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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
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## Deuteronomy 11:10-25      “Crossing Over into a New Year”

Intro. The New Year always brings an opportunity for a new beginning. As you look back on the past year, you will see some failures. You will probably see some hardships or losses. We all would like to believe that the New Year will be better. Hopefully some of the troubles of last year are over. Hopefully this is the year you will overcome a bad habit or take care of some unfinished business.

Well in our text today, the children of Israel were on the brink of a new beginning in a new land. Up to this point their nation had failed to trust and obey God, so they wandered in the wilderness for some 38 years. Now, they were encamped on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, overlooking the Promised Land. To prepare them for the great task at hand, we have before us one of several sermons Moses preached. He encourages them to trust in God’s provision, God’s presence, and God’s protection. Yet he also exhorted them to claim these promises not only by faith, but by meeting the other conditions of our text. Well, at least that generation of Israelites accepted the challenge and went into the Promised Land and by faith in God possessed it.

As we stand at the beginning of a new year, our hearts are filled with anticipation and challenge. Only God knows what the future holds, and what He wants us to achieve and possess. As we cross over into a new year, we do so with the same challenges Moses gave his people so long ago, to trust God for many of the same blessings that He promised to Israel. 1 Cor. 10:6 reminds us that everything that happened to the children of Israel did so as an example to us in this dispensation of grace. So I believe we can apply much of this text to us today, as we enter into a new year. Now the first lesson that we can draw from this text is this:

### I. GOD PROMISES HIS PROVISION

This is a promise we can take with us into a New Year. God is the great Provider. We see from our text that He promised to provide His people with a new homeland, described in v.9 as “flowing with milk and honey.” We all need a place we can call home, and God provided what could be a paradise for His people. Furthermore, He promised to provide rain in that new homeland. We need water to drink and water to produce our food. So one of their most basic needs was rain. Well, God said in v.11 regarding the land He had given them, “but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven.” Then v.14 says, “then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain....” How beautiful to know that He provides the early rain for seedtime and the latter rain to produce a good harvest.<sup>1</sup> Both are important for growing a good crop. Then Moses goes on to say in vv.14b-15 that God will provide rain “that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.” Notice that He does not promise just a meager measure of a basic provision. He provides not only grain for bread, but also the new wine<sup>2</sup> of gladness, and the oil of beauty. He

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Merrill says the former rains were in autumn and the latter rains were in the spring.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word, *tiyrowsh*, refers to freshly pressed wine.

provides grass for livestock, not only that we may eat and be filled! Most of us had our fill of food over the holidays! Even so, Jesus promised in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

Now this promise of rain and abundance of food is set against the background of:

A. Their Experience in Egypt - The land of Israel was quite a contrast from the past years of Egypt. Moses reminds them that the land which they were about to possess was “not like the land of Egypt ... where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot” (v. 10). What was the difference? There was almost no rain in Egypt. The Nile was their source of water, not the rain of heaven. It overflowed once a year. For the rest of the year, to get the water from the Nile to the crops required hard work. By hand and by foot they dug trenches, canals, and ponds to irrigate the land. They probably carried water on foot with buckets. They may have even used large pumping wheels propelled by foot power.<sup>3</sup> There was plenty of water in the Nile, but they had to work hard to get it to the crops. In Egypt there seemed to be no need to pray to God for rain. The Nile was a dependable source of water, and with hard work fields were irrigated by human sweat and toil. The fertility of Egypt depended far more upon the labor of human hands and feet rather than the rain of heaven and divine providence.

In an affluent society such as we live in today, where things come so easily, I am afraid that people assume God has nothing in the world to do with our food and water. We tend to look to the food and transportation industry, or the government, or to the bank, or to our employer as our source for food and water. I’m afraid most kids believe their food comes McDonalds rather than ultimately from God. Do you live each day with the recognition that you depend upon God each day for your provision? That is why Jesus taught us to pray in the model prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). The same problem can transfer over to churches. There are a lot of churches today that operate like the children of Israel in Egypt. That is, they have calculated how to grow a church with human ingenuity and the energy of the flesh. There’s no real need for God. They go right on operating without Him, with their own initiatives, plans and promotions. They do not do anything that cannot be explained by human means. Most everything happens by human effort and ingenuity. Ah, but notice:

B. The Contrast of the Promised Land – We see in v.11 that the promised land “drinks water from the rain of heaven.” Then it sends that water gushing forth through streams that become rivers. Canaan was and is totally dependent on God for rain, not some massive river. God did this purposely. He put them on a land that had to depend upon Him for rainfall. This would draw the people closer to God. When you are put in a situation that seems to be beyond your human ability to handle, that is not a comfortable position to be in. But it is in such situations that you can grow spiritually and learn to expand your faith.

As we cross over into a new year, we do so with the assurance that the same God who sent us the rains of the past will send us the rains in the future. As we cross over, we’re dependent on the supernatural provision of God. Remember that *God* is our source. You may wonder if you will still have a job in 2020. Just remember, God is your source, not your employer. Jesus promised in Matt. 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Now as we face a new year, we also cross over by faith in the fact that:

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<sup>3</sup> However, water wheels were generally operated by hand rather than by foot (Block).

## II. GOD PROMISES HIS PRESENCE

V.12 says they were crossing over into “a land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.” The word translated “cares” (*darash*) is a word that literally means “to seek after,”<sup>4</sup> that is, He seeks the well-being of that special land, and watches over it. Here Moses says it is a land that is so precious to Him the He keeps it within His purview<sup>5</sup> of care the entire year long. As a mother keeps watch over her children, even so God keeps watch over the Promised Land. So God promised His special presence and concern for the land He was giving them.

Some doubted that they could accomplish the task of taking the Promised Land. After all, the land was filled with giants and walled cities. But they failed to account for the fact that they crossed over with God’s presence and care. [Omit or move to III].

Even so, the year upon which we embark is a year that God cares for. He purposed it. He planned it. The New Year brings a fresh vision of new opportunities. What a blessing to cross over into a new year with the very presence of God Himself. The eyes of the Lord are upon us! He is watching the dear mother who faces the year raising children without a husband. He is watching the dad who’s under tremendous pressure to provide. He’s watching the teenager with all the pressures of adolescence. He’s watching each of us. Yes, the Bible says, “for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chr. 16:8-10). Like the children of Israel, we go into a new year with God’s presence.

In 2002 you probably remember the sniper attacks in Maryland and VA that resulted in over 12 deaths, and several serious injuries. One of the victims was a 13-year-old boy, who was shot just outside his school. The sniper left a card that said, “I am God.” The boy's uncle said in an interview on “Good Morning America” (12/12/02) that he wanted to say to the sniper, “No you're not God. God is with my nephew in that hospital room.” Indeed, many considered it a miracle that he survived, considering the significant damage to the boy's major organs, and the loss of blood.

Now notice to specific truths about the promise of God’s presence. It is:

A. At All Times – He promised in the last of v.12 that “...the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.” This was in contrast to Canaanite gods, whom the people believed departed during the dry season. Yet the Lord never leaves His land or stops caring for His land through summer and winter, seedtime and harvest (Lev. 26:3-6, 9).

As we cross over into a new year, we’re reminded that God is watching us, that His eyes are upon us each and every day. This reminds me of the promise of Jesus in Matthew 28:20, “... and lo, I am with you all the days, even to the end of the age.” [Literal translation].

Not only is He with us at all times but also:

B. In All Places – Moses reminded the people in v.11 that, unlike most of Egypt, the land that they were about to possess was a land of “hills and valleys.” Anyone who’s ever traveled in the Promised Land knows the reality of this visual expression. I’ve been to Israel. I’ve seen the

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<sup>4</sup> It also carries a nuance of election (cf. Lev. 25:23). Just as Yahweh has chosen Israel out of all the peoples of the earth, so he has chosen the land of Canaan (Palestine) from all the territories of the earth (Block).

<sup>5</sup> “Range of vision, comprehension, or experience; outlook.”

high mountains like Mount Hermon and Masada. I've seen the beautiful valley oasis of Jericho, as well as others. It did not take the children of Israel long to discover that it was indeed a land of hills and valleys.

What does this mean? Why did God choose to give His people a land of mountains and valleys? God never promised us that the way would always be easy. Sometimes we too, like the Israelites, walk through the valley. They began their conquest of the Promised Land with the great victory at Jericho only to descend into the valley of defeat at Ai in the days that came afterwards. And then, there are those times when we come face to face with a mountain along the journey, which humanly speaking, looks impossible to climb. But He promises to be with them in the valleys, and up the mountains.

The same is true for us along our own journeys. Ours too is a journey through "hills and valleys." Both are important! If there were no valleys, there would be no mountain top experiences where we experience victory and enlarge our vision. We learn spiritual lessons in the valley where we're trusting, depending on the living God to get us through. In the valleys, that's where we become more like our Lord. We would not choose the valleys. But His ways are not our ways. He is the God of the valleys.

He is also the God of the mountains. Do you remember what Elijah said to Ahab when Ben-Hadad, the cruelest general ever to march an army, besieged the city of Samaria! Elijah said, "...Because the Syrians have said, the Lord is God of the hills but He is not God of the valleys: therefore, I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord" (1 Kings 20:28). Our God is the God of both. In fact, Bill & Gloria Gaither wrote a song about that entitled, "God on the Mountain." Orriss has sung it. He will be with you as you face the mountains and valleys of 2020, and He will provide for your every need, if you trust Him.

Finally, as we cross over to a new year remember:

### III. GOD PROMISES PROTECTION & VICTORY

The people of Israel would not enter the land unopposed. They would face ungodly, pagan enemies. But the Lord assures them that He will go before them and drive out their enemies. So look on down to vv.23-25. There Moses tells them that "...then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand against you; the LORD your God will put the dread of you and the fear of you upon all the land where you tread, just as He has said to you." This reminds me of Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" 1 John 4:4 says, "... He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

As you face a new year you will face some enemies. Satan is certainly an enemy of the Christian. In fact, Peter said that he walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). We will face other enemies of our Christian faith. You may face an enemy at work, at school, or even in your own family. Yet God promises to be with us and to give us the victory if we trust in him.

Now we have seen some wonderful promises of God's provision, God's presence, and God's protection. Isn't it great to be able to go into the new year with the assurance that God will provide for your needs, that He will be with you, that He will protect you, and give you success? Yet you may be able to look back and see times when you lacked God's provision, God's

presence, and God's protection. What was wrong? Did God fail you? Did He not keep His promises? No! Just as we see here, many of God's promises are conditional. For example, note that v.13 begins with "if" and v.14 begins with "then." Vv. 22 & 27 also use the word "if" to state the condition of such blessings. For any of us who wonder why we may be living outside the provision and protection of God, the reason might be found in these verses. So I want to share with you last of all:

#### IV. THE CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING THESE PROMISES

The "natural" benefits of the land of promise would tend to lull the people into complacency, into a sense of independence in which the land itself and not its Creator and Sustainer would be viewed as the ultimate source of blessing. So the Lord warned that the continued blessings would be conditional. Thus, this promise is not for everyone. It is for whom? It is for those who meet the conditions listed here. I will put them in logical order. First of all, we must:

A. Love God – In v.13 God gave one of the conditions for benefitting from such blessings, and that is, "if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today to love the LORD your God...." This is a restatement of the *Shema* of 6:5, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." Jesus said this was the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:34). Again, note the repetition of this important command in v.22, "For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love the Lord our God...." The reason we break most of the other commandments is because we do not obey this great commandment. You wouldn't lie or steal or commit adultery if you loved God as you ought. Apart from a true love for God obedience is nothing more than legalism and moralism.

[Share how to love God, based on reflections of His character and what He has done for us].

Here we find the Israelites' primary purpose. It was and is to love God! Everything in life has a primary purpose. The primary purpose of a pen is to write. I would rather have a cheap plastic pen that worked than an expensive one that didn't. The primary purpose of an automobile is to transport us from place to place. I would rather have a 10-year-old automobile that was mechanically dependable than a shiny new one that did not work. When something ceases to fulfill its primary purpose, it becomes useless. Could it be that so many Christians are defeated because so few are fulfilling their primary purpose, which is to love God, and express that love in prayer, in worship, and in obedience?

Furthermore, the first part of v.13 says we should:

B. Obey God – Jesus said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." Moses also said in v.27 that obedience was a key to experiencing God's blessing. Yet we see in the Hebrew text one of the first requirements of obedience. The words translated "earnestly obey" in v.13 are actually a translation of the Hebrew word "to hear" stated twice for emphasis. You have to hear and learn the commandments of God before you can obey them.

If you want to have God's blessings for 2020, you need to obey Him. And you cannot obey in your own strength. You can only obey by faith in the strength He provides through the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God. Love for God provides the motivation we need.

C. Serve God – This is included in the last of v.13. The Hebrew word used (*‘abad*) is a common word for work.

Are you working for God? Are you serving God? One way is to serve through a ministry of the church. Another way is to do good works in His name. Jesus said, “If you’ve done it unto the least of these my brethren, you’ve done it unto me.”

D. Stay Loyal to God – Moses gives a warning here. He says in vv. 16-17, “Take heed<sup>6</sup> to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD’S anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.” The Canaanite gods such as Baal were fertility gods and goddesses. The people believed that by appeasing them with sacrifices and worship rituals, they would have rain, good harvests, and productive livestock. Thus, Moses issued the most urgent warning to his people that they be careful lest they be deceived by what appeared to be cause-and-effect reality and worship the gods who represented the vital elements of nature. By the way, the word translated “deceived” (*pathah*) can mean “to be open-minded.” The devil wants you to be open-minded to his lies, and the spiritual lies of this world.

Then, v.22 adds that we should “hold fast to Him.” That Hebrew word means “to cling to, to stay with.” It’s the same Hebrew word found in Genesis 2:24 where it says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

So stay close to the Lord in 2020 and beyond. Don’t drift away. Don’t backslide on God. I wonder how many began 2019 faithful to the Lord, but today are no longer faithful?

E. Stay in the Word (cf. Deut. 6:6-9) - Moses ties his people to the Word of God. Hear him as he challenges his people in vv. 18-19, “Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Note that we are to “lay up,” to consciously place God’s Word in our hearts by listening, reading, reflecting upon, and even memorizing God’s Word. Though it is not necessary to literally bind Bible verses on our hands and between our eyes, we should carry out the spirit of this requirement and take steps to place reminders of God’s Word ever before us. One way is to do something similar to v.20. Have you decorated your home with significant Bible verses? Is a copy of God’s Word on display in your home? Finally, v.19 says that we should teach and discuss God’s Word with others. The best way to learn the Bible is to teach it, and talk about what you have read, or talk about what you learned in S.S. or a church service. Moses knew the only way his people could love the Lord with all their heart was to saturate themselves with a conscious awareness of His Word.

There is a real need for this. According to a 2003 survey, 58% of Americans could not name 5 of the 10 Commandments, and just under half knew that Genesis is the 1<sup>st</sup> book of the Bible. In a 2010 Barna survey fewer than half of American knew that Easter was associated with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Biblical illiteracy is far worse than 50 years ago.

I want to challenge you as you are about to begin a new year, commit to reading God’s Word on a daily basis. Commit to regular attendance in S.S. and church. Let me illustrate why is

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<sup>6</sup> Be on your guard.

it important to be persistent in the Word of God. The nature of water is soft, that of stone is hard; but if a source of water is above the stone, allowing the water to fall drop by drop, it wears away the stone. So it is with the Word of God; it is soft and our heart is hard, but the man who hears the Word of God often, opens his heart to God.<sup>7</sup>

What could be more simple? Israel only had to love Him, and to walk in obedience to God's Word. All that kept them from the blessing of God was disobedience. It is the same with us. I often wonder what would happen to the church if all of the members began to truly love the Lord with all their heart and serve Him with all their soul. The single most important thing we can do as we cross over into a new year is to love the Lord our God and to do the other requirements mentioned in v.13.

Don't postpone a decision to love God, obey God, serve God, remain loyal to God and His word. As Moses presents this message in chapter 11, he uses the word "today" seven times! Today is a time for decision and commitment.

Conclusion: Yes, it was a long journey for the children of Israel through the decades of wilderness wanderings. Moses led them all the way. And thus he comes to the end of his own life and assures the people of Israel of God's provision, presence and protection if they only meet some basic conditions.

As we enter a new year, we too will need God's provision, presence, and protection. Yet let us also do our part to enjoy these blessings. Let us trust God, love God, obey Him, serve Him, and hold fast to Him. We are more likely to do so if we stay in His Word!

Sources: Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); O. S. Hawkins, *Good News for Great Days* (Dallas: Annuity Board, SBC, 2001)-primary resource; Matthew Henry *Unabridged Commentary* (on Online Bible); C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Eugene H. Merrill, *New American Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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<sup>7</sup> Abba Poemen, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (quoted in *Christianity Today*, 10/22/01).