

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
5-11-22

Deuteronomy 4

Moses Challenges The Nation To Obedience – Verses 1-8

¹ Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. ² Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you. ³ You saw with your own eyes what the LORD did at Baal Peor. The LORD your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor, ⁴ but all of you who held fast to the LORD your God are still alive today. ⁵ See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” ⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? ⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

4:2 What is meant by adding to or subtracting from God’s commands? These laws were the word of God, and they were complete. How could any human being, with limited wisdom and knowledge, edit God’s perfect laws? To add to the laws would make them a burden; to subtract from the laws would make them incomplete. Thus the laws were to remain unchanged. To presume to make changes in God’s law is to assume a position of authority over God who gave the laws (Matthew 5:17-19; 15:3-9; Revelation 22:18-19). The religious leaders at the time of Christ did exactly this; they elevated their own laws to the same level as God’s. Jesus rebuked them for this (Matthew 23:1-4).

4:8 Do the laws God gave to the Israelites still apply to Christians today? God’s laws are designed to guide all people toward lifestyles that are healthy, upright, and devoted to God. Their purpose was to point out sin (or potential sin) and show the proper way to deal with that sin. The Ten Commandments, the heart of God’s law, are just as applicable today as they were 3,000 years ago because they proclaim a lifestyle endorsed by God. They are the perfect expression of who God is and how he wants people to live.

4:8 But God gave other laws besides the Ten Commandments. Are these just as important? God never issued a law that didn’t have a purpose. However, many of the laws we read in the Pentateuch were directed specifically to people of that time and culture. Although a specific law may not apply to us, the timeless truth or principle behind the law does.

4:8 For example, Christians do not practice animal sacrifice in worship. However, the principles behind the sacrifices—forgiveness for sin and thankfulness to God—still apply. The sacrifices pointed to the ultimate sacrifice made for us by Jesus Christ. The New Testament says that with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Old Testament laws were fulfilled. This means that while the Old Testament laws help us recognize our sins and correct our wrongdoings, it is Jesus Christ who takes our sins away. Jesus is now our primary example to follow because he alone perfectly obeyed the law and modeled its true intent.

Moses Challenges Israel To Learn From The Example At Mount Sinai (Horeb) – Verses 9-14

⁹ Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. ¹⁰ Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, “Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.” ¹¹ You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. ¹² Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. ¹³ He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets. ¹⁴ And the LORD directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws you are to follow in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

4:9 Moses wanted to make sure that the people did not forget all they had seen God do, so he urged parents to teach their children about God’s great miracles. This helped parents remember God’s faithfulness and provided the means for passing on from one generation to the next the stories recounting God’s great acts. It is easy to forget the wonderful ways God has worked in the lives of his people. But you can remember God’s great acts of faithfulness by telling your children, friends, or associates what you have seen him do.

Idolatry Forbidden – Verses 15-20

¹⁵ You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, ¹⁶ so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, ¹⁷ or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸ or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below. ¹⁹ And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven. ²⁰ But as for you, the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are.

4:19 God was not excusing the other nations for their idol worship. He was simply saying that while judgment might be delayed for those other nations, it would be swift and complete for Israel because Israel knew God’s laws. We must remember that idol worship was not just keeping statues around the house—harmless lumps of clay, wood, or iron. It was the commitment to the other evil qualities, beliefs, and practices the idol represented (such as murder, prostitution, cruelty in war, or self-centeredness). When the strengths and attributes of powerful humans or animals are revered or the cycles of nature are honored without reference to God who created them, this is idolatry. Because God had so clearly revealed himself in Israel’s history, the Israelites had no excuse for worshiping any person or power but the one true God.

Moses Challenges Israel To Learn From The Example Of His Own Failure – Verses 21-24

²¹ The LORD was angry with me because of you, and he solemnly swore that I would not cross the Jordan and enter the good land the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance. ²² I will die in this land; I will not cross the Jordan; but you are about to cross over and take possession of that good land. ²³ Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden. ²⁴ For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

4:24 God is a consuming fire. Because he is morally perfect, he hates sin and cannot accept those who practice it. Moses' sin kept him from entering the Promised Land, and no sacrifice could remove that judgment. Sin kept us from entering God's presence, but Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sin and removed God's judgment forever by his death. Trusting in Jesus Christ will save you from God's anger and allow you to begin a personal relationship with him.

4:24 Jealousy is a demand for someone else's exclusive affection or loyalty. Some jealousy is bad. It is destructive for a person to get upset when his or her spouse talks to someone of the opposite sex. But other jealousy is good. It is right for a man to demand that his wife treat him, and only him, as her husband. Usually we use the word jealousy only for the bad reaction. But God's kind of jealousy is appropriate and good. He is defending his word and guarding his high honor. He makes a strong, exclusive demand on us: We must treat only the Lord—and no one else in all the universe—as God.

The Price Of Serving Other Gods: Exile Among The Nations – Verses 25-28

25 After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time—if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and arousing his anger, **26** I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed. **27** The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. **28** There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell.

4:26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: Creation itself would testify against an idol worshipping Israel. They would be destroyed in the land God promised to give them.

4:27 And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples: God gave Israel the Promised Land, but not unconditionally. If they persisted in idol worship, God would remove them from the land and scatter them among the nations. This, of course, is exactly what happened. Some 550 years later, at the time of the Babylonian Exile of Judah. Often, God's chastisement on us is to give us what our sinful hearts long for. If Israel wanted idols, God would give them idols.

God's Mercy To Exiled Israel – Verses 29-31

29 But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul. **30** When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. **31** For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath.

4:29 Do you want to know God? God promised the Israelites that they would find him when they searched with all their hearts and souls. God is knowable and wants to be known—but we have to want to know him. Acts of service and worship must be accompanied by sincere devotion of the heart. As Hebrews 11:6 says, "Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." God will reward those who pursue a relationship with him.

The LORD Is God – Verses 32-40

32 Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? **33** Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? **34** Has any god ever tried to take for

himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? ³⁵ You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other. ³⁶ From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, and you heard his words from out of the fire. ³⁷ Because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, ³⁸ to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today. ³⁹ Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. ⁴⁰ Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time.

4:32 How tempted we are to look everywhere else but to God for our guidance and leadership! We trust medical doctors, financial advisers, and news commentators, but do we trust God? Get God's advice first (4:39-40), and recognize his authority over every dimension of life.

4:40 Was Israel guaranteed prosperity for obeying God's laws? Yes—but we have to look carefully at what that means. God's laws were designed to make his chosen nation devout, healthy, just, and merciful. When the people followed those laws, they prospered. This does not mean, however, that no sickness, no sadness, and no misunderstandings existed among them. Rather, it means that as a nation they prospered and that individuals' problems were handled as fairly as possible. Today God's promise of prosperity—his constant presence, comfort, and the resources to live as we should—extends to all believers. We will face trials; Jesus told us that. But we will avoid the misery that directly results from intentional sin, and we will know that a great treasure awaits us in heaven.

Cities of Refuge – Verses 41-43

⁴¹ Then Moses set aside three cities east of the Jordan, ⁴² to which anyone who had killed a person could flee if they had unintentionally killed a neighbor without malice aforethought. They could flee into one of these cities and save their life. ⁴³ The cities were these: Bezer in the wilderness plateau, for the Reubenites; Ramoth in Gilead, for the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, for the Manassites.

4:41 Then Moses set apart three cities on this side of the Jordan: This was part of the essential preparation for entering the Promised Land. God commanded that three cities of refuge be readied on each side of the Jordan River (Numbers 35:14), and here, the three cities on the east side of the Jordan were appointed.

4:41-43 Three cities on this side of the Jordan: Moses could not appoint all six cities of refuge, because they had not yet taken the land on the western side of the Jordan River. Still, though he could not obey all of God's command to appoint six cities of refuge, he did what he could - and appointed the three on the east of the Jordan.

Introduction to the Law – Verses 44-49

⁴⁴ This is the law Moses set before the Israelites. ⁴⁵ These are the stipulations, decrees and laws Moses gave them when they came out of Egypt ⁴⁶ and were in the valley near Beth Peor east of the Jordan, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon and was defeated by Moses and the Israelites as they came out of Egypt. ⁴⁷ They took possession of his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan. ⁴⁸ This land extended

from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge to Mount Sirion (that is, Hermon),⁴⁹ and included all the Arabah east of the Jordan, as far as the Dead Sea, below the slopes of Pisgah.

4:44-49 This is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel: As Moses addressed the nation they were on the threshold of the Promised Land. It had been some 38 years since they received the Law of God at Mount Sinai and now Moses reviewed and explained the Law of God with the new generation.

4:44-49 On this side of the Jordan: If they were going to take the Promised Land, they had to be trained in God's Word. They would not take it by a do-it-yourself spirituality, but only by obedience to the eternal word of God. The same is true for us - we will never walk in the abundant life God has for us unless we do it by His word.