

### Obedience Commanded and Idolatry Forbidden

#### Deuteronomy 4

**Deuteronomy 4:1-8** - *“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. <sup>2</sup> You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. <sup>3</sup> Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor; for the Lord your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor. <sup>4</sup> But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you. <sup>5</sup> “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. <sup>6</sup> Therefore be careful to observe them, for this 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.’ <sup>7</sup> “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? <sup>8</sup> And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?”*

#### Background Notes

Deuteronomy 4 concluded Moses' first address or sermon to the children of Israel on the plains of Moab, before they crossed the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land. In chapters 1-3 he reviewed the events of Israel's 40 years from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab. Chapter 4 was a preview of what was to come as they entered the Land. It was an exhortation for the future.

Israel was to keep God's Word as God had given it - not to add to it or take away from it (v1-2). Follow Israel's history, and it's obvious that they failed to obey. The Pharisees, for example, added additional laws to the Word of God, and the Sadducees took away from God's Word, even denying the possibility of bodily resurrection. As you know, this can happen today as well. Let's be careful not to become legalists, who tend to add "laws" to Scripture. And let's be careful we don't downplay or ignore Bible passages we don't like, and thus take away from God's Word.

Then Moses mentioned Israel's sad moral failure at Baal Peor, when 24,000 people died in a plague because of their sinful departure from God's Law (Numbers 25). In verses 5-8 Moses explained the reasons why God gave His people the Law: so they could have a full and blessed life, and so that they would be a light and testimony, to draw the surrounding nations to the one true God. This still applies today. An individual or nation that follows the Word of God will be blessed, and will become a testimony of the one true God.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Moses preached the importance for Israel to keep God's Law.

**Deuteronomy 4:9-40** - *"Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, <sup>10</sup> especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' <sup>11</sup> "Then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. <sup>12</sup> And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice. <sup>13</sup> So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. <sup>14</sup> And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess. <sup>15</sup> "Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, <sup>16</sup> lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, <sup>17</sup> the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, <sup>18</sup> the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth. <sup>19</sup> And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage. <sup>20</sup> But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day. <sup>21</sup> Furthermore the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. <sup>22</sup> But I must die in this land. I must not cross over the Jordan; but you shall cross over and possess that good land. <sup>23</sup> Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you. <sup>24</sup> For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."*

<sup>32</sup> *"For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. <sup>33</sup> Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? <sup>34</sup> Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? <sup>35</sup> To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him. <sup>36</sup> Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. <sup>37</sup> And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power, <sup>38</sup> driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it*

*is this day. <sup>39</sup> Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. <sup>40</sup> You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time.”*

Moses emphasized that they must be diligent to keep God’s Law, and to teach it to their children and grandchildren (v9). He reminded the people of their awesome experience at Mount Sinai, 40 years earlier (v9-14). None of these people would have been older than teens at that time, but they had seen the mountain on fire, and they had heard God’s voice from the midst of the fire. There they were given the Ten Commandments, written by God Himself on two tablets of stone. So in essence Moses said, “Keep God’s Law! It’s crucial to your survival. And remember, you did not see God in any form when He spoke to you, so don’t try to make any carved or molded images of God. And don’t try to worship Him by worshiping His creation – humans, animals, birds, fish, sun, moon, or stars - because He is the Creator of all creation! It’s important that you honor and revere the Lord by obeying His Law. I won’t be able to enter the Land because of my failure to obey. So - keep God’s Law, because God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”

In verses 32-40 Moses emphasized that, in God’s eyes, Israel was unique – a special nation - and that’s why He was a jealous God (“jealous” in a good sense)! Had any other nation literally heard the voice of God? Had any other nation experienced a miraculous Exodus with signs and wonders, as Israel had? Had any other nation been able to drive out the Amorites against overwhelming odds, as Israel had done? No. Israel was special. God **chose** them - and He **loved** them (v37)! So they must honor the one true God by following His Laws, and then He would bless them in the Land He was giving them. “*You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time*”(v40). Moses preached the importance for Israel to keep God’s Law.

## **2. Moses predicted the removal of Israel from the Land.**

**Deuteronomy 4:25-28** - *“When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the Lord your God to provoke Him to anger, <sup>26</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. <sup>27</sup> And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. <sup>28</sup> And there you will serve gods, the work of men’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.”*

These verses were more than a warning. They were a *prediction* that Israel *would* turn away from the Lord to practice idolatry. It is not “**if** you act corruptly” – it’s “**when** you act corruptly.” As a result the nation would be destroyed and the people would be scattered among the foreign nations. There they would reap what they have sown for their idolatry. As you follow the history of Israel, all this came true. Moses predicted the removal of Israel from the Land.

### 3. Moses predicted the restoration of Israel to the Lord.

**Deuteronomy 4:29-31** - *“But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>30</sup> When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice <sup>31</sup> (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.”*

Here’s the good news: Israel will return to the Lord. Notice once again that it is not “**if** you turn to the Lord” but “**when** you turn to the Lord” (v30). It **will** happen! Notice that it will take place in the latter days (v30) - and we may be on the threshold of that time! The return of the secular state of Israel is not the fulfillment - it’s just the groundwork for the spiritual reawakening of Israel in the future. There will be a worldwide movement among the Jewish people to return - not only to the Land, but also to the **Lord**. Moses predicted the restoration of Israel to the Lord.

### Practical Application

#### Help is not far away!

**Deuteronomy 4:41-43** - *“Then Moses set apart three cities on this side of the Jordan, toward the rising of the sun, <sup>42</sup> that the manslayer might flee there, who kills his neighbor unintentionally, without having hated him in time past, and that by fleeing to one of these cities he might live: <sup>43</sup> Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites.”*

Three cities on the east side of the Jordan were designated as “Cities of Refuge.” Three more would be located on the west side after the fighting was over (Joshua 20). These cities provided protection for a person who caused an unintentional, accidental death, such as a hunting or construction accident. The one who caused the death could flee to a City of Refuge, where he would be safe and protected from revenge until a trial proved that the death was accidental. These cities were located in the territories of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh. In other words, a City of Refuge was not far away from anyone who was seeking safety.

Hebrews 6:18 revealed that the Cities of Refuge are a picture of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He is our true Refuge! What a wonderful spiritual picture! Folks today go to great lengths to find peace and help and safety in this world - but they are always disappointed. All they need to do is turn to Jesus Christ, who is right there! Help is not that far away!