

September 23: Deuteronomy 4:1–43

Sections:

May take two weeks to go through this whole chapter since next week was dedicated for verses 44-49.

- I. Verses 1-4: Introduction
 - II. Verses 5- 8: statutes and judgments have been taught
 - III. Verses 9- 14: do not forget, pass these on to your descendants, remember Mt. Horeb (likely the same place as Sinai)
 - IV. Verses 15-20: warning: don't worship idols!
 - V. Verses 21- 24: Moses cannot cross, stay true to the covenant, again, stay away from idols
 - VI. Verses 25- 31: prophetic: you will fall away, God will bring you back
 - VII. Verses 32- 40: The Lord is God, there is no other
 - VIII. Verses 41-43: cities of refuge
 - IX. Verses 44- 49: Introduction to the Law
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- I. Verses 1-4: Introduction
 - a. This is the end of Moses' first speech.
 - b. The first few chapters have been history from Numbers which was intended to recount history and encourage the people to trust the Lord.
 - c. Remember that some of the people were children or not even born yet when certain events happened in Deut. Chapters 1-3.
 - d. The end of chapter 3 talked about Moses not being able to enter the promised land, but also Joshua taking the people into the land.
 - e. Chapter 4 begins with Moses encouraging them to listen to these statutes and judgments which he is teaching...
 - f. Statutes: have to do with a law
 - g. Judgments are settling disputes.
 - h. If you want more detail: These technical Hebrew terms (חֻקִּים [khuqqim] and מִשְׁפָּטִים [mishpatim]) occur repeatedly throughout the Book of Deuteronomy to **describe the covenant stipulations to which Israel had been called to subscribe** (see, in this chapter alone, vv. 1, 5, 6, 8). The word חֻקִּים derives from the verb חָקַק (khaq, "to inscribe; to carve") and מִשְׁפָּטִים (mishpatim) from שָׁפַט (shafat, "to judge"). **They are virtually synonymous and are used interchangeably in Deuteronomy.**¹
 - i. Moses is teaching them.
 - j. Moses tells them to listen and there is a purpose. The purpose is that they may live and go in and take the land.

¹ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 4:1.

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- k. This is a common theme: Lev 18:5; Deut 5:33; 8:1; 16:20; 30:16, 19; Ezek 20:11; Rom 10:5²
- l. They are not to add to the Word or take away (verse 2).
- m. Verses 3-4 are recounting an event from Numbers 25:1-5. Those who held true to the Lord rejected pagan worship and are there today.
- n. The IVP Bible backgrounds Commentary: **4:3. Baal Peor.** *Baal Peor is the god who was worshiped at Beth Peor. This refers back to the incident in Numbers 25, when the Israelites were drawn into idolatrous worship by the Moabite women. It was perhaps their first exposure to the fertility worship of Canaan. Fertility cults are common in agrarian societies where the populace is dependent on rainfall and the fertility of the soil for survival. These cults often featured a “dying and rising” god in the pattern of the change of the seasons. The association of human fertility with the earth’s fertility led to the development of sexual elements in the religious rituals.*³
- II. Verses 5- 8: statutes and judgments have been taught
 - a. Statutes and judgements are listed again.
 - b. We are seeing the repeatedly theme that they do not fall away as their ancestors did and that they trust the Lord.
 - c. They must follow those statutes and judgments in the land that they are going to possess.
 - d. Moses points out that the Lord commanded him to teach these statutes and judgments.
 - e. Verse 6, the idea of keeping and doing these statutes and judgments is connected with their wisdom and understanding.
 - f. This idea of keeping God’s ways and loving His Word is throughout the Bible: Deut 30:19, 20; 32:46, 47; Job 28:28; Ps 19:7; 111:10; Prov 1:7; 2 Tim 3:15⁴
 - g. I like what the ESV Study Bible adds: *Part of the incentive to keep the commandments is missiological. Obedience will show to other nations Israel's wisdom and understanding, akin to the moral wisdom encouraged in Proverbs. Such wisdom will draw attention not only to Israel but ultimately to Israel's God (as epitomized by the queen of Sheba's visit with Solomon; 1 Kings 10), a pattern intended by the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:3).*
 - h. In verses 7-8 we see questions with intended negative answers: there are no other great nations like Israel. We see this idea later in this chapter and later in the Old Testament:
 - i. Deut 4:32–34; 2 Sam 7:23
 - j. Again, the ESV Study Bible gives insight: In the verses following, the Lord's nearness at Mount Horeb is recalled, though v. 7 has in mind an ongoing nearness, notably in answering prayer. *In Deuteronomy that nearness comes through God's word (30:14)*

² [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

³ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 4:3.

⁴ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

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and his presence in the midst of the people. See also 1 Kings 8:52. In comparison with other nations, Israel's law is emphasized as righteous in order to encourage Israel to keep the laws of the following chapters and not to regard them as unduly onerous [burdensome].

- k. Also, the IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary:
 - l. **4:6–8. result of the laws.** *The laws are presented here as an evidence of wisdom and righteousness that will distinguish Israel from the other nations. In a number of the collections of laws known from the ancient Near East there is a prologue and epilogue explaining that the collection of laws will demonstrate how wise and just the king is. Likewise Solomon's wisdom was evidenced by how he was able to make just decrees and rulings. The kings of the ancient Near East usually counted on their collections of laws to convince the gods that they were wise and just rulers. Here the Lord is revealing his own wisdom and justice to his people and the world.*
 - m. **4:7. nearness of god.** *In Mesopotamia the laws were presented to the god of justice (Shamash) by the king as evidence that he was a just king. The king had been given the authority to make laws by the gods, the guardians of cosmic law. Law was seen as something inherent in the universe, and laws were supposed to somehow reflect that impersonal cosmic law. In Israelite thinking, however, law emanated from the character of God and he was seen as the source of the laws. Moses was not the lawmaker, Yahweh was. By proclaiming laws, the Lord is therefore revealing himself in an act that distinguished him from the other gods of the ancient world. This is the "nearness" that the text remarks on.⁵*
- III. Verses 9- 14: do not forget, pass these on to your descendants, remember Mt. Horeb (likely the same place as Sinai)
- a. **IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Horeb.** *Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, most likely located in the southern section of the Sinai peninsula. See the comment on Exodus 19:1–2.⁶*
 - b. Verse 9 is REALLY important: once again we have the idea of passing on the faith to our sons and grandsons. We, once again, see the idea of passing on the faith to our descendants.
 - c. Moses is saying to "Be careful!" and "watch yourselves closely!" They are to not forget what they have seen.
 - d. This is testimonial. This is also some things that they have seen and some things that their parents and ancestors had seen.
 - e. They are to not let these things depart from their heart. They are to keep them in their heart their whole life and pass them on.

⁵ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 4:6–7.

⁶ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 4:10.

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- f. Verse 10 begins to recount events that they only remember through their ancestors. This happened in Exodus 24:12; 32:15–16. Everyone 20 and older had died in the wilderness except Joshua, Caleb and Moses.
- g. **Verse 10 again mentions teaching children.**
- h. The NIV study Bible points out that this idea of “remembering” is a common theme in Deuteronomy.
- i. Verses 10-14 recount the giving of the Ten Commandments.
- j. **Ten commandments in Hebrew is “Ten words.”**
- k. Verse 13: ***This is the first occurrence of the word בְּרִית (bérit, “covenant”) in the Book of Deuteronomy but it appears commonly hereafter (4:23, 31; 5:2, 3; 7:9, 12; 8:18; 9:9, 10, 11, 15; 10:2, 4, 5, 8; 17:2; 29:1, 9, 12, 14, 15, 18, 21, 25; 31:9, 16, 20, 25, 26; 33:9). Etymologically, it derives from the notion of linking or yoking together. See M. Weinfeld, TDOT 2:255.***⁷ Further the New American Commentary gives more detail: It appears over **three hundred times in the Old Testament, including some twenty-eight times in Deuteronomy**, and can apply generically to covenants of all kinds—conditional or unconditional, bilateral or unilateral, royal grant, or suzerain-vassal—or to just an element of covenant, as here. (For full discussion see the Introduction, pp. 24–28.)¹⁶⁴
- l. In verse 12 Moses said that they saw no image and only heard a voice. The New American Commentary points out: The “voice” the people heard was likely not the articulation of words, for it was Moses alone, according to the Exodus account, who received the commandments directly from the Lord (cf. Exod 19:20–22; 20:1). The statement here, “He declared to you his covenant” (v. 13), refers to the statement of the covenant and its terms as mediated through Moses (Exod 24:3). **Moreover, the narrative in Exod 19 describes the voice (qôl) as a trumpet (v. 19).**¹⁶³ **What to Moses were intelligible words were to the masses below a sound like a mighty trumpet or even thunder (Exod 19:16; cf. Paul’s encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road; Acts 9:4–7; 22:6–9).**⁸

IV. Verses 15-20: warning: don’t worship idols!

TDOT Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.

⁷ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 4:13.

¹⁶⁴ See M. Weinfeld, “בְּרִית *bērîth*,” *TDOT* 2:253–79; J. Begrich, “Berit,” *ZAW* 60 (1944): 1–11; O. Loretz, “בְּרִית - Band - Bund,” *VT* 16 (1966): 239–41; W. L. Moran, “A Note on the Treaty Terminology of the Sefire Stelas,” *JNES* 22 (1963): 173–76; M. Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” *JAOS* 90 (1970): 184–203; *JAOS* (1972): 468–69; id., “Covenant Terminology in the Ancient Near East and Its Influence on the West,” *JAOS* 93 (1973): 190–99.

¹⁶³ Hebrew קוֹל (*qôl*) (like Greek φωνή) fundamentally means “sound” regardless of its nature. As “voice” it can describe either articulate (Deut 1:45; 21:18; 1 Sam 2:25; Luke 4:33; 8:28; John 11:43) or inarticulate (Isa 6:4; Jer 48:34; Acts 9:7) speech. Cf. *BDB*, 876–77; *BAGD*, 870–71.

⁸ Eugene H. Merrill, [Deuteronomy](#), vol. 4, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 119–120.

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- a. Isa 40:18: *To whom can you compare God? To what image can you liken him?*⁹
- b. This is a lot of detail in these verses regarding staying clear of idolatry.
- c. This makes sense given their history and their future. They will repeatedly go into idolatry in the book of Judges, later on in 2 Kings and even 1 Kings.
- d. They went into idolatry in Numbers 25 as has been mentioned. They went into idolatry right after they left Egypt in Exodus 32.
 - i. **→of course, as an application, we certainly have our own idols. Follow the trail of your time, energy and money and you will find out what you worship.**
- e. The New American Commentary adds: ***In this section attention turns from the covenant itself to the God of the covenant, to him who brought Israel out of Egypt in order to make them his special servant people*** (v. 20). *Moses had already pointed out that Israel's God who met them at Horeb did so phenomenologically, by sight and sound, but that there was "no form" to his self-manifestation (v. 12). That is, the Lord is transcendentally and ontologically invisible, one who exists as spirit and not materially.* This, of course, is a pervasive biblical idea (Pss 51:13; 106:33; 143:10; Isa 63:10–14; Neh 9:20; Hag 2:5; Zech 4:6; John 4:24). Nowhere is the idea more fully advanced than here, however; for not only does the Lord not have form (*tēmûnâ*), but he is conceptually set over against images and idols that do (vv. 16, 23, 25). That is, a major difference between the Lord and the imagined deities of the nations is precisely in the fact that they could be represented iconically whereas he cannot. For Israel to attempt to encapsulate God in any form whatsoever was to attempt to reduce him to the level of pagan imagination.¹⁶⁶¹⁰
- f. This idea is repeated in Deuteronomy Deut 4:25; 9:12; 31:29.
 - i. Verse 16: idolatry in the likeness of male or female.
 - ii. Verse 17: idolatry in the likeness of animal or bird. See Romans 1:23: *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings⁴⁶ or birds or four-footed animals⁴⁷ or reptiles.*¹¹
 - iii. Verse 18: idolatry by things that creep or slither, or fish
 - iv. Verse 19: idolatry by worshipping stars or planets. The Scripture say that the Lord has given everyone the stars.
 1. Deuteronomy again tells them not to worship the stars (Deut. 17:3).

⁹ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Is 40:18.

¹⁶⁶ E. M. Curtis, "The Theological Basis for the Prohibition of Images in the Old Testament," *JETS* 28 (1985): 283–84.

¹⁰ Eugene H. Merrill, [Deuteronomy](#), vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 121–122.

⁴⁶ **tn** *Grk* "exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God in likeness of an image of corruptible man." Here there is a wordplay on the Greek terms ἄφθαρτος (*aphthartos*, "immortal, imperishable, incorruptible") and φθαρτός (*phthartos*, "mortal, corruptible, subject to decay").

⁴⁷ **sn** Possibly an allusion to Ps 106:19–20.

¹¹ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Ro 1:23.

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2. Later they did this: 2 Kin 17:16; 21:3¹²
3. The New American Commentary adds to this idea of “apportionment”: *There have been many interpretations offered for this statement about apportionment,¹⁷⁴ but in the context of both the immediate passage and the Genesis creation texts it seems best to understand the author as arguing that the sun, moon, and stars, far from being deities who control humankind, are actually at his service. They have been “apportioned” (thus hālaq) in such a way as to function for all people everywhere exactly as God intended—as separators of day from night and as signs marking the divisions of time.*¹³
- v. About verses 16-18 the New American Commentary adds: **4:16–18** *For the Israelite to undertake to do this was, Moses said, to “become corrupt” (v.*

¹² [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

¹⁷⁴ Most scholars hold that the passage describes the worship of the heavenly bodies, a practice, if not sanctioned by God, allowed by him at least. Craigie, for example, says that “these false forms of worship, though assigned by God to other nations (v. 19), would be antithetic to the revelation of Israel’s true religion” (*Deuteronomy*, 137). Weinfeld suggests that “the heavenly bodies as objects of worship were assigned to the nations by God himself” (*Deuteronomy 1–11*, 206). Driver asserts that “the God of Israel is supreme: He assigns to every nation its objects of worship; and the veneration of the heavenly bodies by the nations (other than Israel) forms part of His providential order of the world” (*Deuteronomy*, 70). This interpretation suffers both theological and biblical deficiencies. It is impossible to harmonize the overall biblical concept of a Creator who stands above and beyond his creation with the notion that he would assign lower parts of that creation to be objects of worship by the highest part of his creation, namely, humankind. In perhaps the clearest exposition of the matter, Paul spoke of the rejection of the true God with the result that “they worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25). It is true the apostle said that God “gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts” (v. 24), but nowhere did he teach that God assigned the heavenly bodies (or anything else) as objects of worship.

Thompson proposes that the passage deals with the allotment of the peoples of the world to various areas, but this clearly is not in line with the context (*Deuteronomy*, 106). The key here is the phrase אֲשֶׁר חָלַק יְהוָה (“which Yahweh allotted”). Though חָלַק normally has the idea of dividing up or distributing (BDB, 323), it can also mean “to assign” (Job 20:29; 39:17; Jer 10:16; Hab 1:16), that is, without dividing (M. Tsevat, “חָלַק chālaq II,” etc., *TDOT* 4:450–51). It is in this sense that God created the heavenly beings and assigned them to all the human race (Gen 1:14–19). Far from being worthy of worship, Moses here was arguing that they themselves were the common property of humankind, made to serve him (Deut 4:19a). Schroeder is correct, after all, when he says that the point here is the contrast between the heavenly creation, which was given to all humanity, and Yahweh himself, “which was the portion of Israel” (F. W. J. Schroeder, *Deuteronomy: Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1879], 72).

¹³ Eugene H. Merrill, [Deuteronomy](#), vol. 4, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 123–124.

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16).¹⁶⁷ *The reason obviously is that in so doing one confuses the Creator with the creature, a reversal in perception that betrays a twisted mind and perverted heart. Paul was certainly alluding to this idea and possibly to this passage when he declared that fallen, natural humanity had “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25), with the result that “he [God] gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done” (v. 28).*¹⁶⁸¹⁴

- g. Egypt is listed again as an “iron-‘smelting’ furnace” in: 1 Kin 8:51; Jer 11:4
 - h. About verse 20 the ESV Study Bible shares: *Israel is the Lord's inheritance; the land is Israel's inheritance (4:21, etc.), though the landless tribe of Levi has the Lord as their inheritance (10:9; 12:12; 18:1).*
 - i. About the Hebrew term translated as “Iron furnace” the New American Commentary adds: *The Hebrew term used here (kûr habbarzel) is related to the Akkadian word for “crucible,”¹⁷⁵ a kiln in which metals and glass were melted down and refined. Any nation caught up in the white heat of Egyptian wrath and oppression was virtually hopeless. But the Lord had used that time of bondage as a purifying process for his people, and when the process was over, he had powerfully delivered them from it (cf. Isa 48:10; Jer 11:4). The result was that they were then qualified to be the people of the Lord, fit to enter the land he had promised to them.*¹⁵
- V. Verses 21- 24: Moses cannot cross, stay true to the covenant, again, stay away from idols
- a. Verses 21-22 has been repeated throughout this book.
 - b. Notice the repetition of “good” land.
 - c. Verse 23 is repeating for emphasis the content already talked about in the previous sections and Deut 4:9. Notice especially this is also repeating Deut. 4:16.
 - d. Verse 24 is powerful: Ex 24:17; Deut 9:3; Is 30:27; 33:14; Heb 12:29¹⁶
 - e. Our God is no one to be trifled with.
 - f. The NET Bible adds: *The juxtaposition of the Hebrew terms עֵשׂ (‘esh, “fire”) and קַנָּא (qanna’, “jealous”) is interesting in light of Deut 6:15 where the LORD is seen as a jealous God whose anger bursts into a destructive fire. For God to be “jealous” means that his holiness and uniqueness cannot tolerate pretended or imaginary*

¹⁶⁷ The Heb. verb תַּחַשׁ in the *hiphil* stem means “to act corruptly” (cf. Isa 1:4; 2 Chr 27:2).

¹⁶⁸ N. Hyldahl, “A Reminiscence of the Old Testament (Dt 4, 15–18) at Rom 1, 23,” *NTS* 2 (1956): 285–88; D. Moo, *Romans 1–8*, WEC (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 104.

¹⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 122.

¹⁷⁵ *The Assyrian Dictionary*, ed. A. L. Oppenheim et al. (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1971), 8: 571, s.v. kûru.

¹⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 124.

¹⁶ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

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*rivals. It is not petty envy but response to an act of insubordination that must be severely judged (see H. Peels, NIDOTTE 3:937–40).*¹⁷

- VI. Verses 25- 31: prophetic: you will fall away, God will bring you back
- This is talking specifically about their descendants falling away.
 - Verse 25 is shown to happen in 2 Kings 17:17.**
 - The New American Commentary gives insight: **This—and the preceding warnings of destruction as well—came to pass regularly throughout Israel’s history and climactically in the deportations of Israel and Judah by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and Babylonians in 586 B.C., respectively.**¹⁸
 - The warnings of verse 27 are in the rest of Deut and the Old Testament:** Lev 26:33; Deut 28:64; 29:28; Neh 1:8¹⁹
 - There are mockeries of idols in:** Ps 115:4–8; 135:15–18; Is 44:12–20²⁰
 - Verse 31 is amazing about God’s compassion.**
 - Great cross references regarding God’s compassion in:** Ex 34:6; 2 Chr 30:9; Neh 9:31; Ps 103:8; 111:4; 116:5; Jon 4:2²¹
- VII. Verses 32- 40: The Lord is God, there is no other
- Think back and see if you can imagine a greater God.
 - Verse 33 is a question implying a negative answer—there is no one who God has had a relationship with like them.
 - Verse 34 is still saying that no one is like Israel with their covenant relationship with God.
 - The rest of these verses are reminding them of their history and covenant with the Lord.
 - Notice verse 40.
- VIII. Verses 41-43: cities of refuge: These verses are self explanatory
- IX. Verses 44- 49: Introduction to the Law: About verses 44-49 the ESV Study Bible shares: These verses provide the geographical and historical setting of the second speech.

NIDOTTE New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology

¹⁷ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 4:24.

¹⁸ Eugene H. Merrill, [Deuteronomy](#), vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 128.

¹⁹ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

²⁰ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

²¹ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).