

God's Power

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

If you want to understand the needs of a people and their culture's deepest longings, attend to their art. I say this because the arts are the second stop downstream from the philosophy of the day. We could say that art puts the spirit of the times in a common language for all; it's the soundtrack of a society. In any culture, regardless of the time—love is one of our deepest longings as human beings.

This focus on the need for love is universal. Love is what everyone in the world is crying out for. Everyone is asking, *"Am I worthy of love?"* Everyone wonders, *"Do others truly love me?"* Since the '60s, we've pushed further and further away from God. Now, in a world where few believe in a creator God or even the supernatural, the world asks: *"Isn't love just a trick that our chemistry plays on us? Love can't possibly be something more, pointing to someone more—could it?"* Indeed, now people are asking, *"What is love?"* These questions turn us to the heart of the Christian faith, don't they? Here is why: it has been said that the kind of God we have determines the kind of relationship we will have with Him.

We know as Christians that God is love, and love comes from God (1 John 4:7-8). This doesn't mean that God is just loving. Other religions believe their god is loving. When Christians teach that God is love, we are saying He Himself is love; that real love has its origin and essence in God. Understanding this truth is vital to grasping the overwhelming love of God for us.

But we have a problem? Adam and Eve rejected God's love and care in the fall. With their sin, they cast all of humanity out of God's loving presence. However, in love, we see the relentless pursuit of God, even immediately after the fall. When Adam and Eve felt the guilt of what they had done and hid themselves, when they experienced shame, when their sinfulness was uncovered—naked before God—God was there. Immediately after the fall, God came looking for them, pursuing them, and made them a promise that He would crush the head of the serpent and bring humanity back into relationship with Him.

From that time on, God has always been in loving pursuit of His people—from creation, to the cross, to the church. The story of Israel is rich with examples of God’s unwavering, steadfast love, even amidst their rebellion. Throughout the ages, God’s love has been a constant theme, resonating through the songs, stories, and art of His people. This divine love not only beckons humanity back to Him but also ignites a longing in our hearts that can only be fulfilled through a relationship with our Creator God. God’s love transcends mere sentiment; it is redemptive, transformative, and eternal, calling us to recognize the profound love that God offers us all.



Deuteronomy 31:1–34:12

Deuteronomy records a crucial intersection in Israel’s history, as the Israelites transitioned from wandering in the wilderness to being settled in the promised land. Through Moses, God had led Israel out of slavery in Egypt. God had used Moses to constitute Israel as His people with the covenant and the law on Mount Sinai. For their refusal to enter the promised land, an entire generation of Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years until all but Joshua and Caleb had died. Now, with Israel on the verge of entering the promised land, God led Moses to give the people a final admonition—calling Israel to love God and live for Him.

Deuteronomy 31–34 detail the transition to Joshua’s leadership and Moses’s last words to the Israelites. Moses told the people that God would go before them as they entered Canaan, and He would drive the Canaanites out of the land. Joshua would be their new leader (31:1-8). Moses delivered the law of God to the priests and gave orders for its annual reading to the people once they were in the land (vv. 9-13). After commissioning Joshua as the new leader of the Israelites (vv. 14-15,23), God foretold that the Israelites would not be faithful to Him, and He gave Moses a song that would bear witness against the Israelite (vv. 16-22).

Chapter 32 contains this song. There are three songs of Moses recorded in Scripture (Ex. 15; Deut. 32; Ps. 90). In Deuteronomy, God told Moses to write down the song and teach it to the people (Deut. 31:19,30). Then, in chapter 33, Moses gave his final blessing to the Israelites.

Chapter 34 records the death of Moses. Just as the Lord had commanded (32:48-52), Moses went up Mount Nebo, and God showed him

the promised land (34:1-4). Then Moses died, and the Lord buried him in an unnamed location in a valley of Moab (vv. 5-7).

Even though Moses's preaching had ended, Deuteronomy 31-34 are beautiful chapters that reinforce the theological concerns of the book as a whole. As Deuteronomy ends, God empowered Joshua to take up the role of leadership of the Israelites as the saga of the nation continued. Israel was encamped on the eastern side of the Jordan River Valley in the Plains of Moab on the verge at last of crossing over into the promised land of Canaan.

In the final chapters of Deuteronomy, the Israelites stood on the brink of doing what the previous generation had failed to do because of their fear and disobedience—entering Canaan. The current generation had been called to make the choice of serving the Lord. Their decision would define their trajectory into the future and had lasting implications for their lives and the lives of their children in the land (31:1-13).



King (Deut. 33:1-5)

In Deuteronomy 33, Moses spoke a blessing over the Israelites before their entry into the promised land. He first declared how God had led His people out of Egypt to the land He had promised to them. Moses emphasized God's love for His people and His role as their King.

VERSES 1-2

This is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, gave the Israelites before his death. 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.”

Deuteronomy 33:1-2 describes Moses's blessing of the tribes of Israel before his death. In this passage, Moses spoke about God's presence and the greatness of His revelation, highlighting how God **came from Sinai** and **shone on** His people. The blessings emphasize God's guidance and the special relationship He had with the Israelites, affirming their unique status as His chosen people.

The Israelites, the people Moses loved, were on the border of the land God had promised to them. That Moses is identified as **the man of God** speaks both of Moses's special relationship with the Lord and to the high esteem in which he was held by the Israelites. While the concept of **blessing** in Deuteronomy certainly refers to material benefits such as prosperity, peace, and protection, all those blessings flowed from the ultimate blessing, which was Israel's covenant relationship with **the LORD** (Yahweh). Through this relationship with God Israel would experience all the other blessings and gifts of God—including their possession of Canaan, the promised land. Then as now, it is important not to elevate such gifts over the Giver.

Indeed, all of Israel's history involves gifts of grace from God. The Lord God chose Israel not because of their own worthiness; they were a small and insignificant people. Through their weakness, God chose them to make His name and His power known. Even more, God's patience with them flowed from His love for them. As for Moses, he was the instrument through which God brought these things about. It was Moses that God used to deliver His people from slavery in Egypt. It was Moses who ascended Mount Sinai to meet with God and receive the law. **Sinai** is also termed "Horeb" in Deuteronomy. Sinai, **Paran**, and **Seir** (also called "Edom") are all places where God disclosed Himself to the Israelites during their journey to the promised land.

These verses cast God in the role of the Divine Warrior who fights for His people, particularly the wording, **The LORD . . . came with ten thousand holy ones, with lightning from his right hand for them**. It is *the LORD*, Yahweh, who is Israel's King, Protector, and Provider.

It's important to keep this passage in context with the entire canon of Scripture. As central as Moses was in redemptive history, Jesus is greater than Moses. This is one of the arguments that the writer of Hebrews makes in 3:1-6. While Moses was a servant in God's house, Jesus built the house. While Moses delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, Jesus delivered God's people from sin and death. Thus, Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses. Here in Deuteronomy, we are given Moses's last words. Last words and lasting words. Before Jesus ascended to the Father, His last words to the disciples were also words of instruction, namely, to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:16-20). Unlike Moses who gave his last words and departed through death, Jesus gave His last words and ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-10)—but He will return again (v. 11; Rev. 19:11-16). While Israel had to go on without Moses, Jesus declares that He will never leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). That is true love.

VERSES 3-5

“Indeed he loves the people. All your holy ones are in your hand, and they assemble at your feet. Each receives your words. Moses gave us instruction, a possession for the assembly of Jacob. So he became King in Jeshurun when the leaders of the people gathered with the tribes of Israel.”

Deuteronomy 33:3-5 speaks about God’s love for the people of Israel and the blessings bestowed upon them. It describes how the Lord is present among His people and emphasizes the leadership of **Moses**. Indeed, as the passage says, God **loves the [His] people**. The theme of God’s love for His people runs throughout the whole Bible. It is the witness of redemptive history. God holds His people in His **hand**, providing them with protection and comfort. God assembles them at His **feet**, providing them with the assurance of His presence and the power to carry out His will. Again, this was the ministry of *Moses*—through whom God gave His people **instruction** regarding His will. The blessings and their fulfillment lay not in Moses or in any human ability but in God Himself. God is His peoples’ **King**.

Jeshurun, which means “upright” or “straight,” is a poetic way of referring to Israel (Deut. 32:15; 33:5,26; Isa. 44:2). “It may represent a play on Jacob, the original Israel, known for deception. Jeshurun would show Israel had quit deceiving and become upright or straight in actions.”¹

The blessings pronounced in this chapter by Moses upon the tribes of Israel (Deut. 33:6-29) parallel those Jacob gave to his twelve sons from whom the twelve tribes of Israel descend (Gen. 49:3-27). Unlike Jacob, who spoke prophetically, Moses issued commands. Moreover, Moses’s blessings do not follow birth order of the sons of Jacob as do Jacob’s blessings of his sons. Moses organized his blessings geographically. It’s often noted that there is no mention of Simeon in Moses’s blessings. This is most likely due to their dispersion and integration into the tribe of Judah.

The similarity between Jacob’s and Moses’s blessings also would have reminded Israel about their past, namely, God’s faithfulness and generosity to His people. The Lord had promised the land of Canaan first to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Israel’s ancestors. Tying the past to the present would have comforted the people in God’s presence, giving them the confidence to move forward. God would be with them and accomplish the conquest of Canaan just as He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and led them to the promised land. While Moses

would not be with them as they cross into the land, God would. The blessings of Moses read as very pastoral and personal. Remember, Moses had spent over forty years with these people as they traveled to the promised land—hearing their problems, navigating difficulties, giving them comfort, fortifying them with hope, and providing them leadership. Like a parent instructing a child before they move out into the world and a new season of life, Moses reminded the Israelites of their priorities, what was truly important. Any good parent knows their child’s particular strengths and weaknesses and instructs them accordingly. Here, Moses did just that—leaving the people he loved with lasting words as they headed into their future without him. But God would be with them (Deut. 31:1-6). When facing an unknown future, it’s vital that God’s people remember His promises and past faithfulness in our lives. While we can’t always recognize His hand in the present circumstances of our lives, we can certainly trust His heart. That is true love.



Explore Further

Read the articles “Salvation” on pages 1403–1404 and “Sanctification” on pages 1412–1413 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some immediate blessings we receive when we place our faith in Christ (such as justification and the gift of the Holy Spirit)? How is sanctification an ongoing blessing? How could a greater awareness of these blessings strengthen your faith in Christ?

Dwelling Place (Deut. 33:26-29)

Moses concluded his blessing by exalting God’s sovereignty and majesty. God was both Israel’s dwelling place and the One who would drive out their enemies. Of all the nations on earth, they were God’s own people who would enjoy His protection.

VERSES 26-29

“There is none like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to your aid, the clouds in his majesty. The God of old is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He drives out the enemy before you and commands, ‘Destroy!’ So Israel dwells

securely; Jacob lives untroubled in a land of grain and new wine; even his skies drip with dew. 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.”

Moses emphasized the greatness of God. **“There is none like the God of Jeshurun.”** As noted earlier, *Jeshurun* is a poetic way of referring to Israel. This links these verses with the earlier mention of Jeshurun in verse 5, where God is identified as the “King in Jeshurun.” **Who rides in the heavens to your aid, the clouds in his majesty** is the language of God as the Divine Warrior and emphasizes God’s incomparable and omnipotent power. There is none like God, who is Israel’s King.

The description of God riding the heavens is similar to the description of God in Psalm 18: “He rode on a cherub and flew, soaring on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his hiding place, dark storm clouds his canopy around him. From the radiance of his presence, his clouds swept onward with hail and blazing coals. The LORD thundered from heaven; the Most High made his voice heard. He shot his arrows and scattered them; he hurled lightning bolts and routed them” (Ps. 18:10-14). This language pictures God in heaven, both overseeing and able to come to the aid of His people on earth.

Israel had God for their **dwelling place** and **underneath are the everlasting arms**. Israel would dwell securely because of their relationship with God. They could trust in Him because He is both all-powerful and eternal. This concept of God as His people’s *dwelling place* appears elsewhere in Scripture. Psalm 90, attributed to Moses, speaks of God being Israel’s “dwelling place throughout all generations” (v. 1, NIV; similar ESV, KJV). The term *dwelling place* carries connotations of refuge or shelter from danger (v. 1, CSB). God is a safe and constant habitation (see Pss. 32:7; 71:3). The security and joy that come from living in God’s presence are further emphasized by the phrases **Israel dwells securely** and **Jacob** [another term often used for Israel] **lives untroubled**. Because the Lord is their omnipotent God and Protector, Israel would live in covenant with Him as a people both protected and blessed by God in the promised land.

The Divine Warrior language continues in the description of how God **drives out** Israel’s enemies and commands, **“Destroy!”** God’s words gave the vulnerable, small nation of Israel reassurance that God would protect them as a **shield** and strike down their enemies as a **sword**. God Himself is the source of their security. This theme recalls God’s promise to Abraham years before—“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am

your shield” (Gen. 15:1). All of this mounting evidence called Israel to remember and trust that God would be with them as they began their conquest of the promised land. The Lord would defeat their enemies.

By living faithfully in relationship with God by obeying His law, Israel would experience all the blessings of living in the promised land. The land would yield its bounty of **grain** and **new wine**. In Israel’s agrarian culture, water was crucial for both life and produce. **His skies drip with dew** speak of the provision and abundance that God would provide for His people.

The passage concludes with a sense of triumph and assurance for the Israelites, affirming that their relationship with God set them apart from other nations. **“How happy you are, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD?”** Their uniqueness was not in themselves. Rather, it was in God’s choosing them and entering into covenant with them. He saved them from Egyptian slavery. **“The LORD had his heart set on you and chose you, not because you were more numerous than all peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors, he brought you out with a strong hand and redeemed you from the place of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt”** (Deut. 7:7-8). Of all the nations on earth, the Israelites were chosen by God to be His own people who would enjoy His blessings and protection. Their God is the one who causes the sky (rain) and land (grain, new wine) to yield its bounty for His people.

The passage ends with a promise of victory in battle, an important assurance given the Israelites were about to begin the conquest of Canaan: **“Your enemies will cringe before you, and you will tread on their backs.”** But this would not be due to the strength of Israel’s army, but rather the strength of Israel’s God. Joshua spoke of this reality in his farewell address to the Israelites after they had defeated their enemies and established themselves in the promised land. He connected this reality to Israel’s relationship with God—both in Israel’s past and in their future: **“The LORD has driven out great and powerful nations before you, and no one is able to stand against you to this day. One of you routed a thousand because the LORD your God was fighting for you, as he promised. So diligently watch yourselves! Love the LORD your God!”** (Josh. 23:9-11).

God is love, and Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God. He is the answer to the question: *“What does love look like?”* In Jesus, God came in the flesh—Christ is love in flesh. The dwelling of God with man, in Christ, is the most powerful move of pursuing love (John 1:14). Thus, if you ever question God’s love for you, look to Christ and the cross. In His

life, Jesus exemplified perfect obedience to the law (love of God and love of neighbor), that which we could not achieve. In the cross, God sent His only Son to bear our sins in our place. Greater is no love than this—that a man would lay down his life for his friends (15:13). In the resurrection, Jesus defeated sin and death, so nothing can separate believers from the love of God (Rom. 8:31-38). In His love, God sent Jesus to redeem us—so that we can be enveloped in His love. It is through faith in Christ that we enjoy access to God (Eph. 2:18). We experience God’s presence and protection through Christ and in Christ alone (John 6:51-58; 15:1-17). Just like Israel journeyed to the land of promise, we journey toward the promised eternity where we will dwell with God (Rev. 21:3).

With these promises believers can live without fear, knowing that we serve the one true God. These gospel truths speak to our assurance in two ways. First, we know that God is with us through His indwelling Holy Spirit. Second, we know that we will one day dwell with God eternally in the new heaven and new earth. Comfort now. Confidence in what’s to come. That is the power of the gospel! What was lost in the fall, what Israel longed for but never experienced in full, is ours in Christ. This promise is sealed in the words of Christ: “Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day” (John 6:37-39).



Explore Further

Read the article “Eternal Life” on pages 512–513 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the article’s definition of “eternal life”? In what way is eternal life experienced in the present? In what ways is eternal life a future experience? What are the indicators that we as believers possess eternal life in Christ? How should knowing that we have been saved by Christ and will spend eternity with God influence how we live in the present?

1. “Jeshurun,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 880–881.

The Journey From Kadesh-Barnea to Moab



NUMBERS, 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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