



[Slide 1] A French astrologer, physician, and supposed seer, who lived in the 1500's, was Nostradamus. On the evening of July 1<sup>st</sup>, he told his secretary, "Tomorrow, at sunrise, I shall no longer be here."<sup>1</sup> Those were his last words; he was found dead in his room the next morning. He was right.

Last words are important, aren't they? They stand out. My favorite?

Louise-Marie-Thérèse de Saint Maurice, the Comtesse de Vercellis, let one rip while she was dying. Her final words? "Good. A woman who can fart is not dead."<sup>2</sup>

What would you want your last words to be? What is that one thing you would want to make sure people knew? We will be spending the next three weeks looking at the book of Deuteronomy, the fifth of the five books of Moses. Written about 3400 years ago – tradition claims Moses as the author – Deuteronomy is essentially Moses' last sermon to the Israelites. He was 120 years old; they were on the border of the Promised Land after spending forty years in the wilderness, ready to enter, and Moses knew his time was finished. God had told Moses he would not enter the land, so Moses gathered the people for one last message.

[Slide 2] While it's 34 chapters long, there are **three main things** that Moses wants the people to know; we're going to tackle one per week. The first is **the covenant** – we're going to dive into that in a minute. The other two are to **care for the poor** and to **choose to follow God**. In other words, Moses reminded them that **God deeply cares about the marginalized**, and that **God wants them to choose to follow Him**.

Let's start at the beginning:

[Slide 3] *Deuteronomy 1:1-3 (NLT) <sup>1</sup>These are the words that Moses spoke to all the people of Israel while they were in the wilderness east of the Jordan River. They were camped in the Jordan Valley near Suph, between*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/58534/64-people-and-their-famous-last-words>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*Paran on one side and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab on the other. <sup>2</sup> Normally it takes only eleven days to travel from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, going by way of Mount Seir. <sup>3</sup> But forty years after the Israelites left Egypt, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses addressed the people of Israel, telling them everything the Lord had commanded him to say.*

Am I the only one that thinks that line, “Normally it takes only eleven days to travel” was a bit of a burn? “Hey guys, you should have been able to do this in less than two weeks, but your parents blew it and we pulled this car over for four decades! Don’t make me do it again!”

Essentially, these opening verses set the scene; they are on the border of the Promised Land, ready to enter. And over the following chapters, Moses reminded them of everything God had told them over the generations. He reminded them that way back on Mt. Sinai, where he received the ten commandments, God promised them the land:

*[Slide 4] Deuteronomy 1:8 (NLT) [God speaking:] “Look, I am giving all this land to you! Go in and occupy it, for it is the land the Lord swore to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to all their descendants.”*

This is the first major theme of Deuteronomy; Moses reminded them of the covenant. **The covenant?** That’s not really a word we use in normal conversation anymore, is it? If you Google the definition, you’ll find out that it means “agreement,” “contract,” or “commitment.” Commitment is probably the most accurate to what Moses reminded them of; the covenant was a commitment, or promise, that God had made to their people.

It began way back in Genesis 15, when God called Abraham:

*[Slide 5] Genesis 15:18-21 (NLT) <sup>18</sup> So the Lord made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River— <sup>19</sup> the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, <sup>21</sup> Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”*

God promised Abraham that his descendants would become a nation, that they would occupy the land, and promised him that God would use them to bless the world (Genesis 22:18).

God reminded them of this covenant, this promise, after they escaped Egypt when He spoke with Moses on top of Mt. Sinai:

[Slide 6] *Exodus 19:5-6 (NLT) [God speaking to Moses:]*<sup>5</sup> “Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. <sup>6</sup> And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.’ This is the message you must give to the people of Israel.”

Abraham’s descendants were to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. The covenant, the promise, was never just about gaining territory, it was about impacting the world. A priest’s role was to be the one connecting the people to God. In the covenant we see hints that they would play a part in connecting the world to God!

This brings us back to Deuteronomy. In this last sermon, Moses wanted to make sure the Israelites understood the covenant between God and them. Moses wanted them to understand that nothing could keep God from keeping His promise:

[Slide 7] *Deuteronomy 7:6-9 (NLT)*<sup>7</sup> “The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! <sup>8</sup> Rather, it was simply that the Lord loves you, and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the Lord rescued you with such a strong hand from your slavery and from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.

## **IT WAS SIMPLY THAT THE LORD LOVES YOU**

[Slide 8] “It was simply that the Lord loves you.” What a powerful phrase. They weren’t the chosen people because they were somehow special or had earned it in some way. They weren’t some impressive group that had stood out. It was simply that the Lord loved them.

This fact is just as true today as it was 3400 years ago. There is nothing that any of us have done to make ourselves lovable to God. We work so hard for approval, don’t we? How many of you have taken down a post because it didn’t get enough likes? We try to pose ourselves in just the right



The book of Exodus! Babies, burning bushes, and plagues, oh my! Yes, it's cheesy, but Dorothy following the yellow-brick road to find her way home kind of reminds me of the ancient Hebrews following God to the Promised Land! It's an extraordinary journey, filled with danger, miracles, strange moments, and a longing for home.

Last week, we looked at two stories and asked what it means to be a lion for God. One of those stories was about Moses and his first attempt to intercede on behalf of his people—but he did it in secret, trying to cover his tracks, and ultimately found himself fleeing Egypt for his life.

Moses' story continues with him ending up in Midian, where he saves seven sisters from a group of evil shepherds. Their father invites him to come and work for him, and Moses marries one of the daughters. Forty years go by, and Moses lives as a simple shepherd. Pharaoh dies, but the Hebrews continue to suffer as slaves. Moses is 80 years old when in Exodus 2:25 (NLT) it says that God, *“Looked down on the people of Israel and knew it was time to act.”*

Chapter 3 of Exodus opens with Moses watching his sheep, when he sees a “blazing fire” (Exodus 3:2) off in the distance.

Fire is fascinating. We love to check it out, don't we? How many of you have gotten in trouble for playing with fire?

**[Author Note: Share a personal story of a time you played with fire. If you don't have one, feel free to borrow mine.]**

When I was 10 years old, I got hold of a box of matches and hid in the back yard burning things in a bucket. I was having a blast! But when I went back in the house, my mom took one look at me and asked if I had been playing with fire. I was stunned. How did she know? I squirmed, looked guilty, and feigned innocence, asking, “Why would you ask that?” Her reply: “You singed off your bangs!” Busted.

Fire can be terrifying. As a child, one of the scariest moments from any movie for me was at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, when the wicked witch

screams, “How about a little fire, Scarecrow?” And then sets him on fire! He’s straw! It’s horrible! Dorothy saves the day, but that scene still gives me the shivers!

[**Author Note:** Here’s the clip on YouTube, if you want to show it.  
<https://youtu.be/aopdD9Cu-So>]

Fire captures our attention. Moses sees this blazing fire off in the distance but can see there’s something strange about it, so he goes to check it out.

### **Exodus 3:3–6a (NLT)**

*“This is amazing,” Moses said to himself. “Why isn’t that bush burning up? I must go see it.”<sup>4</sup> When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, “Moses! Moses!” “Here I am!” Moses replied.<sup>5</sup> “Do not come any closer,” the Lord warned. “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.<sup>6</sup> I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”*

This will not be the last time in Scripture that God chooses to appear to shepherds with a way to save His people! Do we grasp just how shocking this moment is? Let’s take a moment and put ourselves in the sandals of Moses.

From his perspective, he is a failure. His adoptive Egyptian family has rejected him—and wants him put to death! He may have been raised an Egyptian, but he knows he is not one. His own people, the Hebrew slaves, have also rejected him. He is a shepherd, one of the lowest-ranking positions in the culture—a fact made even more jarring after spending the first half of his life living in the Egyptian palace. He believes he is a failure.

### **Exodus 3:6b–12 (NLT)**

*When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.<sup>7</sup> Then the Lord told him, “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering.<sup>8</sup> So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey — the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live.<sup>9</sup> Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse*



- What are some of the conflicts Jacob encountered in his life? What do his responses tell us about him? How should he have responded?
- Jacob sent his family ahead so that if attacked, he could escape while they were killed. What does this tell us about Jacob? What kind of love did he have for his family?
- How would you explain Jacob's wrestling match with God? Why do you think God gave him an injury?
- Jacob's name is changed to Israel; if you had to change your name, what name would you choose and why?
- It was no coincidence that the pivotal moment between God and Jacob happened the night before his pivotal moment with Esau. Do you think the potential conflict with his brother made Jacob more open or less open to God? Explain.
- God's loving forgiveness transformed Jacob into a new person; how has God changed you into a new person?
- How would you define God's forgiving love? What can you do to model it this week?

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