

Deuteronomy

Lesson 4

Chapter 4

IV. Moses' Summary of God's Law

A. Israel Urged to Obey God's Law (4:1)

Moses had completed his summary concerning Israel following the LORD's lead to take them to the Promise Land and failing miserably thirty-eight years before, and his summary of how they had followed the LORD this time, thirty-eight years later with great success. Now, Moses is going to urge Israel to obey God's Law. He says in Chapter 4 verse 1, “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” (4:1).

Israel could not take the Promised Land and be successful unless it followed the statutes and judgments of the LORD. The Hebrew word for *statutes* is *choq* and it means *something prescribed* (legally). Wycliffe translated it as *behests*. He also translated the word *judgments* as *dooms*, which is the Hebrew word *misphat*. In Wycliffe's Middle English, *behest* meant *command or injunction*. Both of these words appropriately define the meaning of a *statute*; it is a command or injunction. Wycliffe's Middle English *dooms* (spelled *doomes*) meant the *administration of justice*. The *doom* was neither good nor bad, it was the justice deserved for the action being judged. To say that in another way, a *doom* could be a good or bad verdict. It, too, is an appropriate word for our NASB translation of *judgment*. What Moses is saying in this passage is this, “Follow the commands or face the justice you deserve.” Moses goes on to say, “...so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land...” I hope you can see the two polar opposite thoughts Moses is putting forth in this part of this sentence. First, if you follow the LORD's commands you will be successful in taking and possessing the land. Or, Second, if you do not follow the LORD's commands, you will not be successful in taking and possessing the land. In other words, Israel has the knowledge to take the land and possess it and they have the wherewithal to mess the whole thing up. Either way, the outcome will depend on how they take the land as to whether or not the victory is theirs.

1. Recounting a Warning before the Ten Commandments

In the first part of the summary of God's Law, Moses is going to remind them of the first ten laws that the LORD gave them when the Nation of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai, after leaving Egypt. In the lead up to those commandments, Moses says, “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” (4:2). The laws are what they are. Do not mess with them. Keep them exactly as the LORD said them.

a) An Example at Baal-peor (4:3)

To make sure that the nation understood exactly what Moses was speaking about, he used the example of what had just happened a month or so before the delivery of this message at Baal-peor. Verse 3. “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” (4:3). The story behind this statement can be found in Numbers 25 and it bears hearing at this point.

Numbers 25:1 While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. ² For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³ So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel. ⁴ The LORD said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of the people and execute

them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.”⁵ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, “Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.”⁶ Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting.⁷ When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand,⁸ and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked.⁹ Those who died by the plague were 24,000.

As I have already stated, this incident happened just a month or so before Moses delivered this message to the Nation of Israel. It was fresh on their minds. The Nation of Israel had already journeyed completely through the land of Moab by that time, fought and defeated Sihon the Amorite and Og the Amorite and captured the land for one-hundred and ten miles to Mount Hermon and come back one hundred miles to settle in the Plains of Moab. The next stop in their minds was on the other side of the Jordan River to take west side for their Promised Land. It was fresh. What had all those men done that caused them to die? They broke one of the Ten Commandments: Thou shall not have any other God’s before Me. Those men had forgotten the injunction and received the administration of justice from the LORD. It as a poignant application to Moses’ point.

b) What Other Nations Will Think (4:5-8)

Moses then reminded the Nation of Israel that other nations would be watching the actions of Israel. Israel should be concerned with what other nations would think. Moses speaks, “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?” (4:5-8).

Moses was telling the people that it was important what other nations would think as they see the Nation of Israel in the Promised Land. It would be important how Israel was seen worshiping the LORD and how she keeps His commandments. No other nation had a God like Israel because there is no other God than the God of Israel. He was a God who provided, directed, instructed, and interacted with people. He was their *wisdom*. He was their understanding. That was what made Israel a wise and understanding people.” All other gods were simply figments of the imaginations of some of the men of those nations, carved by the hands of men, nailed to the walls of the homes and designed according to man’s desires. No other nation had a heavenly God who created them. Instead, their gods were created by man. Do you remember what the LORD said to the nation in Chapter 2:25? “*This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples everywhere under the heavens, who, when they hear the report of you, will tremble and be in anguish because of you.*” (2:25). Sure, with the defeat of the Amorites on the eastern side of the Jordan River, the news that the Israelites were coming had already arrived on the western side. The Canaanites must have known Israel was coming soon.

c) What Israel Must Do (4:9)

Moses was quick to tell the nation what Israel must do. Verse 9. “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.” (4:9).

The Nation of Israel had seen first-hand the works of their mighty God. But Moses was concerned that the nation would think of the LORD’s mighty deeds as common place and as time went by they would dismiss them as just being part of the past. Both generations of Jews had already

proven to Moses and the LORD that their memories and gratefulness to the LORD was short. After seeing the ten miracles the LORD performed in Egypt which allowed them to escape, the nation quickly longed to return to life in Egypt. All along the way, the people grumbled and wanted to return to that land of Egypt where life had become so hard that they cried for a savior to lead them out. God provided, Israel forgot. After the death of all those who had sinned against the LORD at Kadesh-barnea, the new generation with Moses at the time of the giving of this book had also forgotten the provisions of the LORD and grumbled, sinned it had forgotten the LORD's faithfulness and that it lacked nothing during the thirty-eight years. Even on the latest journey to the Plains of Moab with this generation, many of whom had never seen Egypt because they were not born when the Exodus occurred, grumbled and longed to return to Egypt. No doubt their parents had told them about Egypt and no doubt their parents had forgotten the bad and why they wanted to leave. So, too, the new generation longed for that which was in its past that it really did not know anything about.

Here, Moses was saying, "don't forget what the LORD has done for you these forty years." Remember what He did. And, by all means, teach your children and your children's children about His mighty works so they would never forget.

2. Recounting the Giving of the Ten Commandments

Moses must now remind the new generation with him of the first thing the LORD did when their parents arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses began recounting the giving of the Ten Commandments. Verse 10. *"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.'"* (4:10).

According to Exodus 19:1, it took exactly three months from the time the nation of Israel left Egypt until it arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai. The nation left on the fifteenth day of the month of Nisan and arrived at Mount Sinai on the fifteenth day of the month of Sivan. On that day, the LORD spoke to Moses and said the following.

Exodus 19:9 The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

The LORD had Moses tell the people that they had three days to wash their garments and clean themselves and arrive at the edge of the mountain to hear Him speak to them. They were to put on their finest clothing to listen to the LORD Himself as He would speak to them.

a) Gathering to Hear the Word of the LORD (4:11)

To this new generation, which may or may not remember that meeting with the LORD forty years before, was reminded by Moses of their gathering to hear the word of the LORD. Verse 11. *"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."* (4:11).

(1) Giving of the Commands (4:12-14)

On that third day after arriving at Mount Sinai, the people heard the voice of the LORD giving the commands. Moses says in verse 12, *"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."* (4:12-14).

It was not Moses speaking these words, it was the LORD Himself. The people of the Nation of Israel heard the voice of the LORD booming from the mountain as they gathered in the place called

Horeb on the side of the mountain. It was the same place that the Lord had spoken to Moses from the burning bush about six months before. The people could not deny that it was the voice of God. Neither could they deny that the LORD God existed. He had spoken and He expected His people to obey His ten laws.

(2) Warning in the Commands (4:15-20)

So Moses expressed to the new generation standing before him of the warning in the commands of the LORD. Verse 15. *“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.”* (4:15-20).

Moses summarized in this passage the warnings in the first three of the Ten Commandments concerning how Israel was to obey the LORD God. He was to be the only God that the nation worshiped. The Jews had heard this for forty years and yet they seem to have easily forgotten that many times. Forty years before, after hearing the Ten Commandments spoken by the LORD, the people still created the golden calf. After conquering the Amorites and taking their land for a portion of the Promised Land just a few months before this message in this book, many had gone to worship the pagan god Molech at Baal-peor. Both had been drawn away from the commands of the LORD.

(3) Breaking the Commands (4:21-22)

Even Moses had been unfaithful to the LORD by breaking the commands. Moses used himself as an example of breaking the LORD's law. Moses told the people this in verse 21. *“²¹ Now the LORD was angry with me on your account, and swore that I would not cross the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. ²² For I will die in this land, I shall not cross the Jordan, but you shall cross and take possession of this good land.”* (4:21-22).

Moses had broken the fourth commandment when he struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock as the LORD had instructed him. Moses had *taken the LORD's name in vain*. The word *vain* means *emptiness*. Moses had dismissed the LORD with an emptiness by disobeying His word. It was a little thing, but it was a big thing in the LORD's mind. You cannot dismiss any part of the LORD's Ten Commandments.

(4) Remember the Commands (4:23-24)

Because of what Moses had done, it would cause him to suffer the penalty of never being able to cross the Jordan River and enter the full Promised Land, and it emphasized that the people needed to remember the commands. *“²³ So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the LORD your God has commanded you. ²⁴ For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”* (4:23-24).

Do not forget the LORD God, Moses was saying. Do not make your own God, Moses was saying. If you do, Moses said, *“For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”* A “consuming fire, a jealous God!” God would not tolerate the worship of any man made fake gods. There were no other gods that exist in His creation.

(5) Prophecy in the Commands

(a) Perished from the Land (4:25-26)

Then, in a strange turn. Moses stopped summarizing the past and began to prophecy into the future concerning the commands of the LORD and what He would do to His people when they

broke the commands. Verse 25. “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.*” (4:25-26).

We have the fortunate gift of living thousands of years after this prophecy was given and we have the rest of the Bible to unfold Israel’s history. From the date of this prophecy, on the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year out of Egypt, Israel was headed for its fulfillment. Israel lost all of its Promised Land because of breaking the Ten Commandments in just eight hundred and forty six years. The LORD was right when He said, “*You shall not live long on it... .*”

(b) Scattered in Other Lands (4:27)

Where would Israel go? They would be scattered in other lands when they disobeyed the Ten Commandments. Verse 27. “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.*” (4:27). From our perspective, we can know this to be true. The LORD sent the Assyrians to conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel, killing ninety percent of the people and taking ten percent, just a remnant, into exile. Later, the LORD sent Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar to conquer the Southern Kingdom of Israel, killing ninety percent of the people and taking ten percent, just a remnant, into exile. The remnant was few in number, ten percent of the nation’s population, scattered all along the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers from Haran to the Gulf as well as modern-day Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Syria. The prophecy has been fulfilled.

(i) Serving of Other Gods (4:28)

Looking into the future, Moses’ prophecy rightly foretold that Israel would serve the false gods of the countries in which the LORD would drive them. Verse 28 prophesies, “²⁸ *There you will serve gods, the work of man’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.*” (4:28).

Across the countries that we have just mentioned above, the twelve main gods that the Nation of Israel would learn to worship are as follows.

- Ahura Mazda – king of the gods
- Angra Mainyu – principle of evil, chaos, and discord
- Mithra – god of the rising sun, covenants, contracts, and kingship
- Hvar Ksata – god of the full sun
- Ardvi Sura Anahita – goddess of fertility, health, water, wisdom, war
- Rashnu – an angel; the righteous judge of the dead
- Verethragna – warrior god who fights against evil
- Tiri and Tishtrya – gods of agriculture and rainfall
- Atar – god of the divine element of fire; personification of fire
- Haoma – god of the harvest, health, strength, vitality; personification of the plant of the same name whose juices brought enlightenment
- Vayu – god of the wind who chases away evil spirits
- Zorvan (Zurvan Akarana) – god of time, personification of infinite time

This prophecy has been fulfilled.

(ii) Finding the True God (4:29)

But in the midst of being surrounded by all the gods of the foreign lands in which the LORD would drive them, a remnant of the nation of Israel would begin the process of finding the true God just as it had done when it was in Egypt. Verse 29. “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.*” (4:29).

(iii) Returning to Your God (4:30)

When all else has failed, Moses prophesies that Israel will be returning to its God. Verse 30. “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.*” (4:30).

We know that Israel’s return to LORD was short lived. In 536 BC the Nation of Israel was allowed to return to the Promised Land, if it wished. Only a small remnant of the remnant that went into exile returned to the land. That group’s faithfulness to the LORD would be short lived. Five hundred and sixty years later, the Jews would be far away from the LORD again and reject the LORD Jesus upon His arrival and to this day, the leaders of Israel are still leading their people away from the true LORD Jesus Who created them, took them out of Egypt and gave them the Promised Land. One day He will redeem them, in the latter days, when they finally turn to Him during the end times tribulation before His majestic arrival at His Second Coming. At that time, all of the saved people of Israel will finally “listen to His voice.”

(c) The Compassion in the Commands

But in speaking the prophecy of the doom that was coming to Israel in the future, Moses was good to speak of the compassion in the commands. Verse 31. “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.*” (4:31).

The LORD never forgets. Even though Israel would forget the LORD, He would not forget all that He had promised His nation. He would keep His promises.

(i) The Past

In the compassion of the commands of the LORD, Moses urged the nation to look at the past saying in verse 32, “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?*” (4:32).

No other people on earth had been blessed by the LORD as Israel. Just looking at the past, the nation knew Moses was right. Never before had any nation had the LORD fight the battles. No other nation knew that when it went to war, it would win because the LORD was doing the fighting. No one had heard anything like this even as far back as the creation of Adam on the sixth day of creation.

(ii) The Voice (4:33)

But then Moses reminded the nation of the voice of the LORD. Verse 33. “³³ *Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived?*” (4:33).

No other nation had ever heard the voice of the LORD. Individuals had heard His voice, but never a nation as the whole.

(iii) The Deeds (4:34)

Moses reminded the nation of the deeds of the LORD. Verse 34. “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?*” (4:34).

No other nation had ever had a god do for it what the LORD God had done for Israel.

(iv) The Reason (4:35)

Moses gave the reason why the LORD did for Israel what He did. Verse 35. “³⁵ *To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him.*” (4:35).

The LORD did what He did in order that the Nation of Israel would know Him.

(v) The Majesty

Not only would the Nation of Israel know the LORD, it would know His majesty. Verse 36. “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.*” (4:36).

Israel heard the LORD's voice and saw His fire on the mountain at the giving of the Ten Commandment to "discipline" the nation. "Discipline" in this passage does not mean to punish, it means to train. Israel could never deny that it had heard the actual voice of the LORD.

(vi) The Love (4:37a)

Why did the LORD do this? It was because of love. Verse 37. *"^{37a} Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them."* (4:37a).

The LORD loved all those who loved Him all the way back to Adam. But the LORD loved the twelve sons of Jacob, too. As such, the LORD loved all the children of Israel down to the time of this message from Moses.

(vii) The Work (4:37b-38)

How did the LORD show His love to Israel? Through His work. Verse 37. *"^{37b} 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."* (4:37b-38).

Here, Moses was referring to the past few months on the journey to the Plains of Moab. Sihon and Og, the Amorite kings, had armies that were greater in power and number than the Israelites. Under normal conditions, there was no reason that Israel should have utterly defeated and destroyed those two kings and their armies and people. Yet, it was the work of the LORD that caused the defeats of the Amorites and the victory of the Israelites.

(viii) The God (4:39)

That day, Moses wanted the Israelites to know their God. Verse 39. *"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."* (4:39).

Notice the last part of the verse, "there is no other." When the LORD said there were no other gods, He meant it. No other gods exist. Any god, worshipped by any people, except the LORD God, does not exist. Israel had the only God over all of creation on its side.

(ix) The Challenge (4:40)

So Moses gave the nation a challenge that day. Verse 40. *"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."* (4:40).

Even though the LORD allowed Moses to prophesy the future rebellion of the Nation of Israel, that does not mean that Moses understood all that he was saying. In Moses' mind, he may have thought that he was giving a warning so the nation would not rebel against God. Here, Moses challenged the nation to remain faithful so it would not ever be cast from the Promised Land by the LORD.

b) Establishing Three Cities of Refuge (4:41-43)

With verse 41 of this Chapter, the mystery writer of the opening of the book returns. To the end of the Chapter 4, these are clearly not Moses' words. Most likely they are the words of Joshua who was allowed by the LORD to insert information and transitions concerning the things that Moses did within this summary given on the Plains of Moab. Verse 41. *"⁴¹ Then Moses set apart three cities across the Jordan to the east, ⁴² that a manslayer might flee there, who unintentionally slew his neighbor without having enmity toward him in time past; and by fleeing to one of these cities he might live: ⁴³ Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, and Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites."* (4:41-43).

We can find the record of Moses establishing these cities and more in Numbers 35:6-8. What was a city of refuge? If someone had accidentally broken the sixth commandment, "You shall not kill," the killer could go to one of these three cities on the east side of the Jordan River and wait safely for his trial. Three cities would also be set up as cities of refuge on the west side of the Jordan too. Why the unknown writer inserted this information here is unknown except that the LORD led him to do so. All the oldest and most reliable copies of the Bible contain these verses here.

c) Preparing to Restate the First Laws (4:44-49)

Finally, the mystery writer prepares us, the reader, as well as all the generations of readers that have come before us, for the second giving of the Ten Commandments. Verse 44. *“⁴⁴ Now this is the law which Moses set before the sons of Israel; ⁴⁵ these are the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which Moses spoke to the sons of Israel, when they came out from Egypt, ⁴⁶ across the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites who lived at Heshbon, whom Moses and the sons of Israel defeated when they came out from Egypt. ⁴⁷ They took possession of his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites, who were across the Jordan to the east, ⁴⁸ from Aroer, which is on the edge of the valley of Arnon, even as far as Mount Sion (~~that is, Hermon~~), ⁴⁹ with all the Arabah across the Jordan to the east, even as far as the sea of the Arabah, at the foot of the slopes of Pisgah.”* (4:44-49).

Our writer detailed for us the exact place where this summary of the laws were repeated by Moses and what had just occurred in the taking of the Promised Land on the east side of the Jordan River. The introduction to the restating of the Ten Commandments was over. It was time to hear the commands of the LORD. And with that, we will begin a new lesson.