

December 6, 2020

What Nation has a God So Near

Deuteronomy 1-4

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Nov 29	1 Cor. 1-4	Dec 3	1 Cor 15-16
Nov 30	1 Cor 5-8	Dec 4	2 Cor 1-4
Dec 1	1 Cor 9-11	Dec 5	2 Cor 5-9
Dec 2	1 Cor 12-14	Dec 6	2 Cor 10-13

Overview of Deuteronomy 1-4

Deut 1 Recalling the Exodus & Failure at Kadesh

Deut 2 The Wilderness Wanderings

Deut 3 The First Victories

Deut 4 The Call to Obey God's Commands

Lesson Idea: God's people need to keep God's Word, because He is the only True God and is jealous towards His people.

Foundational Truths:

- We are to obey God's Word and not add to it or take away from it (v 2)
- God preserves those who hold fast to Him (v 4)
- Each person must give heed to himself and keep his soul diligently (v 9)
- God establishes covenants with us (v 23)
- Our God is a consuming fire and is jealous towards us (v 24)
- God promises to allow us to find Him if we search for Him with all our heart and soul (v 29)
- The LORD our God is a compassionate God who will not fail or destroy His repentant people (v 31)
- The LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other (v 39)

Background:

The book of Deuteronomy begins with:

1 These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab. **2** It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. **3** In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the LORD had commanded him to give to them... (Deut. 1:1-3)

Verse 2 says that the journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea should have only taken eleven days. Verse 3 subtly reminded the people of their failure by saying "in

the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month..." In other words, the people of Israel had stretched the eleven day journey into forty years and eleven months. The first verse tells the nature of Deuteronomy... it will consist of "*the words which Moses spoke to all Israel.*"

In Deuteronomy Moses gives a recap of everything that had occurred with Israel from the time they received the Law at Mount Sinai through the forty years in the wilderness. But it's not just a history book; the name "Deuteronomy" literally means "second Law." Moses will spend most of the book instructing the next generation of Israelites on what God has revealed to be His commands and statutes for the nation as they enter a new chapter in the Promised Land. Moses shared a lesson about the history of the first generation to remind their children to be obedient and faithful to the Lord and His covenant.

Chapter 1 tells how they journeyed from Sinai, how they established their shared leadership, and how they failed to trust the Lord to bring them into the Promised Land. Chapter 2 tells of their wilderness wanderings which lasted until "***all the men of war had finally perished from among the people***" (Deut. 2:16). In Deuteronomy 3 Moses recounted some of the first victories the people had as they moved towards the Promised Land. Moses also emphasized that God would not allow him to enter the land with them, even though he begged God for the privilege; Moses would have to pass the leadership on to Joshua (Deut. 3:23-28). In Deuteronomy 4, Moses began to share about the statues and judgments that the Lord would expect His people to perform.

Deut. 4:1-8 Israel Urged to Obey God's Law

1 "Now, O Israel, **listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.** **2** **You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.** **3** **Your eyes have seen what the LORD has done in the case of Baal-peor, for all the men who followed Baal-peor, the LORD your God has destroyed them from among you.** **4** **But you who held fast to the LORD your God are alive today, every one of you.**

5 "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. **6** **So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your**

understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 7 For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? 8 Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?

NOTES:

J.G. McConville in the *New Bible Commentary on Deuteronomy* addresses the terms used in verses 1-8 concerning God's commands:

'Decrees and laws'. Deuteronomy typically uses a number of different words for 'law'. Three appear in vs 1-2 (*decrees, laws and commands*)—not counting 'word' (translated *what I command you*), which can have the same meaning. V 1 states that keeping the commandments will lead to life, an important idea in the book (see 30:19-20).

This idea may surprise the reader who is used to the NT's teaching that salvation does not come by works of the law, but by faith (Rom. 9:31-32). Paul even seems to oppose the present verse, with Lv. 18:5, in Rom. 10:5 . . . However, we should bear in mind that Deuteronomy seeks obedience from the heart (6:5; 10:16). This is different from dry legalism.

Moses told the people to listen God's statutes and judgments and gave them several incentives to do so:

1. Obedience would bring success and prosperity in the Promised Land. In verse 1 Moses explained that they should keep the Lord's commands, so ***that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.*** The wilderness wanderings had emphasized the consequences of disobedience, so Moses desired better for this next generation. J.A. Thompson in the *Tyndale Commentary on Deuteronomy* notes:

Obedience would result in blessing which meant life and the possession of the land. Life in this context probably refers simply to physical life, in contrast to death and destruction which would follow on disobedience. The principle here stated has become known as the *Deuteronomic principle*. It is stated many times in Deuteronomy, but it is also found elsewhere in the Old Testament, either directly or by inference.

But obedience cannot be just partial compliance. Verse 2 emphasizes that God does not allow people to change His Word to suit their desires. He tells them not to add to it or take away from it (literally, "reduce it").

Generally, those are areas of temptation for all God's people—we tend to emphasize the parts of Scripture we want to stress and ignore the others. This is the root cause of why people become either legalistic pharisees or liberal universalists.

2. Verses 3-4 emphasize another reason for obedience... the consequences of disobedience. Moses told the people to remember what happened to those who chose their own way by following the idolatrous ways of the Moabites and Midianites at Baal-Peor (see Numbers 25:1-9). The wicked were destroyed, but those who ***"held fast to the LORD your God are alive today, every one of you."***

3. Verses 5-6 claims wisdom as another reason for obedience. God's statutes and judgments are true and righteous, so people demonstrate their wisdom by obeying them. As believers, we have the mind of Christ and the wisdom of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

4. Verses 7-8 list one more reason for obedience—the reputation of God and the nation. Israel was in a unique situation of being the only nation to have the nearness of the true God of the universe. They had received His righteous law, and the whole world would be able to see a difference. (comp. Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalm 34:17-20; Psalm 145:17-19; James 4:8).

Deuteronomy 4:9-20 Give Heed to Yourself

9 "Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen, and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. 10 Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' 11 You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. 12 Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice. 13 So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. 14 The LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it.

15 "So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, 16 so that you do not act

*corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, 17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, 18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. 19 And **beware** not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and **be drawn away and worship them and serve them**, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. 20 But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today.*

NOTES:

A nation (and a church for that matter) is only as strong as the individual members of it. Moses told all of the people to “give heed” to themselves and to “keep their souls diligently.” He uses three words that all carry the idea of urgency and extreme caution. Each of these words are also singular in number, meaning that Moses wanted each and every one of the people to be responsible for himself or herself. In Galatians 6:2-6 Paul shares that believers should “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (v 2), but that “each one should carry their own load” (v 5).

Moses also reminded them not to forget the things that they had seen God do. They had a responsibility to teach them to their sons and grandsons (we will look at this responsibility in more detail when we study Deuteronomy 6 next Sunday). There is power in our testimonies of what God has done in our lives. Our children and grandchildren need to know that we follow the Lord, not just because it is the right thing to do, but also because God has treated us rightly. Coming out of the Thanksgiving holiday, we need to remember to give Him thanks verbally in front of the next generations so that they know how powerful and good He is.

In verses 10-14 Moses reminded them of how they witnessed God’s might and majesty firsthand at the foot of Mount Sinai. He told them to remember how they “came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom” (v 11). They would have been just children at the time, forty years earlier, but it would have made an indelible impression of God’s power and majesty (see Exodus 19:16–19; 20:18, 19). Thompson points out:

The appeal to Israel ‘to remember and not to forget’ God’s saving acts is made again and again in Deuteronomy, for they were the foundation to Israel’s

claim to be God’s people and the basis on which God challenged Israel to enter into his covenant. The same principle applies in the New Testament, where the acts of God in Christ are absolutely fundamental for the church and lie at the basis of God’s appeal to men to enter into a new relationship with himself. They too are to be taught to the children of believers. (Tyndale)

Verses 15-20 reminded the people not to let any thing steal their devotion from the Lord Almighty. He repeated the command prohibiting worshipping idols and created things. In verse 19 he warned them strongly (*beware*) against the absurdity of idolatry which would cause someone to lift up their “eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and **be drawn away and worship them and serve them**, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.”

The Apostle Paul shared that the reality of idolatry was still a problem in his day. He told the believers in Rome that God’s wrath was already being poured out against such ignorance in **Romans 1:18-25**:

*18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because **that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings, and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible mankind, of birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures.***

*24 Therefore God gave them up to vile impurity in the lusts of their hearts, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For **they exchanged the truth of God for falsehood and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.***

Deuteronomy 4:21-24 Disobedience Has Consequences

In these verses, Moses reminded Israel that all disobedience carries consequences, and that even he was not exempt. Moses did not lose his relationship with Yahweh but lost the privilege of leading the people all the way into the Promised Land. Moses allowed his anger with the people to cause him to sin against the

Lord, which brought God's discipline. Moses used himself as a negative example to encourage the people to "watch themselves and not forget the covenant of the Lord" (v 23). Hebrews 12:18-29 utilizes this passage to remind believers to not take for granted their relationship with the Lord our God who is a consuming fire (v 24).

Deuteronomy 4:25-40 The Lord is a Compassionate God

25 "When you become the father of children and children's children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD your God so as to provoke Him to anger, 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. 27 The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD drives you. 28 There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. **29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.** 30 **When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice.** 31 **For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.**

32 "Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. **Has anything been done like this great thing, or has anything been heard like it?** 33 **Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived?** 34 **Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?** 35 **To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him.** 36 **Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire.** 37 **Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great**

power, 38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today. 39 **Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.** 40 **So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time."**

NOTES:

Verses 25-28 begin with the word "when" not "if." Moses knew that in the future the people would fail to be consecrated only to the Lord (see Judges 2:1-15 to see how Moses' prophecy came true). Moses warned them that if they provoked God, He would punish them, and they would perish from the land (v 25-26). They would find themselves enslaved to false gods, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell (v28). Their idolatry would lead them into a life of futility.

But verses 29-31 reveal the compassion of God and provide hope for the future. Verse 29 shares a promise about God that runs throughout Scripture—that "if you search for God with all your heart and all your soul," He will let you find Him (see Joshua 22:5; 1 Kings 8:47-50; Nehemiah 9:27; Isaiah 55:6; Jeremiah 25:13; Joel 2:12; Amos 5:4; Matthew 7:7-8). The fact that God allows His people to repent of their sins and return to Him after their discipline reveals His patient love and longsuffering nature.

McConville sums up verses 32-40 by speaking about the unique nature of God's love for Israel.

Moses finished his first address by summing up its main themes. There is no god like the God who had made himself known to Israel, nor any people like Israel, since they had been singled out by this God (see 3:24; 4:7). He saved them miraculously from slavery in Egypt, in order to give them life and freedom in a land in which he alone would be their king. In doing so he showed both his love (37) and his discipline (36). These cannot be separated; and when Israel carefully obeys God's word of love, she will have life (40). (*New Bible Commentary*)

Moses promised the people that if they kept God's commands, it would **go well with you and with your children after you** (v 40) – still good advice for us.