



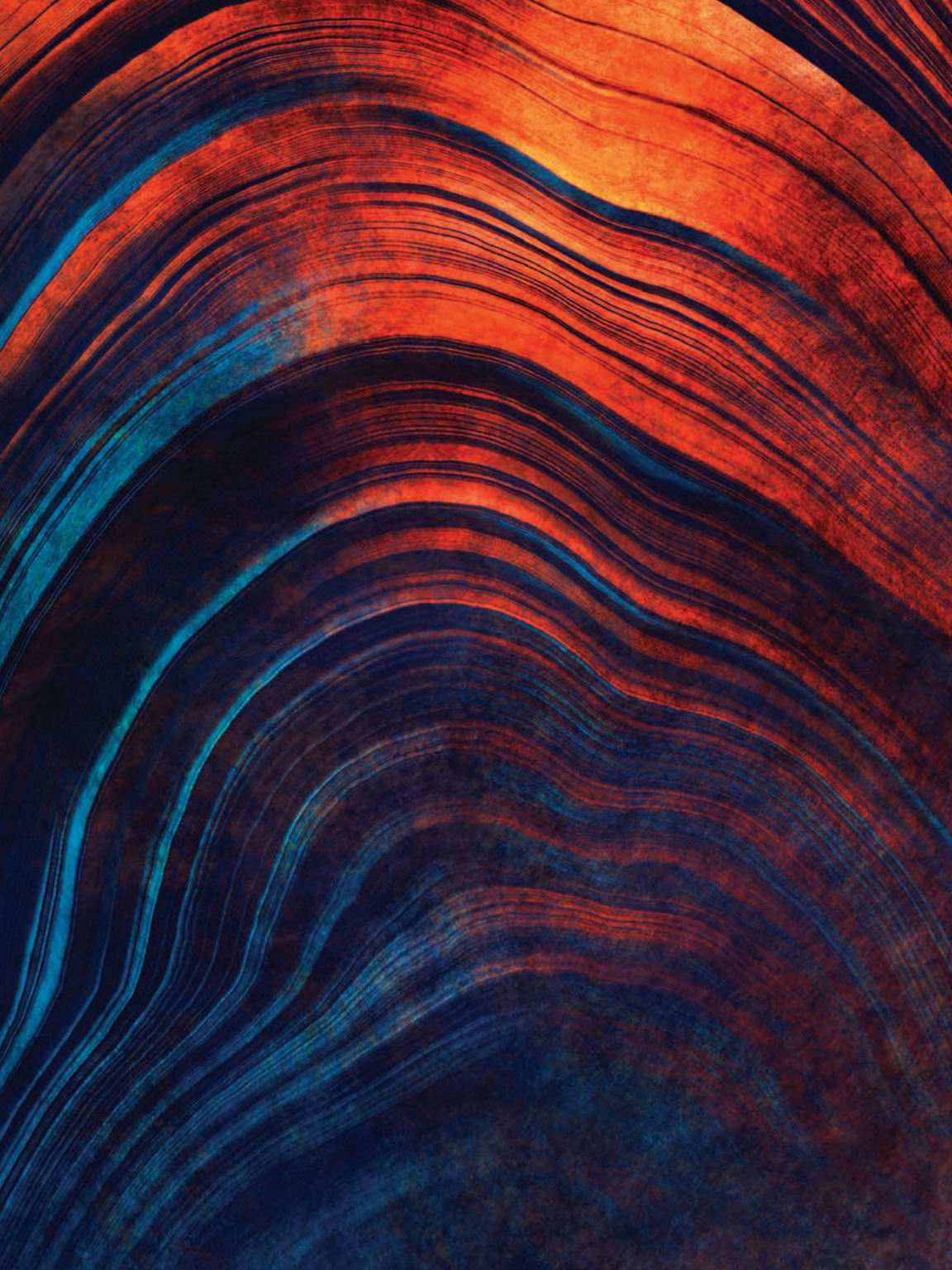
TRANSLATOR OF *THE MESSAGE*  
**EUGENE H. PETERSON**

**S Y M P H O N Y**  
**O F**  
**S A L V A T I O N**

A 60-DAY DEVOTIONAL JOURNEY  
THROUGH THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

**Your  
beauty and love  
chase after me  
every day of  
my life.**

PSALM 23:6  
THE MESSAGE



TRANSLATOR OF *THE MESSAGE*

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A NavPress resource published in alliance  
with Tyndale House Publishers



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# HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

*A Note from the Editors*

**I**n 1993, the world of Bible publishing was revolutionized with the publication of *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary Language*, followed in 2002 by the completion of the entire *Message Bible*. Here was a Bible that parted from any number of conventions in order to return the Bible reading experience to its oldest, purest form: the Word of God in the language of the people.

Not just anyone could be trusted with such an undertaking, but Eugene H. Peterson was up to the task. A scholar of biblical languages, a lifelong pastor, and a demonstrated master of wordcraft, he had earned the trust of people who cherished the Bible, and when his “Bible in Contemporary Language” was released, it was welcomed with critical acclaim and popular praise.

In the decades since, *The Message* has weathered the storms of a volatile publishing industry, the critiques of Bible purists, the vicissitudes of a fickle public. Its relevance remains obvious; its resonance has only increased. In its original language, the Bible was world-weary, savvy, prophetic, and compassionate; now well into the twenty-first century, the world is itself more weary, more savvy, more desperate for compassion and prophetic challenge.

Often overlooked in people’s engagement with *The Message* are the introductions Eugene wrote to each book of the Bible. Many very good Bibles take a minimalist,



utilitarian approach to these introductions—just the facts, and often the facts presented in granular detail. But Eugene had a different vision.

*Symphony of Salvation* takes us a step back from Eugene's translation of the Bible to focus instead on his *theology* of the Bible. Here we see Eugene as pastor, anxious for the People of God to be rooted and established in the Word of God. The introductions that you'll encounter in this book reveal the heart of the Word—a God seeking a people in a world born of love but struggling to survive, a world that “can hardly wait for what's coming next” (Romans 8:19).

These introductions are not to be studied so much as soaked in, and so they are presented here as daily readings for your consideration. Of course you are not obligated to read them daily; you may take up *Symphony of Salvation* whenever you find yourself taking up a new book of the Bible, using this book to inform your reading of that book. Or you may read multiple entries in one sitting to give you a greater appreciation for the themes that overarch the sacred Scriptures, the crossing connections between books of the Bible. Or you may just find yourself with a few spare moments and want to refresh your understanding of the Bible, or even refresh your soul's connection to God.

Included in each of these entries is a “Verse to Remember.” You may choose to commit these verses to memory as a way of letting the Scriptures follow you through your day, or you may simply enjoy the intersection of what Eugene called two language worlds: “the world of the Bible and the world of Today.” However you engage these sixty readings, we hope you find yourself simmering in them, immersed in the world they invite you into, met there with compassion and prophetic challenge. If the Bible is anything, it is some combination of profoundly simple and simply profound, cutting through walls like a double-edged sword, satisfying our souls like a river of life.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

**B**ecause the Bible is so famous and revered, many assume that we need experts to explain and interpret it for us—and, of course, there are some things that need to be explained. But the first men and women who listened to these words now written in our Bibles were ordinary, everyday, working-class people. One of the greatest of the early translators of the Bible into English, William Tyndale, said that he was translating so that the “boy that driveth the plough” would be able to read the Scriptures.

One well-educated African man, who later became one of the most influential Bible teachers in our history (Augustine), was greatly offended when he first read the Bible. Instead of a book cultivated and polished in the literary style he admired so much, he found it full of homespun, earthy stories of plain, unimportant people. He read it in a Latin translation full of slang and jargon. He took one look at what he considered the “unspiritual” quality of so many of its characters and the everydayness of Jesus, and he contemptuously abandoned it. It was years before he realized that God had not taken the form

of a sophisticated intellectual to teach us about highbrow heavenly culture so we could appreciate the finer things of God. When he saw that God entered our lives as a Jewish servant in order to save us from our sins, he started reading the book gratefully and believingly.

Some are also surprised that Bible reading does not introduce us to a “nicer” world. This biblical world is decidedly not an ideal world, the kind we see advertised in travel posters. Suffering and injustice and ugliness are not purged from the world in which God works and loves and saves. Nothing is glossed over. God works patiently and deeply, but often in hidden ways, in the mess of our humanity and history. Ours is not a neat and tidy world in which we are assured that we can get everything under our control. This takes considerable getting used to—there is mystery everywhere. The Bible does not give us a predictable cause-effect world in which we can plan our careers and secure our futures. It is not a dream world in which everything works out according to our adolescent expectations—there is pain and poverty and abuse at which we cry out in indignation, “You can’t let this happen!” For most of us it takes years and years and years to exchange our dream world for this real world of grace and mercy, sacrifice and love, freedom and joy—the God-saved world.

Yet another surprise is that the Bible does not flatter us. It is not trying to sell us anything that promises to make life easier. It doesn’t offer secrets to what we often think of as prosperity or pleasure or high adventure. The reality that comes into focus as we read the Bible has to do with what God is doing in a saving love that includes us and everything we do. This is quite different from what our sin-stunted and culture-cluttered minds imagine. But our Bible reading does not give us access to a mail-order

catalog of idols from which we can pick and choose to satisfy our fantasies. The Bible begins with God speaking creation and us into being. It continues with God entering into personalized and complex relationships with us, helping and blessing us, teaching and training us, correcting and disciplining us, loving and saving us. This is not an escape from reality but a plunge into more reality—a sacrificial but altogether better life all the way.





ANTICIPATION.



DAY 1 ▪ GENESIS

# God First & Last



**F**irst, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living. If we don't have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get *our* lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at center and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.

Genesis gets us off on the right foot. "First this: God" (Genesis 1:1). Genesis pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled. It gives us a vocabulary for speaking accurately and comprehensively about our lives—where we come from and where we are going, what we think and what we do, the people we live with and how to get along with them, the troubles we find ourselves in and the blessings that keep arriving.

Genesis uses words to make a foundation that is solid and true. Everything we think and do and feel is material in a building operation in which we are engaged all our lives long. There is immense significance in everything that we do. Our speech and our actions and our prayers are all, every detail of them, involved in this vast building operation comprehensively known as the kingdom of God. But we don't build the foundation. The foundation is



given. The foundation is firmly in place.

Jesus concluded his most famous teaching by telling us that there are two ways to go about our lives—we can build on sand or we can build on rock. No matter how wonderfully we build, if we build on sand it will all fall to pieces like a house of cards. We build on what is already there, on the rock. Genesis is a verbal witness to that rock: God’s creative acts, God’s intervening and gracious judgments, God’s call to a life of faith, God’s making a covenant with us.

God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature  
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,  
the birds in the air, the cattle,  
And, yes, Earth itself,  
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.”

God created human beings;  
he created them godlike,  
Reflecting God’s nature.  
He created them male and female.  
God blessed them:  
“Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth!  
Take charge!

Be responsible for fish in the sea  
and birds in the air,  
for every living thing that moves  
on the face of Earth.”

GENESIS 1:26-28

But Genesis presents none of this to us as an abstract, bloodless truth or principle. We are given a succession of stories with named people—people who loved and quarreled, believed and doubted, had children and married, experienced sin and grace. If we pay attention, we find that we ourselves are living variations on these very stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The stories show clearly that we are never outsiders or spectators to anything in Heaven and Earth. God doesn’t work impersonally from space; he works with us where we are, as he finds us. No matter what we do, whether good or bad, we continue to be part of everything that God is doing. Nobody can drop out; there’s no place to drop out to. So we may as well get started and take our place in the story—at the beginning. ■

A VERSE  
TO REMEMBER

**God looked  
over everything  
he had made;  
it was so good,  
so very good!**

GENESIS 1:31  
THE MESSAGE



DAY 2 ▪ EXODUS

# The Story of Salvation



**T**he human race is in trouble. We've been in trouble for a long time. Enormous energies have been and continue to be expended by many, many men and women to get us out of the trouble we are in—to clean up the world's mess. The skill, the perseverance, the intelligence, the devotion of the people who put their shoulders

to the wheel to pull us out of the muck—parents and teachers, healers and counselors, rulers and politicians, writers and pastors—is impressive.

At the center and core of this work is God. The most comprehensive term for what God is doing to get us out of the mess we are in is *salvation*. Salvation is God doing for us what we

A VERSE  
TO REMEMBER

**“My presence  
will go with you.  
I’ll see the journey  
to the end.”**

EXODUS 33:14  
THE MESSAGE

can't do for ourselves. *Salvation* is the biggest word in the vocabulary of the People of God. The story of the Exodus is a powerful and dramatic and true story of God working salvation. He told his people, through Moses,

“I am **GOD**. I will bring you out from under the cruel hard labor of Egypt. I will rescue you from slavery. I will redeem you, intervening with great acts of judgment. I'll take you as my own people and I'll be God to you. You'll know that I am **GOD**, *your* God who brings you out from under the cruel hard labor of Egypt. I'll bring you into the land that I promised to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and give it to you as your own country. *I AM GOD.*”

EXODUS 6:6-8

The story has generated an extraordinary progeny through the centuries, reproducing itself in song and poem, drama and novel, politics and social justice, repentance and con-

version, worship and holy living. It continues to capture the imaginations of men and women, especially men and women in trouble.

It is significant that God does not present us with salvation in the form of an abstract truth or a precise definition or a catchy slogan, but as *story*. Exodus draws us into a story with plot and characters, which is to say with design and personal relationships. Story is an invitation to participate—first through our imaginations and then, if we will, by faith—with our total lives in response to God. This Exodus story continues to be a major means that God uses to draw men and women in trouble out of the mess of history into the kingdom of salvation.

About half the book (chapters 1–19 and 32–34) is a gripping narrative of an obscure and severely brutalized people who are saved out of slavery and into a life of freedom. The other half (chapters 20–31 and 35–40) is meticulous—some think tedious—basic instruction and training in living the saved, free life. The story of salvation is not complete without both halves. ■

## DAY 3 ■ LEVITICUS

# Holy as God Is Holy

One of the stubbornly enduring habits of the human race is to insist on domesticating God. We are determined to tame him. We figure out ways to harness God to our projects. We try to reduce God to a size that conveniently fits our plans and ambitions and tastes.

But our Scriptures are even more stubborn in telling us that we can't do it. God cannot be fit into our plans; we must fit into his. We can't use God—God is not a tool or appliance or credit card.

“Do what I tell you; *live* what I tell you. I am **GOD**.

“Don't desecrate my holy name. I insist on being treated

with holy reverence among the People of Israel. I am **GOD** who makes you holy and brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am **GOD**.”

LEVITICUS 22:31-33

*Holy* is the word that sets God apart and above our attempts to enlist him in our wish-fulfillment fantasies or our utopian schemes for making our mark in the world. *Holy* means that God is alive on God's terms, alive in a way that exceeds our experience and imagination. *Holy* refers to life burning with an intense purity that transforms everything it touches into itself.

Because the core of all living is God,





and God is a holy God, we require much teaching and long training for living in response to God as he is and not as we want him to be. The book of Leviticus is a narrative pause in the story of our ancestors as they are on their way, having been saved out of Egypt, to settle in the land of Canaan. It is a kind of extended time-out for instruction, a detailed and meticulous preparation for living “holy” in a culture that doesn’t have the faintest idea what “holy” is. The moment these people enter Canaan they will be picking their way through a lethal minefield of gods and goddesses that are designed to appeal to our god-fantasies: “Give us what we want when we want it on our own terms.” What these god-fantasies in fact do is cripple or kill us. Leviticus is a start at the “much teaching and long training” that continues to be adapted and reworked in every country and culture where God is forming a saved people to live as he created them to live—holy as he is holy.

A VERSE  
TO REMEMBER

**“I’ll set up  
my residence in  
your neighborhood;  
I won’t avoid or  
shun you; I’ll stroll  
through your streets.  
I’ll be your God;  
you’ll be my  
people.”**

LEVITICUS 26:11-12  
THE MESSAGE

The first thing that strikes us as we read Leviticus in this light is that this holy God is actually present with us and virtually every detail of our lives is affected by the presence of this holy God; nothing in us, our relationships, or our environment is left out. The second thing is that God provides a way (the sacrifices and feasts and Sabbaths) to bring everything into his holy presence, transformed in the fiery blaze of the holy. It is an awesome thing to come into his presence, and we, like ancient Israel, stand in his presence at every moment (Psalm 139). Our Lord is not dwelling in a tent or house in our neighborhood. But he makes his habitation in us and among us as believers and says, “I am holy; you be holy.”

Once we realize this, the seemingly endless details and instructions of Leviticus become signposts of good news to us: God cares about the details of our lives, willing everything in and around us into the transforma-

tion that St. Paul elsewhere commends:

So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

ROMANS 12:1-2 ■



DAY 4 ■ NUMBERS

# Growing Up



**B**ecoming a truly human community is a long, complex, messy business. Simply growing up as a man or woman demands all the wisdom and patience and courage that we can muster. But growing up with others, parents and siblings and neighbors, to say nothing of odd strangers and mean enemies, immensely complicates the growing up.

The book of Numbers plunges us into the mess of growing up. The pages in this section of the biblical story give us a realistic feel for what is involved in being included in the People of God, which is to say, a human community that honors God, lives out love and justice in daily affairs, learns how to deal with sin in oneself and others, and follows God's commands into a future of blessing. And all this without illusions.

When the Cloud lifted above the Tent, the People of Israel marched out; and when the Cloud descended the people camped. The People of Israel marched at **GOD's** command and they camped at his command. As long as the Cloud was over The Dwelling, they camped. Even when the Cloud hovered over The Dwelling for many days,

A VERSE  
TO REMEMBER

**“Please forgive  
the wrongdoing  
of this people out  
of the extravagance  
of your loyal love  
just as all along,  
from the time  
they left Egypt,  
you have been  
forgiving this  
people.”**

NUMBERS 14:19  
THE MESSAGE

they honored GOD's command and wouldn't march. They stayed in camp, obedient to GOD's command, as long as the Cloud was over The Dwelling, but the moment GOD issued orders they marched. If the Cloud stayed only from sunset to daybreak and then lifted at daybreak, they marched. Night or day, it made no difference—when the Cloud lifted, they marched. It made no difference whether the Cloud hovered over The Dwelling for two days or a month or a year, as long as the Cloud was there, they were there. And when the Cloud went up, they got up and marched. They camped at GOD's command and they marched at GOD's command. They lived obediently by GOD's orders as delivered by Moses.

NUMBERS 9:17-23

Many of us fondle a romanticized spirituality in our imaginations. The “God's in his heaven/all's right with the world” sort of thing. When things don't go “right” we blame others or ourselves, muddle through as best we can, often with considerable crankiness, and wish that we had been born at a different time—“Bible times” maybe!—when living a holy life was

so much easier. That's odd because the Bible, our primary text for showing us what it means to be a human being created by God and called to a life of obedient faith and sacrificial love, nowhere suggests that life is simple or even “natural.” We need a lot of help.

We need organizational help. When people live together in community, jobs have to be assigned, leaders appointed, inventories kept. Counting and list-making and rosters are as much a part of being a community of God as prayer and instruction and justice. Accurate arithmetic is an aspect of becoming the People of God.

And we need relational help. The people who find themselves called and led and commanded by God find themselves in the company of men and women who sin a lot—quarrel, bicker, grumble, rebel, fornicate, steal—you name it, we do it. We need help in getting along with each other. Wise discipline is required in becoming the People of God.

It follows that counting and quarreling take up considerable space in the book of Numbers. Because they also continue to be unavoidable aspects of our becoming the People of God, this book is essential in training our imaginations to take in some of these less-than-romantic details by which we are formed into the People of God. ■



## DAY 5 ■ DEUTERONOMY

# Live, Really Live

**D**euteronomy is a sermon— actually, a series of sermons. It is the longest sermon in the Bible and maybe the longest sermon ever. Deuteronomy presents Moses, standing on the Plains of Moab with all Israel assembled before him, preaching. It is his last sermon. When he completes it, he will leave his pulpit on the plains, climb a mountain, and die.

The setting is stirring and emotion packed. Moses entered the biblical story of salvation as a little baby born in Egypt under a death threat.

Now, 120 years later, eyesight sharp as ever and walking with “a spring in his step,” he preaches this immense sermon and dies, still brimming with words and life.

This sermon does what all sermons are intended to do: Take God’s words, written and spoken in the past, take the human experience, ancestral and personal, of the listening congregation, then reproduce the words and experience as a single event right now, in this present moment. No word that God has spoken is a mere



literary artifact to be studied; no human experience is dead history merely to be regretted or admired. The continuous and insistent Mosaic repetitions of “today” and “this day” throughout these sermons keep attentions taut and responsive. The complete range of human experience is brought to life and salvation by the full revelation of God: Live this! Now!

This commandment that I’m commanding you today isn’t too much for you, it’s not out of your reach. It’s not on a high mountain—you don’t have to get mountaineers to climb the peak and bring it down to your level and explain it before you can live it. And it’s not across the ocean—you don’t have to send sailors out to get it, bring it back, and then explain it before you can live it. No. The word is right here and now—as near as the tongue in your mouth, as near as the heart in your chest. Just do it!

Look at what I’ve done for you today: I’ve placed in front of you

Life and Good  
Death and Evil.

And I command you today:  
Love **GOD**, your God. Walk in his

ways. Keep his commandments, regulations, and rules so that you will live, really live, live exuberantly, blessed by **GOD**, your God, in the land that you are about to enter and possess.

DEUTERONOMY 30:11-16

The Plains of Moab are the last stop on the forty-year journey from Egyptian slavery to Promised Land freedom. The People of Israel have experienced a lot as a congregation: deliverance, wanderings, rebellions, wars, providence, worship, guidance. The People of Israel have heard a lot from God: commandments, covenant conditions, sacrificial procedures. And now, poised at the River Jordan, ready to cross over and possess the new land, Moses, preaching his great Plains of Moab sermon, makes sure that they don’t leave any of it behind, not so much as one detail of their experience or God’s revelation: He puts their entire experience of salvation and providence into the present tense (chapters 1–11), he puts the entire revelation of commandment and covenant into the present tense (chapters 12–28), and then he wraps it all up in a charge and a song and a blessing to launch them into today’s obedience and believing (chapters 29–34).

*Let’s go.* ■

A VERSE  
TO REMEMBER

**Be vigilant,  
listen obediently  
to these words that I  
command you so that  
you'll have a good life,  
you and your children,  
for a long, long time,  
doing what is good  
and right in the  
eyes of GOD,  
your God.**

DEUTERONOMY 12:28  
THE MESSAGE