

## The Law, Book 5

### Deuteronomy

The name of this book is taken from the Greek Septuagint. The title is derived from the Greek word *Deuteronomion*, which means "second giving of the Law." This refers to the fact that, in this book, the Ten Commandments are repeated, and new laws are added, in preparation for entering the Promised Land. It is the final pronouncement of the Law, and is the fifth and final book of the section of the Bible that we call "The Law" or "The Pentateuch" (Greek for "five tools"). The Hebrew name for the book is *Elleh haddevarim*, ("These are the words"); this name is in keeping with the Hebrew custom of using the opening words of a book for its name (see 1:1).

This book finalizes the Mosaic age, and ends with the death of Moses. And, with the death of Moses the law-giver, the stage is set for the entry of the Israelites into the Promised Land.

**A. Author.** As with the other four books of The Law, the human author is Moses; but who wrote the last eight verses? Because these verses describe the death of Moses, and events immediately following his death, they were probably written by Joshua. If they were written by Moses, it would have been by supernatural revelation, before his death, and this seems unlikely, especially when we consider the wording.

**B. Place and Date.** Deuteronomy was written in the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the final (40<sup>th</sup>) year in the wilderness, about 1450 BC. This was the final encampment of the Israelite people in their wilderness wanderings, and they were encamped at Shittim, in the plains of Moab, by the Jordan River<sup>1</sup>.

*NOTE: The exact location of Mount Horeb is uncertain, and opinions differ; some believe that it is another name for Mount Sinai, or was a peak in the Sinai Ridge. The words, "over against the Red sea" in 1:1 can be confusing, because the location of the writing of Deuteronomy by Moses is clearly stated in v 1 as being on the east bank of the Jordan River, in the plains of Moab. The phrase "over against the Red Sea" can merely refer to the fact that the final encampment was in the Arabah, a vast valley that runs from the Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba) to Mount Herman, part of which is the Jordan River valley. It is part of the Great Rift system of geological faults which runs from Syria in the north to Mozambique in the south. Adding to*

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 1:1-3.

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*the problem is the fact that the word “sea” in v 1 is in italics, meaning that the Hebrew actually reads, “over against the Red, between Paran and Tophel....”*

*The location is “eleven day’s journey from Kadesh- Barnea.” Some commentators attempt to give locations to these place names, but I will settle for the position that their precise locations, except for Kadesh-barnea are largely unknown. Unger considers the location of Kadesh-barnea where many significant events took place, to be identified with confidence as the well-watered, present day Aim Kadeis, “some seventy miles south of Hebron.”*

*And, as I will say repeatedly in this study guide however, the important thing is not where the writing of a part of the Bible was done; rather, the important thing is **what was written**.*

**C. Occasion.** Deuteronomy was the Lord’s last guidance for His people given through Moses. It is a summary of the laws previously given, plus new laws and warnings about sin, in preparation for the occupation of the Promised Land and the new, settled, way of life there.

**D. Theme.** The theme of Deuteronomy is that there will be many temptations in the Promised Land; that sin kills; and that the only way for the people of God to live there in peace and prosperity is to trust and obey Him.

**NOTE:** *Chapters 1 and 2, and the first 22 verses of Chapt 3 are a recitation by Moses of events in traversing the Arabah wilderness, and the land east of the Jordon, including the conquering and possession of some of the land east of Jordon, and its assignment to some of the tribes. This recitation brings us up to the time of crossing over the Jordan and possessing all of the Promised Land. Our highlights begin at this point.*

**E. Highlights.** Highlights of Deuteronomy include the following:

1. Moses’ Last Request--And God Says “No”. (3:23-28)

In the first three chapters, Moses speaks to the people, summarizing the past 40 years of the sojourn in the wilderness since leaving Egypt. At the end of his address to the people he tells of his last request to the Lord: that he be allowed to enter the Promised Land. The Lord says “No--and don’t ask me again!” The Lord tells Moses to go to the top of Mount Pisgah, where he will see the Promised Land, but he shall not enter it.

**NOTE:** *The wording of 4:39-40 is fascinating. It appears that, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, had the people of Israel been obedient and faithful to the Lord and His laws, they could have remained there, in the*

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*Promised Land, happily related to Him, safe and prosperous, forever. But of course they were not obedient or faithful, and were eventually conquered and carried off into captivity. It is an interesting thought.*

2. Three Cities of Refuge East of the Jordan. (4:41-43)

Moses establishes three of the six cities of refuge, east of the Jordan River (which he is not allowed to cross). They are Bezer in the south, Ramoth in Giliad, and Golan in the far north.

3. The Ten Commandments Again. (5:1-21)

Moses reminds the people of their unique privilege as the children of the unique God, recalling that they both saw, and heard, the glory and the voice of God, "face to face" at Sinai. He then repeats the Ten Commandments.

*NOTE: Here again we see that speaking with God "face to face" cannot be taken literally, for no man can see God face to face and live<sup>2</sup>. Even Moses, as close as he was to God on the mount, did not literally see God's face, and the people were far off, at the base of the mountain; and yet this metaphor is applied to them in 5:4. See in this regard Ex 33:9-23.*

4. Why Live by God's Rules? (5:28-29)

God hates sin, not because He doesn't want us to have pleasure, and not because He is insecure and fearful that we will love it more than we love Him. God wants His people to live by his rules, eschewing sin, because He loves us and knows that sin will damage and, eventually, destroy us.

5. "The First and Great Commandment": Loving God. (6:4-5)

Moses proclaims that, in order to live and prosper in the Promised Land, there is one thing that the people must get straight--one thing that must guide their every thought and deed: they must love the LORD their God with their entire being. This passage of Scripture is known among Jews as The Shemah; and if a Jew knows only one passage of Scripture, he will know this one; it is the very heart of God's revelation to the Israelites and, via them, to us (see Matt 22:34-40)<sup>3</sup>.

This was then, and is today, an AMAZING concept; for there is no false/pagan, god, from creation until now, that is to be loved. False gods are to be feared and served, but not loved. Their images, when drawn, painted or sculpted by their pagan followers, are grotesque, terrifying, and threatening--never images that would inspire affection or love. In Islam, even though is

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 33:20.

<sup>3</sup> The name for this passage derives from the Hebrew word "shemah" (hear), the first word in the passage, which is the Hebrew system for assigning titles.

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a pagan moon god, one to be feared. In fact, to a Muslim, the idea of loving Allah is **unthinkable blasphemy**--something akin to cosmic incest<sup>4</sup>! To speak of loving Allah is, in most Muslim nations, a capital offense. Yet Jesus, when asked at the very end of His earthly ministry, what is the most important ("first and greatest") commandment, He quoted this one--the Shemah. The most important thing we are to do is to love God, and to love Him with our entire being<sup>5</sup>.

*NOTE: We cannot love God, as Jesus calls us to do, until we are born again, because the kind of love He requires is agape love, the love of which we are incapable until the Holy Spirit implants it in our hearts. This is plainly stated in I John 4:8, where it is written "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love." The Greek word used there (and in the declaration of Jesus, in affirming the Shemah) is "agape" (and "agapeo," which is the verb form).*

6. "Teach Them Diligently to Thy Children." (6:1-3, 6-9)

Here is the command to keep the Word of God paramount in our lives, and our responsibility to teach it to our children and our grandchildren. It is significant that the children are to be taught the Word in all settings, in everyday life, and it is to be done by the parents and grandparents, not just for one hour a week in a Sunday school class, taught by someone else<sup>6</sup>. *NOTE: Jesus is, of course, a special case, in that although He was entirely human, He was, and is, also entirely divine, and the living "Logos" (Word of God)<sup>7</sup>. One might say that He is not only the Author of the Bible, but that He **is** the Bible. In spite of this, we must remember His full humanity and note that, when tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus responded each time quoting Scripture ("it is written"). Not also that, but He **knew** it; He didn't have to say to Satan, "Wait a minute--I will run back to the synagogue to see what the scroll says." And, incidentally, the verses with which Jesus answered Satan, from memory, were from Deut 6 and 8.*

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<sup>4</sup> As this footnote is being written, a young woman in Pakistan has come to the Lord and been made new. She was arrested and condemned to death, not only for converting from Islam to Christianity, but for declaring that, because of the miracle in her heart, she loves God.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 22:34-40.

<sup>6</sup> Although much (or all) spiritual teaching of children has at times been done by mothers and grandmothers, it seems that, from the beginning, the spiritual training of the children is the primary responsibility of fathers. See in this regard Eph 6:4.

<sup>7</sup> This duality, the fact that Jesus was both fully human, and yet fully divine, is what theologians call a "holy mystery"; like the Trinity, this is an infinite concept, one of which our finite minds are incapable of understanding.

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7. Don't Bring Idols into Your House. (7:1-5, 25-26)

Moses repeats the basic rule that the people of God are to make no compromise with the paganism they will encounter in Canaan, and make no intermarriage with the pagan people; rather, they are to destroy and drive them out. They are to utterly destroy all pagan altars, idols and groves, removing all traces of paganism. And then he warns them against keeping souvenirs of such things, declaring that if they bring such accursed objects into their homes, they may become accursed things themselves. One wonders why they would even want to keep such things; the answer is probably two-fold: (1) some were sometimes made of precious metals and gemstones; and (2) the people were so susceptible to paganism that some would want to cling to it in the privacy of their homes.

***NOTE:** Not long after this, one Achan will yield to the temptation to keep some accursed things after the conquest of Jericho (Josh 7), and paid dearly for it<sup>8</sup>.*

8. A Promise to Give the People the Land, but Gradually. (7:12-24)

Through Moses, the Lord reminds the people of the miraculous way He brought them out of bondage in Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness. With this as a preamble, He then promises to open the way for them to possess the Promised Land of Canaan. He will give it to them, however, "by little and little," not all at once, for they are not yet prepared to possess it all.

9. The Summary of the Matter: Blessing or Curse. (11:26-28)

As Moses continues his long summary of the law, he expresses the heart of the matter in plain, succinct terms: if they obey the Lord they will be blessed; if they do not obey, they will be cursed. The choice is theirs (as, today, it is ours).

10. The Release of Bond Slaves--Is Your Ear Pierced? (15:1-18)

Every seventh year is called a Sabbath Year, or a Year of Release. In that seventh year, debts owed by the poor are to be forgiven. Under the law then, an Israelite could buy and own slaves (bond servants); after six years of bondage, however, they are to be set free if they are Israelites (the provision for release does not apply to foreigners, for they do not live under the law and, therefore, are not entitled to its benefits). Not only are the bond slaves to be set free, but they are to be sent away with possessions enough to be able to live prosperously in freedom. If, however, the slave

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<sup>8</sup> Ai is the only place in the Bible whose name is pronounced by spelling it.

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loves his master and does not wish to leave him, he may declare this, his ear will be pierced with an awl, and he will then remain a slave in that home permanently. Thus, a bond slave with a pierced ear is declaring, "I love my master." As Christians, it is healthy to ask ourselves if we are likewise declaring to the world our love for our Master. Each of us should ask himself, "Is my ear pierced?"

11. The Death Penalty for Paganism and the Rule for Witnesses. (17:2-7)

Paganism is forbidden, enumerated as the worshipping of the Sun, the Moon, any of the other "host of Heaven," or the worship of other gods. The accused can only be convicted by the testimony of "two witnesses or three witnesses"; the testimony of only one witness is not sufficient for conviction<sup>9</sup>. If convicted, the penalty is death by stoning and, as we have already seen in the case of blaspheming the holy name of YHWH, the witnesses who testify against him must lay their hands upon him, and then be included in his executioners<sup>10</sup>.

12. Qualifications and Rules for Kings. (17:14-20)

In the latter part of Chapter 17 are set forth qualifications and requirements for anyone who would be king over the Israelites. The rules are designed to prevent a king from taking himself too seriously and becoming lifted up and corrupted by pride and possessions. Most interesting is the requirement that a king must make his own copy of the Law (apparently being his own scribe), and read it daily; what a healthy practice this would be! It seems to be true, however, that no king, from Saul to the collapse of the kingdom(s), ever fully lived up to these requirements (at any rate, there is no record that any king made his own copy of the Law).

*NOTE: In fact, it was never the will of God that the Israelites have an earthly king, for He was their king. When, about 400 years later, the people insisted upon a king, the Lord, through the prophet Samuel, tried to talk them out of it. However, knowing the future, the Lord had laid down these rules for kings far in advance. It makes me wonder how this must have hurt the Lord, for, even as He was laying down rules for kings He did not wish the people to have, He knew that the rules would not be obeyed. There are profound truths about God and man illustrated here, some of which we shall neither know nor understand until we finally see Him face to face (I Cor 13).*

13. Moses Condemns Occult Practices. (18:9-15)

<sup>9</sup> See also in this regard Matt 18:16; Jn 8:17; I Tim 5:19.

<sup>10</sup> Leviticus 24:10-16.

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The English word “occult” does not appear in the Bible, but it is a commonly used word today. It is derived from the Latin word *occultus*, which means “unseen,” or “hidden”; and it refers to supernatural revelation of things that cannot be seen or known by natural means. An obvious example is divination, which is fortune-telling in its various forms, and “divining” to learn things not known by the natural senses. Such knowledge is referred to in Deuteronomy 29:29 as “secret things,” where we are told that secret, or unknown, things “belong to God,” and that we should be satisfied with those that He chooses to reveal to us.

In modern terms this prohibition includes all supernatural phenomena, not done by the Holy Spirit, including witchcraft, divination, sorcery, spiritism, magic, and all psychic phenomena. All such practices are forbidden in the summary Moses gave<sup>11</sup>. Instead, Moses tells the people, the Lord will raise up prophets who will give them His guidance, just as He has been doing for the past 40 years.

**NOTE:** *It is important to remember that there are only 2 sources of supernatural power: the Holy Spirit and Satan. All supernatural things done in Jesus’ name, and which glorify Him, are done by the power of the Holy Spirit. All other supernatural things glorify the individual, and they are to be avoided and condemned, no matter how sincerely one believes that he is serving God, or how many of his godly ancestors had the same power. A great many sincere Christians perform such supernatural things, believing that “the gift” is from God, granted in order to help others by stopping nosebleeds, finding underground water, removing warts, etc. This is especially true in the Appalachian Mountains and other isolated places settled by Celtic (Scottish, Welsh, Irish, etc) immigrants and their descendants. Consider the fact that such people are called (and call themselves) “water **witches**,” “wart **witches**,” etc, and that the rod used in finding water is a “**divining** rod.” Consider also that the modes for doing such things are usually secrets, passed down from one generation to the next. There are no secrets in the Kingdom of God; there are mysteries, but **never secrets**. And there is no such thing as “white” or “good” witchcraft; all witchcraft is black and evil.*

14. Leave No Body Hanging on a Tree All Night. (21:22-23)

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<sup>11</sup> This is the classic passage forbidding such things, but the prohibitions are repeated elsewhere, in both the Old and New Testaments (e.g. see Is 47:9-14; Gal 5:20 and Rev 22:12-15).

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In some cases (and, apparently, for different reasons), after someone was killed, the body was then hung up in a tree, apparently for purposes of putting him on display. If this is done, the body must not be left in the tree all night; to leave the body on display all night will defile the land. This law is referred to later concerning the crucifixion of Jesus<sup>12</sup>.

15. No Cross-Dressing. Cross-dressing is forbidden, in a few plain words. God knew that sinful man would blur the differences between the sexes and, of course, He knew the implications; so He took pains to make clear that it was not to be. It is not just forbidden, but **those who do it** are “an abomination unto the LORD thy God.” Why? Transvestites are almost always (if not always) practicing homosexuals, or those with strong tendencies to become practicing homosexuals. It is interesting that Matthew Henry, the great 17<sup>th</sup> Century commentator, treats this verse very delicately; but God minces no words, stating clearly, to paraphrase Him in contemporary terms, “There shall be no drag queens or super-butches among God’s people!” (22:5)

16. And No Prostitution. In a related matter, God makes it clear that there are to be no prostitutes among His people, neither male nor female. And any money earned by prostitution cannot be brought into the Tabernacle (or, later, the Temple) as a sacrifice or to fulfill a vow. What could be more clear<sup>13</sup>? (23:17-18)

17. An Adjustment Period for Newlyweds. (24:5)

Able-bodied Israelite men were expected to fight as soldiers whenever the need arose. In this way, they were all reservists, subject to call; when the bugle sounded, they laid down the hoe or the carpenter’s hammer, put on their swords, picked up their spears, and reported for duty. But God knew that adjusting to marriage, especially in that system that often brought two strangers together in marriage, could be difficult--especially for the young woman. Here, He provides that a man with a new wife is exempted from military service for a year, and that his duty for that year is to comfort her (“cheer up his wife which he hath taken”). The husband is also exempted from demands of business or labor, so that he can devote himself completely to his bride and their relationship. It seems to me that here, in this relatively obscure provision of the law (only one verse of 42 words) is a beautiful revelation of the tenderness of the heart of God, and His great compassion

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<sup>12</sup> Galatians 3:13.

<sup>13</sup> In v 18, “the price of a dog” is a Hebrew metaphor for sodomy, because of positions involved.

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for us in the difficulties of life, particularly for a newly married young girl, adjusting to the demanding role of being a wife and mother (girls were often given as wives in their early teen years).

18. A Duty to Marry. (25:5-10)

If a man dies and has no children, and if he has a brother who lives in the same area (as he almost certainly would, since the tribes are to remain together), then that surviving brother is obligated to marry the widow. The first child born to such a couple will have the name of the dead brother, so that his line of descent will not be broken. Apparently, the surviving brother can refuse to marry the woman (“perform the duty of an husband’s brother unto her”); but if he refuses, he is publicly and permanently shamed. *NOTE: In Chapters 26 and 27 the LORD, through Moses, continues to make clear the blessedness of righteousness and obedience, and the accursedness of unrighteousness and disobedience, singling out specific sins which He knows will tempt them, and which He hates. And here we continue to see God’s concern for the poor, the foreigner (“stranger”), orphans and widows, and those, such as the blind, who are seriously handicapped. He continues on this theme, which runs throughout the entire giving of the law, from beginning to end, and which is, I think, a beautiful revelation of the tenderness of his heart, and for his particular compassion for the defenseless and disadvantaged.*

19. Blessing or Curse--the Choice Is Theirs. (28:1-14; 15-19; 47-68)

Chapter 28 is a detailed recitation of the fundamental choice that the Israelites must make as they enter the Promised Land: blessings if they are obedient, and curses if they are disobedient. And, in these verses, God does not soften the verbal blows; rather, He describes the results of disobedience and rebellious sin in no uncertain terms! A careful reading of this chapter, alongside the secular history of the Jews since that day, should convince any open-minded person of the divine inspiration of this chapter, if not of all Scripture.

*NOTE: It is a most unpleasant thought, but during the sieges of Jerusalem, by both the Babylonians and the Romans, the Israelites ate their children, as predicted here.*

20. A Clear Prophecy of the Future Captivity, Restoration (and the End Time?). (30:1-10)

In the first three verses of Chapter 30 there is a concise prophecy of the carrying away into captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians, and the restoration of the remnant to the Promised Land, events about 1,000 years

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into the future. However, these three verses, plus the following seven, taken together, could be speaking of the ultimate in-gathering of God's people in the last day<sup>14</sup>. Then, the token of being heir to the covenant promises will be not a physical circumcision, but a circumcised heart. This may be a mixed prophecy, and we can only wonder; but it is fascinating.

#### 21. The Book of the Law Is Finished. (31:24-27)

Moses completes the writing, “in a book,” of all the Law as God has given it to him, and he commands the Levites to place the scroll(s) in the Ark of the Covenant.

***NOTE:** This would have been done by the High Priest, for all the other descendants of Levi were forbidden even to see the Ark of the Covenant, let alone open it and put things inside. And, it is likely that there were more than one scroll (“book”), for all 5 books, combined, would have made a very, very long scroll. It is also probable, perhaps certain, that there had been made more than one copy of the Law (Pentateuch) for, in the future, there will be a need for scrolls to be studied, read and taught to the people by priests, Levites and by rabbis.*

*Today, there is a remnant of Samaritans, who still worship on Mount Gerazim, and they accept only the Torah (Septuagint) as Holy Scripture<sup>15</sup>. They possess a very ancient Torah Scroll, which may be the oldest such scroll of the Torah known to exist.*

#### 22. Moses Sees the Promised Land. (Chapter 33)

Moses assembles the people, makes one final address to them in the form of a song (Chapter 32), and pronounces a final, prophetic, blessing that is similar to that pronounced by Jacob over his sons about 400 years earlier.

#### 23. And Moses Dies. (Chapter 34)

Moses then climbs up to the top of Mount Nebo, the highest peak of the Mount Pisgah complex, where he meets with God. God shows Moses the Promised Land, from south to North (“unto Dan”), and east to west. Across the land that will become Judaea, Moses can see the far-off Mediterranean (“the utmost sea”)<sup>16</sup>. There, somewhere on the mountain, at age 120 and in good health (“his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated”), Moses dies, his vast work finished. God Himself buries him, and the place of Moses’ burial is, to this day, known but to God.

<sup>14</sup> Note in this regard vv 3-4.

<sup>15</sup> John 4:20.

<sup>16</sup> Today, when the weather is clear, from the top of Mount Nebo it is possible to see the Mediterranean in the west, and the snows of Mount Herman in the north.

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This man, the greatest of the prophets and judges, remains to this day the only mortal since sin entered the Garden of Eden, ever to have a direct, ongoing, face-to-face, relationship with GOD<sup>17</sup>. God will speak to Joshua, successor to Moses, from time to time, as He will to the judges and the prophets; but no other leader of Israel will enjoy the ongoing, personal relationship that Moses had with Him. Perhaps the Lord has kept the burial site a secret because He knew that subsequent generations might be tempted to worship Moses.

\* \* \* And thus end the five Books of the Law \* \* \*

***NOTE:** Herbert Lockyer, in his classic book, "All the Men of the Bible," describes the death of Moses thusly: "...he was kissed to sleep by the angels and God buried him...<sup>18</sup>." Lockyer apparently borrowed this expression from a song, "Angels Kiss Mine Eyes to Sleep," composed by John T. Rutledge in 1877, concerning the approaching death of a child, or woman, to comfort her mother.*

*Lockyer's poetic description of the death of Moses appears nowhere in the Bible, nor is it even suggested. Neither is it in any commentary that I have seen. But I like it, and the complete lyrics to Rutledge's song are a beautiful and godly poem. The complete lyrics follow:*

### **"Angels Kiss Mine Eyes to Sleep"**

**John T. Rutledge**

**1877**

**Verse 1:** Mother raise me from my pillow, for the day seems long and drear. Round my bed the angels hover, sweetest music I can hear. Tears are in your eyes dear mother, tell me, tell me why you weep. Twilight o'er me now is stealing, Angels kiss mine eyes to sleep.

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<sup>17</sup> Moses never actually saw God face-to-face, for even Moses could not survive that; but someday we all shall see His face, in all its unimaginable glory, in our glorified bodies (I Cor 13).

<sup>18</sup> Lockyer, Herbert, DD, DLitt: "All the Men of the Bible," Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1958, p 248.

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**Verse 2:** Mother you will miss your darling, when you've laid her in her grave. In the garden 'neath the roses, where the weeping willows wave. Keep my grave green will you mother, when I've gone, but do not weep. For we'll meet again in heaven, Angels kiss mine eyes to sleep.

**Verse 3:** Birds above my grave will murmur, those sweet songs they used to sing. But they will not sound as pretty, as they did last sunny spring. Will they know that I am sleeping, in my grave so cold and deep? I am going, good-bye mother, Angels kiss mine eyes to sleep.

**Chorus:** Mother dearest do not cry, For it pains me when you weep...Mother dearest do not cry, For it pains me when you weep. We shall meet, shall meet beyond the sky... Angels kiss mine eyes to sleep. We shall meet beyond the sky....We shall meet beyond the sky....Angels kiss mine eyes to sleep.

DRAFT