

## Bible Study – Deuteronomy Chapter 4 – Warning against Idolatry

In our studies so far, Moses has recounted Israel's journey from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab, which span almost 40 years. We have seen Israel's unbelief in God's ability to deliver and sustain them, even though He has demonstrated this every step of their journey since leaving Egypt.

As Moses continues to emphasize God's faithfulness to his chosen people, along with His mercy and grace, we now look at how the next generation of Israelites are to obey their God.

### Read Deuteronomy 4:1-14

Moses teaches the Israelites the statutes and rules (or ordinances) from God so they can conquer and enjoy life in the Promised Land. An end goal of living according to these statutes and rules is for the people living around them to praise God; a deity who lives near His chosen people and has given such righteous rules and statutes for living. Moses also recounts the covenant made with Israel at Horeb, reminding them of what is required from them.

**Q.** In verse 2, where else have we seen this command in the Bible? (cf. Deut. 12:32; Joshua 1:7; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19) Why is this command so important? How does this apply to us today?

- Statutes were the permanent basic rules of conduct
- Judgments/Ordinances/Rules (or rulings) were decision God revealed in answer to specific needs. The judgments set precedent for future actions (e.g. Case of Zelophehad's daughters – Num. 36)
- Revelation passage – This is the conclusion of the entire bible and is a warning to those who try to add or remove God's word, that punishment would follow. And this punishment would not be light (add plagues as described in the book of Revelation or reduced share in the tree of life)
- When God gives us a command or rule to follow, we should do so according to what is written
- Therefore, it is important that we are careful in understanding and applying the Word of God as it is written and not do what we think is "right"
- God's word is true and perfect so what makes us think that we can add anything to it?
- This is also important for us to test the Word of God as it is preached for it is important that we do and apply the Word of God as it is intended, not what we think it should mean
- Let the Word have authority over us and that we need to come humbly before the Word of God, asking God to grant us wisdom to understand (James 1:5)
- **Matthew 15:1-9** – The sake of tradition over the Word of God

**Q.** How have you kept the statutes and rules that God has given you to conduct your life? Would people praise God through your actions? How do you not be mistaken for just being a good or moral person?

**Q.** In verse 9-14, what is Moses reminding the Israelites with the recounting of the gathering at Horeb (or Mt. Sinai – cf. Exodus 19)? How should this be a reminder to us?

- Focus on verses 11 – 14
- Human beings did not invent Israel's laws, but rather a holy God
- There is also a supernatural character of the revelation of God's law (through fire and smoke)
- Moses also reminds the people not to forget what their eyes have seen (and what they have lived through) by God's hand.
- To remind them to fear God in the following ways:
  - Have an awesome reverence for God (v. 10)
  - Being acutely aware of His moral purity and omnipotence that one is genuinely afraid to disobey Him
  - Also includes responding to Him in worship, service, trust, obedience, and commitment

- To take care and keep our soul diligent to the statutes and rules that God has given the Israelites
- It is the parent's responsibility to educate their children on spiritual matters and to pass on what God has taught them
- When remembering what God has done for us should motivate us to continue to fear the Lord by worshipping, trusting, obeying, and committing our life to Him

### Read Deuteronomy 4:15-31

Moses continues on and warns the Israelites not to make any images as 'aids' for their worship to God. This was a common practice of ancient Near Easterners when worshipping their gods. He lists objects and images on earth and in the heavenly realms that are not to be used as images of God. Moses again emphasizes how they are to remember what God has done for them as their motivation towards obedience and to explain that God is a jealous God. He finishes with a warning that if they disobey, they would be banished from the land, though God through his mercy and grace, would bring them back because of the covenant made with their ancestors.

**Note:** God's jealousy is His zeal for righteousness that springs from His holiness. The connotation of pettiness that is present in the English word 'jealousy' is absent from the Hebrew idea.

**Q.** In our present day, how can we make 'carved' images of God that would provoke his jealousy? How do we avoid this temptation? How else can we provoke God to jealousy? (cf. Colossians 3:5; Matthew 6:24)

- God revealed himself to Moses and the Israelites at Horeb through fire and smoke (Exodus 19)
- If the Israelites made a carved image of God, it said that they knew what God looked like, even though they never saw Him
- This indirectly equates God with other gods that were being worshipped as carved images which were neither alive nor had power
- Does it make sense for the Creator to be worshipped as one of his created beings? No, as this would lower God's supremacy and who He is, thereby limiting him.
- He does not tolerate Israel's allegiance to any other god
- **Isaiah 42:8** – God does not share his glory with another
- We can make 'carved' images by placing limits on him or saying we fully understand Him
  - By this, I mean to say that we cannot put God in a box and said that is who he is, when he is so much more than we know
  - Once we put a limit on God, he is by virtue no longer God the Creator and Sovereign of our universe
- We can also be drawn away from worshipping the one true God when we create an image that we think represents Him, perhaps also be attributing worship to the creation rather than creator (v.19)
- One possibility that why we do not need a physical image of God (at least not his face) is because God wants us to trust in His words rather than an image of him. To know God fully is through His words that we have in the bible and not a conjured-up image. His word can faithfully represent Him.
- Though more has been revealed about Him to us in the Church Age, there is still much we don't know about Him (e.g. In terms of sovereign will)
- Therefore, we must acknowledge that we don't know certain things about God, especially when it is not specifically revealed to us in the Bible and to be humble before the Lord when reading his Word
- **Colossians 3:5** - "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry"
- **Matthew 6:24** - "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money"

**Q.** Moses states that because of his disobedience (because of the Israelites), he is not allowed to enter the Promised Land. How should this be a warning to us today?

- Sin, at its root, is more than just disobedience to God's commands. It is our selfish thoughts and desires that takes precedence over God's command and will for us.
- Moses, God's chosen leader for the Israelite people, was excluded from his earthly inheritance of being able to enter the Promised Land because of one act of disobedience during the exodus
- If Moses can be denied an inheritance, so can we. No one is exempt from judgment when we disobey God's laws.
- What is interesting is Moses' failure to acknowledge his disobedience. Rather he blames his 'sin' on the Israelites (though he is responsible for his actions – cf. Numbers 20:8-12)
- Though Moses is denied his inheritance, it doesn't mean he was denied entry into heaven.
- This should cause us to be diligent in how we conduct ourselves and how we ought to view God's laws and commands for our lives
- Though it may not disallow us from entering heaven, it may disqualify us from earning some of the rewards that are promised us, both in heaven and on earth
- When we are judged, we will need to answer for our actions
- We need to acknowledge and repent of our disobedience before God, asking for forgiveness
- We also should not rely on God's grace as a justification of our disobedience (e.g. even if I sin, God will forgive me, so it is okay if I don't obey God)

### **Read Deuteronomy 4:32-40**

Moses asks rhetorical questions about what God has done for the Israelites, for the purposes of showing that there is no other god except God (Yahweh) alone. Moses goes onto to answer those same questions, showing that it is Yahweh alone that has done all these things for the Israelites. Their response should be obedience to His law and statutes.

**Q.** How do we see God's love for the Israelites in this passage? What are some of his actions and words that demonstrate His love towards them?

- This is the first time in the bible that it states God's love for a certain people group or person
- He has demonstrated that He loves man from the very first of Genesis, but up to this point, has not expressed his love for man
- God chose the Israelites for a special blessing because of His love for them, not because He foresaw that they would be a great example to all other people, or because He knew that they would love Him in return, though they failed to do both of those things
- The Israelites were his people by virtue of having been descended from the patriarchs, the objects of his love and choice, that he was moved to save them and enter into covenant with them
- God uses his mighty power to bring His people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land that was foretold to their forefathers, defeating nations and greater and mightier than them
- He spoke to them to discipline them, as well as teaching them (v. 36)
- He gives them statutes and commands so they, and their children, can live prolonged lives in the land that God is giving them for all time
  - This is an act of love because he doesn't let them figure out how to live well, but rather gives them everything they need to live

**Q.** Considering God's love for his chosen people, how should that motivate your love for God? Does it change from what it is now?

- Use the following talking points to get the discussion going:
  - Chosen before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) similar to the Israelite people
  - Made into a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) similar to the Israelite people
  - Forgiven and made clean by the blood of Christ
  - As we are in the family of God (for those who are Christian and followers of Christ), he gives us everything we need to live full lives for him, as long as we live in obedience to Him.
  - Hopefully, with these demonstrated acts of love, it should make us love God back as a sign of our gratefulness

### **Read Deuteronomy 4:41-49**

This is an interlude before the introduction of the law and expansion of the Ten Commandments to the Israelites. He sets out the cities of refuge on the East of the Jordan, where the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, will eventually settle. Moses then sums up the law that is to be given to the people of Israel, remembering how God has brought them out of Egypt and onto the Plains of Moab.

Moses continues his exhortation to prepare the people for living in the land they are to possess. The address by Moses, and especially the exhortation to observe the Law faithfully, is one of the greatest revelations of God's character in the Old Testament. The total impression which God and Moses intended must have been awe and humble gratitude in the hearts of the Israelites. Moses mentions several times that by living according to the statutes and rules that God gave them, all would go well for them. However, in the same breath, Moses knows that Israel will not be able to hold fast to God's law, even with his own example of disobedience and judgment, and would therefore face God's punishment. This should be a clear warning to us that we need to always strive to be obedient to God's word, even in the age of grace. Though complete obedience is required of us, we know that Jesus is the only one that was able to fully obey the law completely, which is why He was the perfect sacrifice for our redemption. Therefore, remember to always put your trust in Christ to help you obey the word of God each day.