

Power of Scripture during Vietnam:

I read a true story in a book by Ravi Zacharias. Zacharias is a Christian writer and speaker who writes about defenses for Christianity. He writes:

During my ministry in Vietnam in 1971, one of my interpreters who traveled with me was Hien Pham, an energetic, devoted young Christian who had worked very closely as a translator with the American military forces, purely as a civilian, with no official or military responsibilities. He just knew English so well that he was able to be of immense help to them in their linguistic struggles.

By virtue of that same strength he also worked with the missionaries. He and I traveled the length of the country and became very close friends before I bade him good-bye when I left Vietnam to return home. We were both very young, and neither of us knew if our paths would cross again. Within four years Vietnam fell, and Hien's fate was unknown.

Seventeen years later, in 1988, I received a surprise telephone call that began with, "Brother Ravi?" Immediately I recognized Hien's voice. We got caught up with our pleasantries, then I asked him how he managed to get out of Vietnam and come to the United States. I was not prepared for the story I was about to hear.

Shortly after Vietnam fell to the Communists, Hien was arrested. Accused of aiding and abetting the Americans he was in and out of prison for several years. During one long jail term, the sole purpose of his jailer was to indoctrinate him against the West--- and especially against democratic ideals and the Christian faith. He was cut off from reading anything in English and restricted to communist propaganda in French or Vietnamese. This daily overdose of the writings of Marx and Engels began to take its toll on him. One of the books he was given to read pictured the Communist man as a bird in the ironclad cage of capitalism, throwing itself against the bars of "capitalist oppression" and bloodying itself in the process. Yet still it continued to struggle in its quest for freedom.

Hien began to buckle under the onslaught. Maybe, he thought, I Have been lied to. Maybe God does not exist. Maybe my whole life has been governed by lies. Maybe the West has deceived me. The more he thought, the more he moved toward a decision. Finally, he made up his mind. He determined that when he awakened the next day, he would not pray anymore or ever think of his Christian faith again.

The next morning, he was assigned to clean the latrines of the prison. It was the most dreaded chore, shunned by everyone, and so with much distress he began the awful task. As he cleaned out a tin can overflowing with toilet paper, his eye caught what he thought was English printed on one piece of paper. He hurriedly washed it off and slipped it into his hip pocket, planning to read it at night. Not having seen anything in English for such a long time, he anxiously waited for a free moment. Under his mosquito net that night after his roommates had fallen asleep, he pulled out a small flashlight and shining it on the damp piece of paper he read at the top corner, "Romans, Chapter 8." Literally trembling with shock, he began to read:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?...

... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors

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through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:28, 31, 32, 35, 37-39)

Hien wept. He knew his Bible, and he had not seen one for so long. Not only that, he knew there was not a more relevant passage of conviction and strength for one on the verge of surrendering to the threat of evil. He cried out to God, asking for forgiveness, for this was to have been the first day in years that he had determined not to pray. Evidently the Lord had other plans.

The next day, Hien asked the camp commander if he could clean the latrine again. He continued with this chore on a regular basis, because he had discovered that some official in the camp was using a Bible as toilet paper. Each day Hien picked up a portion of the Scripture, cleaned it off, and added it to his nightly devotional reading. In this way he retrieved a significant portion of the Bible.¹

Deuteronomy 1:1-18:

Sections:

Verses 1-2: intro: verse 1, the words... verse 2: an 11-day journey leads to verse 3, it has been the 40th year

Verses 3- 5: Intro, part 2: travel log, geographical detail

Verses 6- 8: Words from the Lord, it is “go” time

Verses 9-15: appointment of judges

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Verses 1-2: intro: intro: verse 1, the words... verse 2: an 11-day journey leads to verse 3, it has been the 40th year

The Archaeological Study Bible gives insight:

The English title for this book is unfortunate, as it is based on the Septuagint’s mistranslation of the phrase “a copy of this law” (17:18) as deuteronomion touto, “this second law.” The Jewish name debârîm, “words,” derives from the opening expression, “These are the words Moses spoke” (1:1). This title is well-suited because it focuses attention on a clue to the peculiar literary character of the book; the treaties imposed by ancient imperial lords on their vassals began with such an expression. Deuteronomy is the text or “words” of a suzerainty covenant made by the Lord of heaven through the mediatorship of Moses with the servant people Israel beyond the Jordan.

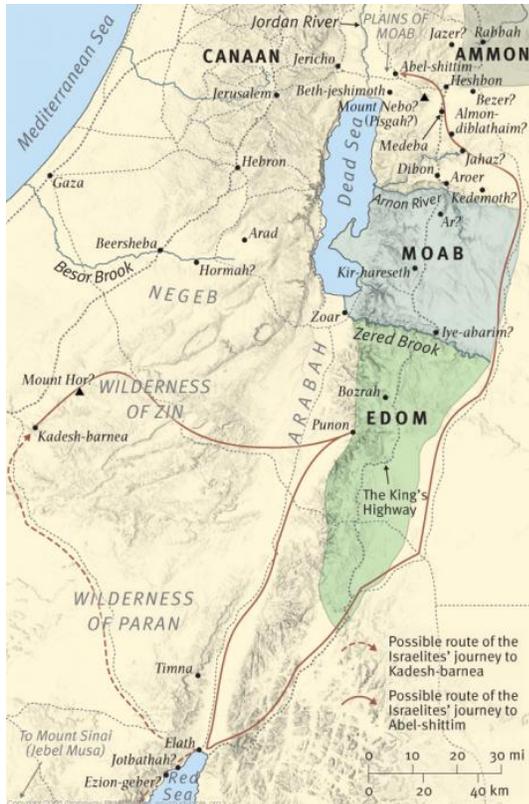
The ESV Study Bible:

¹ Sermon Illustration 405-406; 425-426; 438-439 of Ravi Zacharias: *Deliver Us from Evil*
Page 406: Ravi says:

This first, brief section provides the chronological and geographical setting of Deuteronomy, identifying the speaker and audience as well as summarizing that the book is an exposition of the law. It parallels the preamble sections of ancient covenant treaties.

- The text says in verse 1 “across” or “Beyond the Jordan.” The ESV Study Bible gives insight: *That is, east of the Jordan River, on the north end of the Dead Sea. Since leaving Egypt and crossing the Red Sea, Israel has been in the wilderness for 40 years (Exodus 14-15; see Ex. 15:22). Arabah. The low Jordan Valley and area surrounding the Dead Sea. Suph . . . Dizahab. These are places that Israel passed through en route to Moab. Numbers 12:16 mentions Paran and Hazeroth. Suph, Tophel, Laban, and Dizahab are not mentioned elsewhere in the OT.*
- These are all locations which we could study more.
- In verse 2 we see more names of locations:
- Horeb is the name used in Deuteronomy for Mount Sinai (except see 33:2), where Israel received the commandments (Ex. 19:1–Num. 10:12). Kadesh-barnea: A town on the southern border of the Promised Land where Israel camped (Num. 13:26).
- The NET Bible shares: *Horeb* is another name for Sinai. “Horeb” occurs 9 times in the Book of Deuteronomy and “Sinai” only once (33:2). “Sinai” occurs 13 times in the Book of Exodus and “Horeb” only 3 times.²
- See map below
- Verse 1: these are the words, or we could say “sermons” which Moses spoke to all the people.
- These are Moses’ dying words.
- Moses spoke these to all the people.
- They are in the wilderness.
- “Suph” may be the Red Sea
- Horeb:
- Ex. 3:1: Now Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb.

² Biblical Studies Press, [*The NET Bible First Edition Notes*](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 1:2.



Verses 3- 5: Intro, part 2: travel log, geographical detail

The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary Gives us more insight:

The eleventh month is Tebet, and it spans our December-January. In Israel it is the middle of the rainy season, but in the southern region where the Israelites still are there is very little rainfall (an average of two inches per year), and though it is winter, the average daytime temperature would still be about sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit. It is difficult to assign a number to this fortieth year since the text has offered us no anchor to absolute chronology. In the ancient world chronology was only noted in relative terms (“the fifth year of king X”), and the biblical text does the same (here, the fortieth year since the exodus). There was no absolute chronology system (“the year 1385”). See “The Date of the Exodus,” p. 86.³

- When we get to verse 3 it should surprise us a little bit.
- Notice how verse 2 says that it is 11 days journey, then verse 3 says: “In the fortieth year, on the first *day* of the eleventh month”⁴

³ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 1:3.

⁴ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Dt 1:3.

- The NET Bible tells us: *An eleven-day journey was about 140 mi (233 km).*⁵
- Don't gloss over that. Think about it. If we did not know some of the Old Testament what would we think of that? There is a juxtaposition of the 11 days with the 40 years.
- Now, we know that because of their disobedience they were wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. For 40 years they were wandering in circles. Numbers 14:33-34 record their punishment for their lack of faith.
- How long is 40 years?
- How old were you 40 years ago?
- Quote from Colin Smith on unlocking the Bible: *Warren Weirsbe says unbelief wastes time. The people have been wondering in the desert because of weak faith. How much time have we wasted in unbelief? In this book Moses will talk about houses. How do they know about houses when they have been living in tents?*
- Verse 3 can be cross referenced with Deut 4:1: *Now, Israel, pay attention to the statutes and ordinances I am about to teach you, so that you might live and go on to enter and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.*⁶
- Verse 4 says, "After"
- Think about the chronology, "after what"?
- This is after they had defeated "Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and Edrei."⁷
- This is talking a little about their travels and wars.
- The ESV Study Bible gives insight:
- Deuteronomy rarely distinguishes between God's words and Moses' words.
- For the defeat of Sihon see See Num. 21:21–35.
- Heshbon and Bashan were east of the Jordan, north of where Deuteronomy is set.
- Neh 9:22 mentions Sihon: "You gave them kingdoms and peoples, and you allocated them to every corner of the land. They inherited the land of King Sihon of Heshbon and the land of King Og of Bashan."⁸
- Num 21:33–35; Josh 13:12 mentions Og as well.
- Verse 5 is self explanatory in that it is telling us about Moses' teaching. The ESV study Bible gives insight:
- The repeated mention of beyond the Jordan (also v. 1) underscores that **Israel is not yet in the Promised Land. (Moab is "beyond" the Jordan, i.e., on the east side,** from the perspective of Canaan.) Unlike their fighting against Sihon and Og (v. 4), **Israel had not fought against Moab en route to the Promised Land.** This law refers to the **entire law** given to Israel at Sinai (Ex. 19:1–Num. 10:12). **Moses' task is not simply to repeat that law but to**

⁵ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 1:2.

⁶ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Dt 4:1.

⁷ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Dt 1:4.

⁸ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Ne 9:22.

expound it (in effect, to preach it) so that Israel will newly accept the law before crossing the Jordan to conquer the land. At Sinai, Israel verbally agreed to the covenant law's obligations (Ex. 24:3) but did not behave accordingly. Hence in Deuteronomy Moses **exhorts** Israel to a covenant renewal with God.

Verses 6- 8: Words from the Lord, it is “go” time

- Chapter 1:6-4:43 is Moses' first speech reciting their history.
- About verse 6 the ESV Study Bible gives insight:
- *Deuteronomy typically names God as the Lord our (or your) God. “Lord” is Yahweh, the personal and covenantal name for God revealed to Moses (Ex. 3:14–15; see note on Gen. 2:4).*
- Verse 6: *you have stayed “long enough” at this mountain.* They have been there 40 years!
- Verse 7 is telling them where to go.
- The NET Bible shares: *The Hebrew term Negev means literally “desert” or “south” (so KJV, ASV). It refers to the area south of Beer Sheba and generally west of the Arabah Valley between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba.*⁹
- There is great detail about what land they will take.
- Again the ESV Study Bible gives insight
- Refer to the map of the promised land, which is the map on the right:
- *The descriptions of the land reflect its geography, roughly east to west. The hill country is the ridge of higher mountains overlooking the Jordan Valley from the west. The lowland is the next strip of land to the west, with low, undulating hills. The Negeb is the arid land across the south, which becomes desert. Seacoast refers to the flat Mediterranean coastline. In general terms, the land is occupied by Canaanites (a term virtually synonymous at this time with “Amorites,” mentioned earlier in the verse). Lebanon lies to the north. The river Euphrates lies even farther north and east. Cf. the description of the land in the promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:18–21).*
- See note in the ESV Study Bible for verse 8 **as this is so important:**
- *The promise of land was made first to Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:18–21), reiterated to Isaac (Gen. 26:4), and then to Jacob (Gen. 28:13; 35:12; cf. Deut. 6:10; 9:5; 29:13; 30:20; 34:4). The promises to the three patriarchs included land for their offspring after them. Moses is emphasizing that the current generation of Israel is included in the promises and God intends to keep his promise of the land. Thus the patriarchal reference functions rhetorically to persuade Israel to go in and possess the land.*
- Gen. 15:18-21 NET Bible: ^{15:18} *That day the LORD made a covenant with Abram: “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River—^{15:19} the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ^{15:20} Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ^{15:21} Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”*

KJV The King James Version, known in Britain as the Authorized Version (1611)

ASV American Standard Version (1901)

⁹ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 1:7.

- Deut. 11:24-25 NET Bible: *Every place you set your foot will be yours; your border will extend from the desert to Lebanon and from the River (that is, the Euphrates) as far as the Mediterranean Sea* ^{11:25} *Nobody will be able to resist you; the LORD your God will spread the fear and terror of you over the whole land on which you walk, just as he promised you.*
- Joshua 10:40 NET: *Joshua defeated the whole land, including the hill country, the Negev, the lowlands, the slopes, and all their kings. He left no survivors. He annihilated everything that breathed, just as the LORD God of Israel had commanded.*¹⁰

Verses 9-15: appointment of judges

The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary:

*Egyptian and Hittite records of this general period likewise evidence a judicial system set up in tiers, and the Hittite Instructions to Officers and Commanders even has military leaders in the position of judge, as verse 13 here does. This suggests the close relationship between military activity and the activity of judging that the book of Judges implies. In most other systems difficult cases were referred to the king, whereas here Moses serves as the final adjudicator. Thus in the ancient Near East, leaders, whether tribal, military, city, provincial or national, had the obligation of judging the cases under their jurisdiction. There was no trial by jury, though at times a group of elders may have been involved in judging a case together. When only one individual judge was involved, the danger of favoring the powerful or the wealthy was very real. In both ancient Near Eastern documents and the Bible impartiality is valued, along with discernment. There were no lawyers, so most people represented themselves in court. Witnesses could be called, and oaths played a very significant role since most of our scientific means of gathering evidence were not available.*¹¹

- Verse 9: Moses needs help
- This is recorded in: Ex 18:18, 24; Num 11:14
- Verse 10: God has multiplied them and this is a fulfillment of promises: Gen 15:5; 22:17; Ex 32:13; Deut 7:7; 10:22; 26:5; 28:62¹²
- Verse 11: an encouraging word that the Lord will continue to increase their numbers.
- Verse 12: Moses needs help, but also this is a soft reprove of their arguing/quarreling
- Verse 13: choose:
 - Wise
 - Discerning
 - Experienced
 - Men
 - From their tribes

¹⁰ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Jos 10:40.

¹¹ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 1:16.

¹² [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

- They will be the judges or elders
- The Archaeological Study Bible:
1:13 *The office of judge was elective. In time judges were chosen primarily from among the Levites, although this was never a necessity. Judges were held in high regard, and the law profession continued to develop among the Hebrews, its members being called “lawyers,” “scribes” or “doctors of the law” (Lk 2:46 kjv; the niv renders this “teachers”).*

ESV Study Note:

The process to appoint leaders involved the people nominating the judges and Moses confirming them; Ex. 18:25 simply summarizes that Moses chose them.

- Verse 14: the people agree with this
- Verse 15: Moses does this and some are leaders of thousands, some hundreds, some fifties

Verses 16-18: charge to judges

- Verse 16 is a simple explanation of how this will work
- Verse 17 is very important:
 - No partiality
 - Don't fear man, the judgment is Gods
 - Cases too difficult are brought to Moses
- Cross references for partiality: Deut 10:17; 16:19; 24:17; 2 Chr 19:5, 6; Prov 24:23–26; Acts 10:34; James 2:1, 9¹³

Prov. 29:25: The fear of people becomes a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD will be set on high.

ESV Study Note:

Aliens were non-Israelites who resided in the land and accepted Israelite rule and law but did not own land and were hence vulnerable to oppression. Deuteronomy consistently upholds the equal rights of aliens and Israelites (e.g., 10:19; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:14, 17, 19-21; 26:11–13; 27:19). You shall not be partial in judgment. Impartiality is a prerequisite for good judgment as well as a characteristic of God himself (10:17).

- Verse 18 is a summary

¹³ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).