When you enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and settle in it, 2 you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God will choose to establish His name. 3 You shall go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, “I acknowledge this day before the Lord your God that I have entered the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage.”

When farmers bring the first fruits to the Temple each year, and after they give the poor tithe every third year, they are to make certain declarations. These declarations (and the declaration of 21:7–9) are the only instances in the Torah that present the precise wording that must be recited in a layman’s address to God. They convey what Deuteronomy wished the farmers to find meaningful in these ceremonies.

THE FIRST-FRUITS CEREMONY (26:1–11)
The first-fruits ceremony leads the farmers from a recognition of the land’s fertility to an awareness of God’s guidance of the Israelites from their beginnings, freeing them from oppression and giving them the land. The change in the focus of a religious ceremony from exclusive attention to God’s role in nature to an emphasis on God’s role in history is one of the most significant original features of the Bible. The declaration spoken by the farmers evokes the very heart of monotheism, which acknowledges God as the power behind all phenomena, historical as well as natural.

2. The farmer, the typical Israelite, is being addressed. The context suggests that farmers brought their first fruits individually. No date is specified for bringing them, and it probably varied for different farmers, depending on their work load, the species that each grew, and the date of the harvest of each species in each part of the country.

The farmer is addressing the priest. The Lord, of course, is the farmer’s God as well, as the chapter states several times. People would often say “your God” or “so-and-so’s God” when speaking to, or about, priests, prophets, and kings, because their offices were established by God and they were considered especially close to Him.

CHAPTER 26
Deuteronomy now moves toward its climax, invoking blessings on those who will be faithful to God’s message and calling down a series of curses on those who would depart from the Torah’s norms. The curses culminate in a warning, called the Tokhehah [Reproach], similar to the one found in the final parashah of Leviticus.
tered the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to assign us.”

4 The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God.

5 You shall then recite as follows before the Lord your God: “My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. 6 The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. 7 We cried to the Lord our God: “My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. 8 The Lord heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. 9 He brought us to this place and stretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. 10 Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O Lord, have given me.”

5. my father It could refer to Jacob, who went down to Egypt; it could be collective, referring to Jacob’s entire family, who went with him; or it could refer to all the ancestors, Abraham and Isaac as well as Jacob and his sons.

fugitive Could also mean “perishing” or “straying.”

Aramean Probably refers to the fact that the ancestors of the Israelites came from the region known as “Aram alongside the River.” The recitation contrasts the homeless beginnings of the Israelites with their present possession of a fertile land. In the Pesah Haggadah, a well-known midrash interprets these words to mean, “Laban the Aramean sought to destroy my father.”

9. this place The land of Israel.

10. After reciting a brief history of Israel and speaking about God, the farmers now turn to speak to God. In this way they express their feeling that they stand directly in God’s presence. Then, after speaking of Israel in the first person plural while describing the history of God’s benefactions to Israel, they switch to the first person singular, expressing the feeling that they personally are participating in that history.

which You, O Lord, have given me Refers to the soil, not to the first fruits.

5. The words that the farmer utters here and in verse 3 are called “The First-Fruits Recitation” in the Mishnah, which requires that it be said in Hebrew. At first those who were able to recite it on their own did so, while those who could not were assisted by a prompter. When the latter group, out of embarrassment, ceased to bring their first fruits, the procedure was changed so that everybody was led by a prompter [M Sot. 7:2–3, Bik. 3:7].

This is a rare instance of the Torah prescribing the precise words of a prayer rather than leaving it to the inspiration of the worshiper’s own heart. This recitation summarizes the historical basis of Jewish identity and has found a featured place in the Pesah Haggadah. One of the advantages of a set liturgy, in addition to uniting all Jews across barriers of time and space, is that it reminds us of themes we might not think of on our own.

10–11. Gratitude and generosity do not seem to come naturally to most people. Most of us must be taught to remember to thank God for our good fortune and must learn through ex-
You shall leave [the basket] before the LORD your God and bow low before the LORD your God. 11 And you shall enjoy, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that the LORD your God has bestowed upon you and your household.

12 When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithe—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements, 13 you shall declare before the LORD your God: “I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, just as You commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor neglected any of Your commandments: 14 I have not eaten of it while in mourning, I have not cleared out any of it while I was cleared out Not held back the slightest amount.

the consecrated portion The poor tithe. Even though it is not brought to a sanctuary, it is to be treated as holy until it is handed over for distribution to the poor. Giving it to the poor is no less a sacred purpose than bringing it to the sanctuary.

You commanded me The first-person formulation expresses the idea that God commanded the farmer personally, not only his or her ancestors. This wording is part of the liturgy’s attempt to enhance the farmers’ feeling of personal involvement in the history of their people.

commandments That is, about the tithe in 14:28–29. It is not a blanket claim of virtue, but a statement about the obligation that has just been discharged.

13. I have . . . [not] neglected any of your commandments I have not performed any of these mitzvot mindlessly, perfunctorily, without feeling [S’fat Emet].
impure, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead. I have obeyed the Lord my God; I have done just as You commanded me. 15Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers.”

16The Lord your God commands you this day to observe these laws and rules; observe them faithfully with all your heart and soul. You have affirmed this day that the Lord is your God, that you will walk in His ways, that you will observe His laws and commandments with food and drink. This widespread belief was also found among Jews in Second Temple times and later. The Torah does not forbid the practice, but because contact with the dead is ritually defiling, it prohibits the use of the tithe for it.

17You have affirmed this day that the Lord is your God, that you will walk in His ways, that you will observe His laws and commandments with food and drink. This widespread belief was also found among Jews in Second Temple times and later. The Torah does not forbid the practice, but because contact with the dead is ritually defiling, it prohibits the use of the tithe for it.

Moses’ Second Discourse, Part 4: Conclusion to the Covenant Made in Moab (26:16–28:69)

MUTUAL COMMITMENTS (26:16–19)

The laws in all their detail are now concluded. This passage sums up Israel’s duty to obey them wholeheartedly and underscores the fact that, beyond being mere items of a legal code, they are the very basis of the relationship that God and the people Israel have established. It not only is an emotional or spiritual association but also entails mutual obligations with consequences.

16. commands you this day Moses, speaking at God’s command, has referred to “this day” throughout his address (e.g., 4:8, 15:5, 19:9). According to 1:3, the address was delivered on the first day of the 11th month (later known as Sh’vat) in the 40th year after the Exodus.

17. you have affirmed The most probable interpretation of the unique form of this Hebrew verb (rendering its hiph•il form not as causative but intensive). God and Israel have each proclaimed acceptance of the other as parties to the covenant and have proclaimed specific commitments to each other. The principles agreed to are strongly reminiscent of the earlier covenant at Horeb (Mount Sinai), which this reaffirms.

18. that the Lord is your God The counterpart to this phrase in verse 18 is “that you are . . . His people.” This pair of phrases is the classic expression of the covenant relationship (see 29:12).

19. you will walk in His ways This clause and the remainder of the verse are virtually a definition of what it means to accept the Lord as God. In short, it requires action as well as intellectual assent.
DEUTERONOMY 26:18  
KI TAVO

and rules, and that you will obey Him. 18And the Lord has affirmed this day that you are, as He promised you, His treasured people who shall observe all His commandments, 19and that He will set you, in fame and renown and glory, high above all the nations that He has made; and that you shall be, as He promised, a holy people to the Lord your God.

27 Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people, saying: Observe all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. 2 As soon as you have crossed the Jordan into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones. Coat them with plaster 3 and inscribe upon them all the words of this Teaching. When you cross over to enter the land that the

18. as He promised you  When He first proposed to enter into a covenant with you (Exod. 19:5).

19. This verse defines what it means to be God’s treasured people.

high above all the nations  That is, He will make Israel more famous, praised, and glorified than any other nation, as a result of the abundant prosperity and victory over enemies that Israel will enjoy.

holy people  Sacrosanct, inviolable; a nation that others harm at their peril (see Exod. 19:6). For another implication of the notion of Israel’s sanctity, see 7:6 and 14:2,21.

CEREMONIES TO MARK ISRAEL’S ARRIVAL IN THE LAND (27:1–26)

The covenant relationship with God is so vital for Israel’s existence in the Promised Land that it must be reaffirmed formally as soon as the Israelites arrive there.

MONUMENTS AND AN ALTAR  (vv. 1–8)

1. Moses and the elders  Only here is Moses joined by the elders in instructing the people. Similarly in verses 9–10, Moses is joined by the priests in charging the people to obey the commandments. Because these two groups would be the leaders of the people in their daily civil and religious affairs after Moses’ death, they are in the best position to ensure continued adherence to his teachings.

Instruction  Hebrew: ha-mitzvah; the instructions given in Deuteronomy, the Teaching (v. 3), not a specific law.

2. As soon as you have crossed  Literally, “on the day when you cross.” This is loosely understood to mean “once you have crossed,” not necessarily on the same day. According to verse 4, these instructions are to be carried out on Mount Ebal; that site—some 30 miles (50 km) and more than 4000 feet (1200 m) uphill from where the Israelites would cross the Jordan—could not be reached on the same day that the Jordan is crossed.

Coat them with plaster  If the text was engraved through the plaster into the stone, the white plaster would highlight the dark color of the letters. It is also possible that the plaster served as a clean surface for writing in ink or paint. Writing over plaster was common in Egypt where even outdoor inscriptions would last a long time because rain is infrequent there.

3. This ceremony dramatizes Israel’s obligation to live by God’s Teaching. Its performance shortly after entering the land is a prerequisite for further penetration into the land. The text says that all the words of the Teaching (chapters 12–26, and perhaps chapters 1–11 and 28) are to be inscribed, placing no limit on the size or
Lord your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you—4upon crossing the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, about which I charge you this day, on Mount Ebal, and coat them with plaster. 5There, too, you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones. Do not wield an iron tool over them; 6you must build the altar of the Lord your God of unhewn stones. You shall offer on it burnt offerings to the Lord your God, and sacrifices are to be offered, and the people are to celebrate the erecting of the steles inscribed with the Teaching. These sacrifices are part of a one-time ceremony. Thus there is no conflict with Deuteronomy’s restriction of sacrificial worship to Jerusalem, because that was to take effect only later (see 12:8–12).

stones In their natural state, uncut, following the command of Exod. 20:22. An Israelite altar of uncut stones has been found in excavations at Arad in the Negeb. Similar altars from earlier times have been discovered at Canaanite sites as well.

iron tool Hebrew: barzel; literally, “iron.” Here it refers to a chisel.

6–7. The two types of offerings mentioned in these verses are the same as those brought at the conclusion of the covenant at Mount Sinai (see Exod. 24:5)

offering of well-being These offerings (sh’lamim) are in the category of sacrifices in which most of the flesh was eaten by the worshiper. Hence they were appropriate for a festive occasion.

8. those stones Mentioned in verses 2–4, not those of the altar. This verse repeats the requirement that the stones be inscribed with the Teaching. By making the point both before and after the provision about the altar, the text makes clear that the terms of the Teaching, not the sacrifice, constitute the heart of the ceremony.

AN APPEAL FOR OBEDIENCE (vv. 9–10)
The Israelites are now concluding the Moab covenant (see 28:69) that will be reaffirmed later in ceremonies at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. By pre-
Israel, saying: Silence! Hear, O Israel! Today you have become the people of the Lord your God: 10 Heed the Lord your God and observe His commandments and His laws, which I enjoin upon you this day.

11 Thereupon Moses charged the people, saying: 12 After you have crossed the Jordan, the following shall stand on Mount Gerizim when the blessing for the people is spoken: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. 13 And for the curse, the following shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. 14 The Levites shall then proclaim in a loud voice to all the people of Israel:

15 Cursed be anyone who makes a sculptured or molten image, abhorred by the Lord, a scribing these ceremonies here, in the midst of the conclusion of the covenant in Moab, Moses makes it clear that the later ceremonies are a reaffirmation of the Moab covenant (itself a reaffirmation of the Horeb covenant), not a new one.

9. Silence! Hear This is the first time that the appeal to hear is preceded by a call for silence. Absolute concentration is required at the awesome moment of solemn promises and warnings they are about to hear, when Israel becomes the people of God covenanted to Him.

Today you have become the people of the Lord Other passages in the Torah suggest that this took place earlier, at the time of the Exodus or at Mount Sinai (e.g., Exod. 6:6–7, 19:5–6; Deut. 4:20,34). There were varying views as to when the Israelites actually became God’s people.

PROCLAIMING BLESSINGS AND CURSES (vv. 11–13)

When the 12 tribes of Israel arrive in the Promised Land, they are to proclaim the blessings and the curses—the divinely imposed consequences of either obeying or disobeying the terms of the Covenant—at Mounts Gerizim and Ebal. Such blessings and curses are integral elements of ancient Near Eastern covenants. The best known biblical examples are found in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.

12–13. on Mount Gerizim . . . on Mount Ebal North and south of Shechem. The precise location where the tribes were to stand is not given, but their pronouncements would be most audible if they stood on the slopes of the moun-

tains rather than on their peaks (which are 2.2 miles [3.5 km] apart). The text indeed says that the blessings and the curses shall be recited “on,” not “atop,” the mountains.

the blessing for the people is spoken Literally, “to bless the people.”

And for the curse Literally, “And these shall stand for the curse.” A circumlocution to avoid saying that the tribes would actually curse the people.

CURSES FOR SECRET SINS (vv. 14–26)

Verses 14–26 refer to a different ceremony from that prescribed in verses 11–13, although it may have been intended to be performed on the same occasion. This ceremony consists only of curses. The 11 specific sins mentioned here (the 12th sin is all-inclusive) often escape detection because, as Ibn Ezra and Rashbam note, commonly they are committed in secret or it is difficult for their victims to publicize them. The intent of this ceremony is to discourage such offenses by providing for their punishment by God. A curse is pronounced on those who commit them, and the people express their assent by responding “Amen,” which also constitutes an oath to avoid these acts.

14. Levites They act here in their priestly role. Although blessings and curses by any individual could be effective, those uttered by priests and prophets were thought to possess particular potency.

15. Cursed Those who commit these sins are destined for divinely imposed misfortune, such as
craftsman’s handiwork, and sets it up in secret.—And all the people shall respond, Amen.

16 Cursed be he who insults his father or mother.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

17 Cursed be he who moves his fellow countryman’s landmark.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

18 Cursed be he who misdirects a blind person on his way.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

19 Cursed be he who subverts the rights of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

20 Cursed be he who lies with his father’s wife, for he has removed his father’s garment.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

21 Cursed be he who lies with any beast.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

childlessness, the death of children, slavery, and the calamities listed in Deut. 28.

image Any kind of idol, whether of the Lord or any other deity.

craftsman’s handiwork The fact that idols are made by mortals is the Torah’s most telling argument against their divinity.

in secret To avoid detection. The Torah, which seems to expect that open idolatry would be stigmatized and punished by the sinner’s contemporaries, here seeks to deter idolatry practiced in secret. The archaeological evidence indicates that idols were indeed rare in ancient Israel. Very few have been found in Israelite sites compared to those of neighboring peoples.

Amen The ancient Greek translation of this word is, “Let it be so.” The term, derived from the root meaning “firm” (ÔÓ‡), expresses assent to what someone has just said. As the Talmud puts it, “Answering ‘Amen’ after an oath is equivalent to pronouncing the oath with one’s own mouth” (BT Shevu. 29b).

16. insults Treats them disrespectfully. The crime is not limited to verbal insults and would include the actions of a rebellious son (Deut. 21:18–21).

17. This curse is based on the prohibition against moving landmarks (19:14). Because this crime is committed in secret, and fear of detection is not as effective a deterrent as in the case of other crimes, ancient literature is replete with curses and warnings of divine punishment against those who commit it. Babylonian boundary stones were inscribed with curses directed against those who would move them or alter their inscriptions. The crime was a direct affront to God because property was assigned by lot, which was believed to be directed by God and expressive of His will.

18. The same principle is expressed in Lev. 19:14. Similarly, Egyptian wisdom literature teaches: “Do not laugh at a blind man or tease a dwarf, nor injure the airs of the lame.”

19. the stranger, the fatherless and the widow Because they do not have power to prosecute or defend their rights, the Torah often points out that God is their protector, as in 10:18.

20. Unlike 23:1, which refers only to his father’s former wife, this could refer to his current wife and even to the sinner’s own mother. Only sexual relations are mentioned here. Marriage to a father’s former wife, which is prohibited in 23:1, is inherently a public act and hence irrelevant in this context. The laws of Hammurabi likewise oppose a man’s having intercourse with his stepmother after his father’s death. In the Hittite laws, it is a crime only if the father is still alive.

21. Bestiality is not uncommon, especially in rural areas. The Hittite laws prohibit it only with certain animals but not others. Ancient Near Eastern myths sometimes describe sexual intercourse between gods and animals.
22. Cursed be he who lies with his sister, whether daughter of his father or of his mother.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

23. Cursed be he who lies with his mother-in-law.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

24. Cursed be he who strikes down his fellow countryman in secret.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

25. Cursed be he who accepts a bribe in the case of the murder of an innocent person.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

26. Cursed be he who will not uphold the terms of this Teaching and observe them.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

28. Now, if you obey the Lord your God, to observe faithfully all His commandments

cia, found mostly among the royalty.

24. strikes down Hebrew: makkeh, which can refer either to lethal or to nonlethal blows.

25. Refers to a judge who accepts a bribe to condemn an innocent defendant to death.

26. The final curse refers to all other provisions of the Teaching and constitutes an oath to uphold the entire Teaching. If this ceremony was to be performed at Mount Ebal, at the same time as the other ceremonies in this chapter, “this Teaching” may refer to the copy of the Teaching inscribed on the stones that stood nearby.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE (28:1–68)

This chapter details the consequences of Israel’s obeying or disobeying the terms of the covenant that Moses reviewed in chapters 5–26. Promises and threats such as these are well known in the Bible and elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern literature. See Comment to 27:11–13.

In this chapter, “blessing” and “curse” do not refer to promises and threats but to the benign and the destructive forces that blessings and curses call for. They are almost personified by the verbs used to depict them; they “come,” “pursue,” and “overtake” (vv. 2,15,22,45), and God “lets [them] loose” (vv. 20, 48, cf. 32:24). True personification of these forces, however, is absent in Deuteronomy, which avoids any suggestion of independent supernatural powers other than God. Instead, the blessings and the curses are treated as impersonal forces under God’s absolute control.

26. The Talmud derives a positive principle from this verse, inferring that one who does uphold the Teaching (i.e., Torah) will be blessed. This applies even to those individuals who never studied and never taught but give financial support to those who study Torah (JT Sot. 7:4; Barukh Halevi Epstein).

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
Copyright © 2001 by the Rabbinical Assembly
This version for electronic use during pandemic only.
which I enjoin upon you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. 2 All these blessings shall come upon you and take effect, if you will but heed the word of the Lord your God:

3 Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country.

4 Blessed shall be the issue of your womb, the produce of your soil, and the offspring of your cattle, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock.

5 Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

6 Blessed shall you be in your comings and blessed shall you be in your goings.

7 The Lord will put to rout before you the enemies who attack you; they will march out against you by a single road, but flee from you by many roads. 8 The Lord will ordain blessings

THE BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENCE (vv. 1–14)

1. Moses reviews the conditions and the promises of 26:16–19 regarding the covenant now being made in Moab and then spells out the consequences that will ensue if the Israelites are loyal or disloyal to it.

2. The promise of 26:19 is conditional. The Israelites are not promised automatic special treatment. They must earn it. To make this clear, the condition is repeated here.


City . . . country These opposites express a totality, meaning that wherever you live and work, your undertakings will prosper.

5. Basket . . . kneading bowl These containers were used for gathering produce and preparing bread. The blessing means that the harvest will be abundant and that food will be plentiful.

6. Comings . . . goings Literally, “entering and going out.” Abravanel takes blessedness in these activities to mean safety in traveling to and from the city, a common theme in descriptions of blessing and prosperity.

7. By a single road They will be too numerous and confident to bother separating their forces for safety.

by many roads Literally, “by seven roads.” The enemy will scatter in every direction. Seven is often used to express a complete number.

CHAPTER 28

2. Take effect Literally, “overtake you.” Sometimes God intends to bless us, but we are so busy running after success that the blessings cannot catch up to us. Instead of chasing after fulfillment, perhaps we need to slow down and let the good things of life catch up to us (Ha'amek Davar).

3. In the city, God will reward you for your service to the community. In the country, God will reward you for sharing the harvest of your fields with the poor and the needy (Deut. R. 7:5).

Blessed shall you be in the city May your home be in a good neighborhood, close to the synagogue, surrounded by good neighbors (BT BM 107a).

6. Here “comings” and “goings” may refer to business dealings, for the previous blessings refer to material well-being (Deut. R. 7:5). Prosperity brings its own dangers; this blessing asks that God guard us from the temptations that wealth occasions (Ha'amek Davar).
for you upon your barns and upon all your undertakings: He will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. 9 The Lord will establish you as His holy people, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. 10 And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the Lord’s name is proclaimed over you, and they shall stand in fear of you. 11 The Lord will give you abounding prosperity in the issue of your womb, the offspring of your cattle, and the produce of your soil in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to assign to you. 12 The Lord will open for you His bounteous store, the heavens, to provide rain for your land in season and to bless all your undertakings. You will be creditor to many nations, but debtor to none. 13 The Lord will make you the head, not the tail; you will always be at the top and never at the bottom—if only you obey and faithfully observe the commandments of the Lord your God that I enjoin upon you this day, 14 and do not deviate to the right or to the left from any of the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day and turn to the worship of other gods.

15 But if you do not obey the Lord your God

8. barns Namely, stores, granaries such as silos, underground storage pits, and storehouses.

9. the Lord . . . the Lord your God These two ways of referring to God are used throughout the chapter. When acts of divine reward and punishment are described, God is called simply “the Lord.” The full phrase, “the Lord your/our God,” is reserved for passages that refer to the Israelites’ duty of obeying God or refer to His gift of the Land. It has the connotation of “the Lord, who has kept His promises to you and whom you are obligated to obey.”

if you keep The conditional nature of Israel’s sanctity is repeated.

10. the Lord’s name Israel is known as “the people of the Lord” (am YHVH). The connection between God’s name and protection is expressed in prayers that appeal to God for security on the grounds that the supplicant is called by His name.

11. abounding That is, surpassing. Because of the surplus, Israel will be able to lend to other nations and it never will need to borrow (v. 12).

12. store The ancients pictured rain, snow, hail, wind, and other natural phenomena as kept in celestial storehouses that God opens as needed.

creditor to many nations Because of your surplus wealth.

14. The promises end with a final reminder that they depend on a key condition: that the Israelites shun all other gods.

15. But if you do not obey the Lord your God
to observe faithfully all His commandments and laws which I enjoin upon you this day, all these curses shall come upon you and take effect:

16 Cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the country.

17 Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

18 Cursed shall be the issue of your womb and the produce of your soil, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock.

19 Cursed shall you be in your comings and cursed shall you be in your goings.

20 The Lord will let loose against you calamity, panic, and frustration in all the enterprises you undertake, so that you shall soon be utterly wiped out because of your evildoing in forsaking Me. 21 The Lord will make pestilence cling to you, until He has put an end to you in the land that you are entering to possess. 22 The Lord will strike you with consumption, fever, and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew; they shall hound you until you perish. 23 The skies above your head shall be copper and the earth under you iron. 24 The Lord will make the rain of your land dust, and sand shall drop on you from the sky, until you are wiped out.

25 The Lord will put you to rout before your enemies; you shall march out against them by

THE CURSES FOR DISOBEDIENCE (vv. 15–68)

The remainder of the chapter, like the threats in Lev. 26, is known as the Tokhehah, or “Warning” (literally, “rebuke”) in postbiblical sources. As in the Leviticus passage, the threats are more numerous than the promises.

FIRST GROUP (vv. 15–44)

20. calamity Hebrew: m’erah; literally, “curse.” The antonym of “blessing” in verse 8. It probably refers to drought and plant-destroying pests (as in Mal. 3:9–11).

panic Refers to the tumult and confusion caused by war, social disorder, and pestilence.

frustration Hebrew: mig’eret; literally, “obstruction, encumbrance.” Here it may refer to the drought (vv. 23–24) and crop failure (vv. 38–42) resulting from God’s rejection of their prayers.

forsaking Me Here Moses speaks in God’s name, as sometimes happens in Deuteronomy (see v. 68).

21. pestilence A virulent epidemic.

22. The exact nature of the seven affictions listed in this verse is uncertain. The terms refer to symptoms that could stem from various causes.

23. The sky will be too hard to yield rain and the soil too hard to plow.

24. In the absence of rain, the land will be exposed to duststorms and sandstorms stirred up from the waterless soil.
You shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. Your carcasses shall become food for all the birds of the sky and all the beasts of the earth, with none to frighten them off.

The Lord will strike you with the Egyptian inflammation, with hemorrhoids, boil-scars, and itch, from which you shall never recover.

The Lord will strike you with madness, blindness, and dismay. You shall grope at noon as a blind man gropes in the dark; you shall not prosper in your ventures, but shall be constantly abused and robbed, with none to give help.

If you pay the bride-price for a wife, another man shall enjoy her. If you build a house, you shall not live in it. If you plant a vineyard, you shall not harvest it. Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it; your ass shall be seized in front of you, and it shall not be returned to you; your flock shall be delivered to your enemies, with none to help.

abused and robbed “Abused” refers to maltreatment and being cheated out of one’s property; “robbed,” to robbery and extortion. In the light of verses 30–33, they must refer to oppression by conquerors.

none to give help Refers to kings, officials, or others who could save the oppressed and to military leaders who could give the nation relief from foreign assailants.

The most important personal achievements, those that constitute grounds for draft deferment (see 20:5–7), will be worthless.

will enjoy her The unvocalized letters of the text (יִשָּׁקְאוּנָה) mean “will rape her.” Because that verb (עֲשֵׂה) was considered too vulgar for public reading in the synagogue, another verb is read in its place, literally meaning “will lie with her” (yishkavennah).

The extortion of another’s ox or ass is a proverbial example of oppression.
you. 32 Your sons and daughters shall be delivered to another people, while you look on; and your eyes shall strain for them constantly, but you shall be helpless. 33 A people you do not know shall eat up the produce of your soil and all your gains; you shall be abused and downtrodden continually, until you are driven mad by what your eyes behold. 34 The Lord will afflict you at the knees and thighs with a severe inflammation, from which you shall never recover—from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

35 The Lord will aﬄict you at the knees and thighs with a severe inﬂammation, from which you shall never recover—from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

36 The Lord will drive you, and the king you have set over you, to a nation unknown to you or your fathers, where you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone. 37 You shall be a consternation, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples to which the Lord will drive you.

38 Though you take much seed out to the field, you shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. 39 Though you plant vineyards and till them, you shall have no wine to drink or store, for the worm shall devour them. 40 Though you have olive trees throughout your territory, you shall have no oil for anointment, for your olives shall drop off. 41 Though you beget sons and daughters, they will be delivered to another people, while you look on; and your eyes shall strain for them constantly, but you shall be helpless.

32. delivered to another people They will be sold as slaves to a foreign land, so that their parents will never see them again.

33. your eyes shall strain for them Literally, “your eyes shall run out [of tears] over them.”

34. until you are driven mad by what your eyes behold

35. The Lord will afflict you at the knees and thighs with a severe inflammation, from which you shall never recover—from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

36. The Lord will drive you, and the king you have set over you, to a nation unknown to you or your fathers, where you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone.

37. You shall be a consternation, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples to which the Lord will drive you.

38. Though you take much seed out to the field, you shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it.

39. Though you plant vineyards and till them, you shall have no wine to drink or store, for the worm shall devour them.

40. Though you have olive trees throughout your territory, you shall have no oil for anointment, for your olives shall drop off.

41. Though you beget sons and daughters, they will be delivered to another people, while you look on; and your eyes shall strain for them constantly, but you shall be helpless.
daughters, they shall not remain with you, for
they shall go into captivity. 42 The cricket shall
take over all the trees and produce of your land.
43 The stranger in your midst shall rise above
you higher and higher, while you sink lower and
lower: 44 he shall be your creditor, but you shall
not be his; he shall be the head and you the tail.
45 All these curses shall befall you; they shall
pursue you and overtake you, until you are
wiped out, because you did not heed the Lord
your God and keep the commandments and
laws that He enjoined upon you. 46 They shall
serve as signs and proofs against you and your
offspring for all time. 47 Because you would not
serve the Lord your God in joy and gladness
over the abundance of everything, 48 you shall
have to serve—in hunger and thirst, naked and
lacking everything—the enemies whom the
Lord will let loose against you. He will put an
iron yoke upon your neck until He has wiped
you out.
49 The Lord will bring a nation against you
from afar, from the end of the earth, which will
swoop down like the eagle—a nation whose lan-

SECOND GROUP (vv. 45–57)
46. signs and proofs Of the guilt of this sin-
ful generation, as elaborated in 29:21–27.

47. you would not serve... in joy Ingratitude
keeps us from true devotion to God. The image
here is not of refusing to worship, but of wor-
shippers grudgingly (Hayyim of Volozhin).

48. The punishment is the precise reversal of
the prior situation (v. 47). This will make the jus-
tice of the punishment obvious.
iron yoke The yoke is a familiar, not always
unfavorable, metaphor expressing submission to
the rule of gods and kings in the ancient Near
East. Here, however, the context is punitive. Be-
cause yokes were normally made of wood, an
iron yoke implies an exceptional burden or un-
breakable servitude.
49. a nation... from afar No specific na-
tion is meant. The enemy will be utterly alien to
Israel, even stranger than the “people you do not
know” of verse 33. It will come from so far away
that its language will be unintelligible, unlike Is-
rael’s close neighbors who spoke languages similar
to Hebrew.
like the eagle Or the griffon vulture. The
simile refers to the suddenness, speed, and power
of the attack.
guage you do not understand, 50a ruthless na-

tion, that will show the old no regard and the
young no mercy. 51It shall devour the offspring
of your cattle and the produce of your soil, until
you have been wiped out, leaving you nothing
of new grain, wine, or oil, of the calving of your
herds and the lambing of your flocks, until it
has brought you to ruin. 52It shall shut you up
in all your towns throughout your land until
every mighty, towering wall in which you trust
has come down. And when you are shut up in
all your towns throughout your land that the
Lord your God has assigned to you, 53you shall
eat your own issue, the flesh of your sons and
daughters that the Lord your God has assigned
to you, because of the desperate straits to which
your enemy shall reduce you. 54He who is most
tender and fastidious among you shall be too
mean to his brother and the wife of his bosom
and the children he has spared 55to share with
any of them the flesh of the children that he eats,
because he has nothing else left as a result of
the desperate straits to which your enemy shall
reduce you in all your towns. 56And she who
is most tender and dainty among you, so tender

50. ruthless Literally, “harsh of face.” Al-
ludes to the enemy’s shameless brutality in treat-
ing the old and the young.

51. The list of what the enemy will consume
is the same as the list of blessings promised in verse
4, with one omission, “the issue of your womb.”
In the grisly climax of the invasion, that blessing
will be consumed by Israel itself (v. 53).

52. shut you up Literally, “press you,” “dis-
tress you.”

in all your towns There will be no place to
escape.

until every . . . wall . . . has come down Until
the enemy has breached the walls with battering
rams and has razed them.

in which you trust A warning against mis-
placed trust. If the people disobey God, powerful
fortifications will provide no more protection
than they did for the Canaanites and the Amorites
(see 1:28, 3:5, 9:1).

53. Besieged and starving, the people will
lose every vestige of compassion, and they will re-
sort to cannibalism. (Under such circumstances,
cannibalism has taken place throughout history;
ancient cases are reported from Samaria, Jerusa-
lem, and elsewhere in the Near East.)

54. spared Children whom he has not yet
slaughtered and eaten.

56–57. The most pampered of women will
likewise turn to the most loathsome of foods and
guard it jealously. Newly delivered mothers will
secretly devour their newborn along with the af-
terbirth to avoid sharing them with their hus-
bands and older children.

53. you shall eat . . . the flesh of your
sons and daughters One commentator, un-
able to bear the horrifying literal meaning,
takes this to mean: “In old age, you will
have to depend on your children to feed and
sustain you.”
and dainty that she would never venture to set a foot on the ground, shall begrudge the husband of her bosom, and her son and her daughter, the afterbirth that issues from between her legs and the babies she bears; she shall eat them secretly, because of utter want, in the desperate straits to which your enemy shall reduce you in your towns.

If you fail to observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching that are written in this book, to reverence this honored and awesome Name, the Lord your God, the Lord will inflict extraordinary plagues upon you and your offspring, strange and lasting plagues, malignant and chronic diseases. He will bring back upon you all the sicknesses of Egypt that you dreaded so, and they shall cling to you. Moreover, the Lord will bring upon you all the other diseases and plagues that are not mentioned in this book of Teaching, until you are wiped out. You shall be left a scant few, after having been as numerous as the stars in the skies, because you did not heed the command of the Lord your God. And as the Lord once delighted in making you prosperous and many, so will the Lord now delight in causing you to perish and in wiping you out; you shall be torn from the land that you are about to enter and possess.

The Lord will scatter you among all the peoples from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and dainty that she would never venture to set a foot on

**dainty** Pampered, indulged.

**would never venture to set a foot on the ground** She was accustomed to being carried on a litter or a portable chair or to riding in a carriage.

**THIRD GROUP (vv. 58–68)**

**58. If you fail to observe** To prevent the lengthy list of threats from inducing hopeless resignation, Moses again reminds the Israelites that the curses are conditional.

**Name** God’s name is synonymous with God’s being. This is a common usage in the Bible, especially in poetry. One loves and fears God’s name—and blesses, thanks, and praises it—while sinners scorn and revile it.

**59. strange** Literally, “great.” That is, unusually severe.

**60. God will afflict** The Israelites with the sicknesses of Egypt, from which He had promised to protect them if they would obey Him (see 7:15; Exod. 15:26).

**61. plagues that are not mentioned** Ancient Near Eastern documents often conclude with statements like this to indicate that the document stands for more than it contains.
stone, whom neither you nor your ancestors have experienced. Yet even among those nations you shall find no peace, nor shall your foot find a place to rest. The Lord will give you there an anguished heart and eyes that pine and a despondent spirit. The life you face shall be precarious; you shall be in terror, night and day, with no assurance of survival. In the morning you shall say, “If only it were evening!” and in the evening you shall say, “If only it were morning!”—because of what your heart shall dread and your eyes shall see. The Lord will send you back to Egypt in galleys, by a route which I told you you should not see again. There you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but none will buy.

These are the terms of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to conclude with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb.

65. no peace Even in exile, the Israelites will find no relief from the terrors left behind at home.

66. despondent spirit Literally, “a parched throat.” A symptom of grief or depression.

67. a route which I told you you should not see again In 17:16, God said, “You must [or will] not go back that way again”; and in Exod. 14:13 He promised, “The Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again.” With this punishment, God will rescind that promise.

I told you Here Moses speaks in God’s name, as in verse 20. According to 17:16, it was God who made this promise.

68. The final reversal of history: the Israelites will be returned to Egypt.

69. offer yourselves for sale Their crushing poverty in Egypt will force them to find sustenance by selling themselves as slaves.

69. none will buy The text gives no reason for the refusal, which represents the ultimate irony and tragedy: the Egyptians, who once declined to free the Israelites from slavery, will now refuse to take them back as slaves.

CONCLUSION TO THE COVENANT (v. 69)
According to 4:13 and 5:2–19, the covenant at Horeb consisted of the Decalogue. The laws and teachings, promises and warnings outlined in chapters 6–26 and 28, constituting the terms of the present covenant made in Moab, were given by God to Moses privately. Moses first communicated them to the people in Moab in the long address just concluded (4:44–28:68), and then had the people commit themselves by covenant to observe them. Deuteronomy, however, regards these laws given in Moab as implicitly part of the Horeb covenant, because they are the direct continuation of God’s words at Horeb, and the people had pledged there to observe them (5:24). This means that the covenants of Horeb and of Moab are virtually identical. The covenant to be made at Shechem (chap. 27) is also identical to the one made at Moab.

67. because of what your heart shall dread Bad as the reality will be, you will fear that the future will be worse. Fear of misfortune is often worse than the actual misfortune, as our imaginations conjure up all sorts of dreadful experiences we may feel we deserve.
Moses summoned all Israel and said to them:

You have seen all that the LORD did before your very eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his courtiers and to his whole country:

2 the wondrous feats that you saw with your own eyes, those prodigious signs and marvels. 3 Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

4 I led you through the wilderness forty years; the clothes on your back did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet; 5 you had no bread to eat and no wine or other intoxicant to drink.

Moses' Third Discourse: A Summons to Ratify the Covenant Made in Moab (29:1–30:20)

Moses has presented all the terms of the second covenant to the people (4:44–26:19, 28). He now summons them to ratify it and concludes by stating that what he is offering Israel as a nation is the opportunity to choose between life and death (30:15–20).

BASIS OF THE COVENANT (29:1–8)

Moses reminds the people about the Exodus, which lies at the heart of the covenant, just as he did when God first offered the covenant to the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

1. summoned Literally, “called.” “Summoned” implies that Moses had dismissed the people after his previous address, perhaps to allow them time to reflect on it so that they could enter the Covenant in full awareness of the solemnity of their action. If “called” is meant literally, it could mean that he simply continued proclaiming to the people on the same occasion as before.

You have seen . . . before your very eyes In Deuteronomy, Moses frequently stresses that he is appealing to the people on the basis of their own personal experience.

3. to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand “The ability to understand, to see or hear the divine significance of events, may be granted or withheld from man. One may see great wonders but remain entirely insensitive” (Heschel).

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
Copyright © 2001 by the Rabbinical Assembly
This version for electronic use during pandemic only.
drink—that you might know that I the LORD am your God.

6When you reached this place, King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan came out to engage us in battle, but we defeated them. 7We took their land and gave it to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh as their heritage. 8Therefore observe faithfully all the terms of this covenant, that you may succeed in all that you undertake.

6. this place Transjordan. For Sihon and Og battled with Israel at Jahaz and Edrei, respectively (2:32; 3:1), not in the Plains of Moab where Moses is speaking.

we defeated them The willingness of this generation to wage war against both Sihon and Og—in contrast to the previous generation’s fear of fighting the Amorites—revealed that they had indeed gained a mature trust in God’s power. Their victory showed them that their trust was justified.

8. The experiences of the past 40 years have taught the Israelites that the essential condition for success is adherence to the Covenant.
In this haftarah the prophet dramatically announces Zion’s imminent restoration, concretized through imagery of light and worldly splendor. The light is nothing less than the divine presence and redemption. The worldly splendor is the gift of nations who had oppressed the city and its inhabitants in times past. A tone of physical and spiritual transformation pervades the reading.

Powerful imagery of light frames and dominates this haftarah. This light is God’s own glory (vv. 2, 19–20), a splendor that will illumine and be reflected in Zion, attracting all nations to her (v. 3). Earlier prophecies portray Israel—and the prophet and his teaching in particular—as the bearer of the light of hope and direction to the exiles (42:6, 49:6, 51:4). In this passage, it is Zion that is the locus of this divine illumination (v. 1).

The light of redemption is a renewal of the re-splendent light of origins. Zion is reborn and re-created by the shining presence of God’s immediacy, much as each day dramatizes the renewal of Creation out of the dark night. Furthermore, just as the clarity of God’s first creation was celebrated by new names (“Day,” “Night,” “Adam,” “Eve”), so now, in this re-creation, Jerusalem shall be renamed “City of the Lord, / Zion of the Holy One of Israel” (v. 14), and her walls and gates shall be called “Victory” and “Reno” (v. 18). The special identity of Zion is singled out, together with its new future. But in contrast to the abstract, oblique announcement of light at Creation (“Let there be light”), the light of re-creation and redemption presented here is personal: “your light has dawned” (v. 1).

Nothing suggests that this effulgence of light is a cosmic principle set over against the dark, in the manner of the dualism that emerges in Zoroastrianism at this time. Light imagery was a feature of ancient Israelite culture too, in personal exclamations such as “The Lord is my light” (Ps. 27:1) and in theological statements such as “by Your light do we see light” (Ps. 36:10). What finds expression here is the sense of the divine as source and ground of reality, as power and presence for redemption. The words in the haftarah announce a new light of enduring brilliance. This portrayal of redemption as illumination marks a new moment in theology.

In the redemption, God will glorify and permanently transform Zion, the Temple, and Israel. The key Hebrew phrase that marks this prophetic truth is lo od: “No more” (lo od) shall the cry of wrack and ruin be at hand (v. 18); “No longer” (lo od) shall Zion need an earthly sun (v. 19). “Your sun shall set no more [lo od], / Your moon no more [lo od] withdraw; / For the Lord shall be a light to you forever” (v. 20). Expectation of lasting renewal seals the prophet’s words, along with the guarantee that “I the Lord will speed it in due time” (v. 22).

For later readers of this prophecy, still awaiting the end of exile, these final words were less a statement of immediate assurance than a promise of future fulfillment (BT Sanh. 98a). And the opening call for Zion to arise because “your light has come [ba]” was understood as “your light is coming [ba]”—coming but not yet realized.

**RELATION OF THE HAFТАRAH TO THE CALENDAR**

Less than seven weeks ago, the destruction of Zion was mourned on the fast of Tish-ah b’Av. Now, in this vision of restoration, the prophet calls Zion to arise from its sorrowful state (v. 1). In radiant glory, Zion shall be called “the city of the Lord” (v. 14); its ancient sanctuary shall be adorned by the majestic trees of Lebanon (v. 13).
60 Arise, shine, for your light has dawned; The Presence of the Lord has shone upon you!

2 Behold! Darkness shall cover the earth, And thick clouds the peoples; But upon you the Lord will shine, And His Presence be seen over you.

3 And nations shall walk by your light, Kings, by your shining radiance.

4 Raise your eyes and look about:
They have all gathered and come to you.
Your sons shall be brought from afar,
Your daughters like babes on shoulders.

5 As you behold, you will glow;
Your heart will throb and thrill—
For the wealth of the sea shall pass on to you,
The riches of nations shall flow to you.

6 Dust clouds of camels shall cover you,
Dromedaries of Midian and Ephah.
They all shall come from Sheba;
They shall bear gold and frankincense,
And shall herald the glories of the Lord.

7 All the flocks of Kedar shall be assembled for you,
The rams of Nebaioth shall serve your needs;
They shall be welcome offerings on My altar,
And I will add glory to My glorious House.

8 Who are these that float like a cloud,
Like doves to their cotes?

9 Behold, the coastlands await me,
With ships of Tarshish in the lead,
To bring your sons from afar,
And their silver and gold as well—
For the name of the Lord your God,
For the Holy One of Israel, who has glorified
you.

10 Aliens shall rebuild your walls,
Their kings shall wait upon you—
For in anger I struck you down,
But in favor I take you back.

11 Your gates shall always stay open—
Day and night they shall never be shut—
To let in the wealth of the nations,
With their kings in procession.

12 For the nation or the kingdom
That does not serve you shall perish;
Such nations shall be destroyed.

13 The majesty of Lebanon shall come to
you—
Cypress and pine and box—
To adorn the site of My Sanctuary,
To glorify the place where My feet rest.

14 Bowing before you, shall come
The children of those who tormented you;
Prostrate at the soles of your feet
Shall be all those who reviled you;
And you shall be called
“City of the Lord,
Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”

15 Whereas you have been forsaken,
Rejected, with none passing through,
I will make you a pride everlasting,
A joy for age after age.

16 You shall suck the milk of the nations,
Suckle at royal breasts.
And you shall know
That I the Lord am your Savior,
I, The Mighty One of Jacob, am your Redeemer.

17 Instead of copper I will bring gold,
Instead of iron I will bring silver;
Instead of wood, copper;
And instead of stone, iron.
And I will appoint Well-being as your government,
Prosperity as your officials.

18 The cry “Violence!”
Shall no more be heard in your land,
Nor “Wrack and ruin!”
Within your borders.
And you shall name your walls “Victory”
And your gates “Renown.”

19 No longer shall you need the sun
For light by day,
Nor the shining of the moon
For radiance [by night];
For the Lord shall be your light everlasting,
Your God shall be your glory.

20 Your sun shall set no more,
Your moon no more withdraw;
For the Lord shall be a light to you forever,
And your days of mourning shall be ended.

21 And your people, all of them righteous,
Shall possess the land for all time;
They are the shoot that I planted,
My handiwork in which I glory.

22 The smallest shall become a clan;

This prophecy transcends the need for natural light. Compare Isa. 30:26: “The light of the sun shall become sevenfold . . . when the Lord binds up His people’s wounds.” (Earlier and later prophets exploited the contrast between light and darkness to dramatize a time of doom and death; see Amos 5:18–20, 8:9–10; Zech. 14:6–7).
The least, a mighty nation.
I the Lord will speed it in due time.

22. I the Lord will speed it in due time  A paradox to earlier commentators—for if redemption will occur “in due time,” what does “will speed it” mean? The Hebrew words of the phrase were, therefore, read as if separated: “I [the Lord] will speed it” if the people have merit, but if they do not have merit, redemption will come “in due time” (BT Sanh. 98a, see Rashi). On the other hand, the word order in the Hebrew text puts “in due time” before “I will speed it.” This prompted Radak to explain: When redemption comes “in due time,” God “will speed it” to a complete conclusion.

The two interpretations represent two theological poles concerning redemption. According to the first interpretation, human merit may hasten God’s hand. According to the second, redemption is a divine mystery whose “time” is not influenced by human actions (see Gen. R. 65:12). Messianic movements in Jewish history have often swung between these two poles.