose life. We choose Christ!"

Life and death--those are the ultimate choices. O Lord, help me and my family to choose life, to "love the Lord...listen to his voice, and hold fast to him."

56. The Leaders

*The Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you....
Joshua also will cross over ahead of you... (Deuteronomy 31:3).*

How faithful and encouraging is the Lord! He does not point the way; he leads the way. His people have something more and better than a road map. They have his presence as trailblazer and companion. "Ahead of you" is the Lord himself!

The Lord's presence does not make human leadership unnecessary. Joshua also, as God's chosen commander, went ahead of the people. He became the visible sign of God's invisible presence. Looking to the human leader they were reminded of the divine presence, promises and power. "Ahead of you" is Joshua.

The people's relationship to God was mirrored in their relationship to Joshua. We cannot follow the Lord unless we follow those whom he has chosen to be our guides. If we love and trust the Lord we will love and trust them.

We do not confuse the two. We do not make idols of them. We pray for them, but we pray to the Lord. They are finite and fallible; he is eternal and almighty. Still, we respect and follow them as they follow the Lord. We thank him for them.

57. A Happy Union

***Be strong and courageous* (Deuteronomy 31:6).**

We know that strength without courage is useless, and courage without strength is helpless.

Strength that lacks the courage to dare will remain untested and achieve nothing. Courage that lacks strength to achieve will be daring but winless.

Like the two wings of an eagle, both strength and courage are needed to soar, to strike and to survive. Each alone is a wasted asset. Joined together they are mightier than all the forces of evil that oppose God's people.

Both are needed and both are granted. God gives them by giving himself. The secret of courage and strength lies in the promise that accompanies the charge: "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (v. 8).

The Lord will never let us go and never let us down. His presence is strength for the weak and courage for the fearful. His fidelity is our security. The way is daunting, the enemy is cunning and powerful, but the Lord is with us. Victory is assured.

58. The Work Goes On

The Lord said to Moses, "Now the day of your death is near. Call Joshua...I will commission him " (Deuteronomy 31:14).

John Wesley was right when he said, "The Lord buries his workmen; his work goes on." All of God's servants are expendable; none is indispensable. Marcus Barth, when a child, said to his famous father, "God is Mr. Essential." True!

The bravest life, the noblest toil, must yield at last to death. Performance records do not make leaders immortal. Death interrupts their service but cannot destroy their achievements. God chooses and commissions others to take up the dropped sword, renew the urgent battle and secure the promised future. A Joshua succeeds each Moses who dies.

This passage speaks with special poignancy when we reach our advanced years. The Lord will let his servants die, but not the work for which their lives have been spent. From among those we have known and helped, he will raise up preachers to carry the gospel onward and beyond any boundary we could ever reach. For their continuing labors and victories we will give him praise as we die in peace and live in glory. Amen.

59. The Force of Music

Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites (Deuteronomy 31:19).

What a powerful force for living and learning is music! God's word and the church's faith can be deeply implanted upon the heart through songs.

Even saints with tin ears have been frequently and mightily assisted by the hymns that celebrate God's saving deeds in Jesus Christ. We have been schooled in God's praise and sustained in our trials by songs that crowd our minds and move our lips in times of "dangers, toils, and snares."

How often has an ancient psalmist steeled our tempted souls! How often has Charles Wesley "propped us on our leaning side!" How often has a snatch of song lifted our hearts to our unfailing source of strength and hope!

God's people have always been a singing people. He gives them songs even in the night. Faith is renewed and fight is resumed as our hearts "sing to the Lord."

60. Life-giving Rain

Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew
(Deuteronomy 32:2).

The Lord's words are life giving. They refresh our souls as rain renews the thirsty earth. They bring the promise of growth and blossom and fruit, as does the morning dew. Our lives would be barren deserts without his words.

That little word "let" holds an arresting and challenging force for us. His word is his word, and no decision of ours changes its essence or dilutes its power. But what his word is to us and what effect it will have upon our lives is ours to choose. We are free to choose. Better put, we are freed to choose.

We can accept God's word and act upon it in faith. We can ignore it, or deliberately reject it, in deference to our own counsel. This awesome freedom and responsibility is inescapable. Each day we must let God's word bring light and life to our pathway, or we will walk in arid darkness to a tragic doom.

No one else can determine our relationship to his teaching. Each morning brings that saving or destroying alternative. Lord, we choose rain and life.

61. Upon This Rock

He is the Rock.... You deserted the Rock, who fathered you
(Deuteronomy 32:4, 18).

The Lord is stability and refuge like a huge rock upthrust through the shifting sands of a windswept desert. His "works are perfect" and his "ways are just" for they flow from an unending love and wisdom. The strength and shelter we need cannot be found in our ways and our works. We are unstable and vulnerable. We are pushovers for the forces that menace us. We are like tiny pebbles in an onrushing mountain stream.

The Lord is the rock that stands unmoved by the winds and waters that assault it. When we place our trust in him, when he is our reality and refuge, then we are secure and triumphant.

If we desert the rock we orphan ourselves. We cast ourselves into life without foundation or defense. We become fatherless waifs, deprived of inheritance and at the mercy of whatever exceeds us in size and strength.

Our Father, our rock, we will not live without you.

62. This God Is My God

There is no god besides you (Deuteronomy 32:39).

The Lord alone is God, although the world is crammed with so-called gods. John Calvin was right when he described the human mind as a perpetual manufactory of idols. History is sin's persistent effort to supplant God with a rival.

Even those who affirm themselves atheists have gods. They have given to themselves, to other persons, or to things the value, service and devotion that is rightfully God's.

He is a "jealous" God and will not give his glory to another. He lives forever, and life and death for all creatures is at his disposal. None can keep him from delivering his people and from destroying his enemies (vv. 39-42). None can deliver from his hand those whom he has marked for judgment.

He has "compassion on his servants" (v. 36). He is forgiving, patient and kind. Whom he redeems, he also sustains. He never fails or forsakes those who trust in him. His goodness and greatness mean that he is close enough to hear and help when we cry to him as our God.

62. No Idle Words

They are not just idle words for you--they are your life (Deuteronomy 32:47).

Moses called upon Israel to "take to heart" the words he had proclaimed at the Lord's bidding. All those words were to be carefully taught to their children. God's words are a matter of life or death. Neutrality is impossible for those to whom his word comes. The options are obedience and life or disobedience and death.

He first commands us to repent of our sins and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. His further commands are mediated through the teachings of Christ and the apostles that are recorded in the New Testament. This does not mean the Old Testament is irrelevant for us. It means the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament is the word by which our redeemed lives are to be developed and guided until we behold his glory in completed salvation.

We have chosen to live by his words applied to our relationships and situations. In this way we walk with him and have life abundant and eternal.

They are not idle words. They come packed with possibility and power.

63. Appropriation

Your strength will be equal to your days (Deuteronomy 33:25).

These are the words of Moses to Asher. We can read them as his words to us and never feel guilty of misappropriation.

We really need these words each day. For some of us, Mondays create special need for special help. When sickness is compounded with accident and weakness with pain, we feel unusually vulnerable. Each day we have responsibilities that we can't evade and work that we can't delay or delegate. We pray, "Help us or we are goners!"

We are told in the Bible that God numbers our days and provides our strength. We will act upon that truth, trusting him to make us equal, not to all we want to do, but certainly for all that we must do.

We don't ask for the whole promise to Asher. We don't ask to be "most blessed." We don't ask to be "favored" by our brothers. We don't ask to have our feet bathed "in oil" or our gates to be "iron and bronze." Just give us strength to do the work and endure the pain and we pledge be your grateful and uncomplaining servants. Thank you, Lord.

64. My Refuge

The eternal God is your refuge; and underneath are the everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27).

We need a refuge when chased by an enemy or when threatened by a storm. Peter wrote, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." From that lion God is our refuge. A lion easily preys upon sheep that straggle from the shepherd. We must keep close to the Lord.

When no evil person seeks our ruin, there are menacing storms, circumstances that would overwhelm our hearts with fear and doubt, paralyzing our usefulness as the Lord's servants. He is our refuge. In him we find peace, strength and courage to "Fight the good fight of the faith."

Nothing in time can defeat those whose refuge and strength is the timeless! When we stand at the mysterious juncture of time and eternity called death we will not fall into the nothingness that so many people dread. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

65. Unique God, Unique People

Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? (Deuteronomy 33:29).

Israel tried too often and too hard to be like other nations. Uniqueness brought about persecution and escape was sought in assimilation, with consequent disasters. Israel's burden was Israel's God: "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun" (v. 26). A people become unique when saved by the unique God.

At times some of the Lord's people try too hard to be different from others. They manufacture artificial distinctions and parade them as badges of superior holiness. They deliberately call attention to themselves, and with attention comes suspicion, distrust and hostility that lead to needless battles fought over trivial issues. Energy is dissipated and opportunity is lost that should have been appropriated for the real mission of the Lord's people.

We should not seek to be like or unlike others. We should simply exist as persons "saved by the Lord," and let his "word of salvation" determine our relationships, character, behavior, purpose and agenda. Whatever results from taking that stance will coexist with "blessed."

66. The Unknown Tomb

And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab...but to this day no one knows where his grave is (Deuteronomy 34:5-6).

Moses served the Lord during his life and the Lord became his servant when he died. The Lord served as his undertaker, placing him gently and respectfully in his grave.

The greatest Jew in history--until Jesus came--was buried in an unmarked grave unattended by mourners, spectators and reporters.

That teaches us, Lord, that graves are not shrines. That teaches us that ancestor worship is idolatry. That teaches us that life's direction should be always forward--with the backward glance allowed only to spur the continuing advance. Memory is the armor bearer of today's warrior and inspiration for tomorrow's victory.

"Whom the Lord knew face to face," we do not serve, though we deeply venerate him. We serve the Lord Jesus Christ, the conqueror of sin and death whose face is, indeed, the face of God.

THE END