



Remember

RECALLING GOD'S PAST FAITHFULNESS
LEADS US TO WORSHIP HIM.

DEUTERONOMY 4:1-9,15-20

Older folks will remember family get-togethers that included porch sitting. After the evening meal, family members headed outside. A few sat in rocking chairs. Some were on the porch swing. The adults would talk. Someone would ask, “What ever happened to so-and-so?” Then the reminiscing began. They talked about their happy memories and the hurdles. The kids didn’t do a lot of talking. Mostly, they listened, not realizing how much they would treasure these memories decades later.



What is your favorite family memory? How do your family’s stories get passed down from one generation to the next?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

DEUTERONOMY 1:1–4:43

The book of Numbers records events and lessons related to the children of Israel as they traveled from Mount Sinai to the Plains of Moab, which was across the Jordan River from the promised land. The book of Deuteronomy focuses and expands on the law God gave at Mount Sinai. Deuteronomy teaches God's people how to live in covenant in the promised land. Some terms appear in these opening chapters that deserve attention. Understanding their usage will aid in our study of Deuteronomy.

Great—This word appears thirty-nine times in Deuteronomy. Only in Psalms (66), Jeremiah (50), and Revelation (46) does the word appear more times. In Deuteronomy 4, the word is used to speak of God's great power (v. 37), of God bringing great terrors on Egypt (v. 34), and of His sending great fire on the earth (v. 36). Surprisingly, God referred to Israel as a "great nation" (vv. 6,8). Israel—a great nation! A generation earlier, the Israelites had been captive in Egypt and serving as slaves. Israel's greatness was not because of its accomplishments. They were great because of the power and presence of God among His people (see 3:24).

Today—The repetition of this word (4:4,8,26,38) highlights the sense of urgency for obeying God's law every day. Thus, moving forward, God's people would have to commit themselves to obedience for their every today.

Statutes and ordinances—This phrase appears seventeen times in Deuteronomy; five are in chapter 4 (vv. 1,5,8,14,45). The root word for "statutes" alludes to engraving or etching; "ordinances" has to do with judging. In Deuteronomy, the terms are almost indistinguishable; they refer to God's covenant requirements.

This entire law and the Ten Commandments—These terms appear only once each in this fourth chapter (vv. 8,13). Their scarcity does not indicate an unimportance. The Ten Commandments are the core around which all the law is built. The first five books of the Bible are referred to as the Torah, which in Hebrew means the Law. The Torah contains a total of 613 commands.



As you read through today's text, underscore the imperative verbs. Pay close attention to the directives that appear once and those that are repeated.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

OBEDIENCE (DEUT. 4:1-4)

¹ “Now, Israel, listen to the statutes and ordinances I am teaching you to follow, so that you may live, enter, and take possession of the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. ² You must not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, so that you may keep the commands of the LORD your God I am giving you. ³ Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed every one of you who followed Baal of Peor. ⁴ But you who have remained faithful to the LORD your God are all alive today.”

VERSES 1-2

Deuteronomy 1–3 contains Moses’s reiteration of what had happened from the time the Israelites left Mount Sinai until they arrived at the Plains of Moab. Chapter 4 verse 1 marks a transition. Rather than looking back, Moses, speaking for God, would be giving instructions about how to live as His people in Canaan.

Moses commonly used the imperative verb *listen* as he was about to instruct God’s people (see 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9). In Deuteronomy, the terms *statutes* and *ordinances* referred to God’s covenant requirements. Thus, the people were to *follow* them.

With the requirement of what the people were to do came a three-fold promise of what they would receive. The first promise, that they would *live*, was significant. These Israelites would not be like those who died during their wilderness wanderings. Second, they would *enter*. Fear would not keep them from advancing. Third, they would *take possession of the land*. They would receive what God promised. Canaan was the land God was giving them. It belonged to Him and was His to give. They would receive it, but not passively; they would *take* possession.

Verse 2 does two things. First, it emphasizes that the commands from Moses were *the commands of the LORD*. Second, it affirms the sufficiency of God’s instructions. They would provide the guidance God’s people needed for living in Canaan. The command not to *add* or *take anything away from* God’s instructions appears elsewhere in Scripture (Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19). God’s Word is sufficient always and in all ways. As David

declared, “The instruction of the LORD is perfect, renewing one’s life” (Ps. 19:7). His Word never returns void but accomplishes what God intends (Isa. 55:11).

God’s Word is sufficient always and in all ways.

VERSES 3-4

These verses speak of a recent event that would have been fresh in the people’s minds. The Israelites knew they were to worship God alone. At **•Baal-peor**, they had done the opposite. The Israelites began to “prostitute themselves with the women of Moab . . . and the people ate and bowed in worship to their gods. So Israel aligned itself with Baal of Peor, and the LORD’s anger burned against Israel” (Num. 25:1-3). Because of Israel’s unfaithfulness, God brought a plague; 24,000 of His people died.

Hearing Moses allude to that event, the Israelites could see families who were still grieving. The lesson could not have been plainer. Those who **remained faithful** were **all alive today**; those who did not were gone.

 **Why do you think Moses kept emphasizing that the words he was speaking were from God?**



BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible atlas and Bible dictionary to locate and learn about places mentioned in Scripture.

Find the location of Baal-peor in a Bible atlas. (Tip: Check the atlas index or search on the internet.) Then use a Bible dictionary to learn more about the place. What are some significant facts about this location and the incident that took place there (Deut. 4:3; Hos. 9:10)?

WISDOM (DEUT. 4:5-9)

⁵ “Look, I have taught you statutes and ordinances as the LORD my God has commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to possess. ⁶ Carefully follow them, for this will show your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the peoples. When they hear about all these statutes, they will say, ‘This great nation is indeed a wise and understanding people.’ ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god near to it as the LORD our God is to us whenever we call to him? ⁸ And what great nation has righteous statutes and ordinances like this entire law I set before you today? ⁹ Only be on your guard and diligently watch yourselves, so that you don’t forget the things your eyes have seen and so that they don’t slip from your mind as long as you live. Teach them to your children and your grandchildren.”

VERSES 5-8

Look signaled the urgency of the instructions that would follow (Gen. 28:15; Ex. 34:10; Deut. 2:31; 11:26-28; Josh. 6:2). Moses again underscored that he spoke only what the Lord had **commanded**.

The **them** in verse 6 were the statutes and ordinances God had given (vv. 1,5). Following them would ensure the Israelites could live safe and productive lives in the promised land. Further, obeying God’s statutes and ordinances would be a witness in the eyes of the other peoples. As others observed the Israelites living by God’s principles, they would recognize the wisdom that governed their lives. Living by God’s standards would set His people apart. They would be seen as a great nation. Ultimately, that differentiation would point people to God.

The expected response to the rhetorical question of verse 7 is “None.” No other nation, no other peoples, would be like Israel and the Israelites.

The Canaanites worshiped more than twenty deities. These deities supposedly controlled war and weather, dusk and dawn, fertility and fire, and diseases and death. But no Canaanite god was near when people called out to them. Canaanite gods were merely sculptures and statues based on someone’s imagination. The people had no idea how to please and appease these so-called gods. It was all speculation, trial, and error. People believed the gods were remote and angry. Not so with Yahweh. He had proven Himself to be always near. He had given His people ordinances and

statutes so they would know how to worship and live in harmony with Him. These statutes and ordinances were **righteous** because God was their source.

VERSE 9

To ***be on your guard*** meant being vigilant in spiritual matters. God's people could not allow themselves to become lax in observing what mattered to Him. The imperative phrase ***diligently watch yourselves*** carries the idea of building a hedge of protection. This is not something a person accomplishes passively or without effort; it requires determination.

Failing to guard and watch would result in the people forgetting what they had seen and experienced. Deuteronomy warns the people not to forget (1) God's covenant with them, (2) how He led them out of Egyptian slavery, (3) that He was their God, and (4) how God's people had rebelled against Him (4:23; 6:12; 8:11; 9:7).

Like bookends, verse 5 introduced a thought and verse 9 completes it. The connection involves teaching. Moses began by saying he taught the people what God had instructed. This verse challenged the Israelites to teach the next generation God's righteous statutes. In essence, Moses was passing the baton to those standing before him.

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The responsibility to pass God's truth to subsequent generations is repeated throughout Scripture (Ex. 12:24-27; Josh. 4:1-9; Ps. 78:1-7). Christ's followers have the same responsibility today (Eph. 6:4).



How will obeying God's Word set believers apart in today's world?



KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. (See Isaiah 40:8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17.)

WORSHIP (DEUT. 4:15-20)

¹⁵ “Diligently watch yourselves—because you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you out of the fire at Horeb—
¹⁶ so you don’t act corruptly and make an idol for yourselves in the shape of any figure: a male or female form, ¹⁷ or the form of any animal on the earth, any winged creature that flies in the sky, ¹⁸ any creature that crawls on the ground, or any fish in the waters under the earth. ¹⁹ When you look to the heavens and see the sun, moon, and stars—all the stars in the sky—do not be led astray to bow in worship to them and serve them. The LORD your God has provided them for all people everywhere under heaven.
²⁰ But the LORD selected you and brought you out of Egypt’s iron furnace to be a people for his inheritance, as you are today.”

VERSES 15-18

Verses 10-14 recount events from forty years earlier at Mount Sinai. There, God called the people to assemble at the foot of the mountain and made His presence known with fire and smoke. The people could hear His voice but not see Him. Recalling those events had to bolster the Israelites’ faith.

God instructed the Israelites: ***Diligently watch yourselves.*** People tend to want something visible to focus on in worship. Canaanite religions had physical representations of their false gods. The Israelites could easily be lured into wanting God to be represented visually. If they did that, God would be personified as an idol. To portray Him in a visible form would violate the commandment, “Do not make an idol for yourself” (Ex. 20:4).

Moses repeated the word ***any***. Don’t make an idol in the shape of *any* figure. This excluded all possibilities. From there, though, Moses began to mention the forms that an idol might take.

Many Canaanite gods took human form, typically with exaggerated parts. Asherah was the Canaanites’ mother goddess. Likenesses of Asherah typically emphasized her breasts. Baal took a male form. The god of wind and weather, he typically held lightning bolts in his raised right hand.

Egyptians and Canaanites had various gods that took the forms mentioned in verses 17-18.

An ***animal on the earth***—The golden calf at Mount Sinai demonstrated the Israelites’ comfort with worshipping an animal. This tragic incident may have mirrored the Egyptians’ worship of Apis, their sacred bull.

A **winged creature**—Horus was the Egyptian god of healing, kingship, sun, and sky. He took the form of a hawk or falcon. His right eye was the morning star and represented power. His left eye, the evening star, was supposedly the source of healing.

A **creature that crawls on the ground**—Apophis took the form of a serpent. Egyptians believed he was the perpetual enemy of their solar god, Re. On cloudy days, they believed Apophis had been victorious over Re.

A **fish in the waters**—Dagon was portrayed as half-fish and half-human. Dagon is the Hebrew word for “fish.” Dagon worship began in third-millennium Mesopotamia; it migrated into Canaan before the Israelites’ arrival.

Thus, the forms mentioned in these verses were not idle conjecture. God knew His people would be tempted to worship a god in a visible form. Doing so, though, would be to act corruptly (v. 16).

VERSE 19

Finally, God warned His people not to worship the **sun, moon, or stars**. Genesis states that God created the sun, moon, stars, and the heavens. The fish in the sea came afterward. Creatures that crawl and roam the earth and the birds of the air were created before Adam and Eve. The forms these gods could take (vv. 16-19) are offered in reverse order from what we see in creation.

The best that human ingenuity and imagination can offer is a counterfeit of God’s divinity. God alone is worthy of our worship, adoration, loyalty, love, faithfulness, and devotion.

VERSE 20

Verse 20 offers a climax to this teaching. Out of all the earth’s inhabitants, God had selected one group, Abraham’s descendants, to receive His grace. Hearing their cries in Egypt, God remembered His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He **brought** them **out**.

This is always God’s work of redemption. He brings us out—from darkness to light, from death to life, from the yoke of slavery to freedom in Christ, and from condemnation to righteousness (Rom. 8:1-10; 1 Cor. 15:55-57; Gal. 5:1; Col. 1:13-15).



What kinds of idols do we need to refrain from worshiping today?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + We are to obey God’s commands.
- + We are to value and seek the wisdom that comes from the Lord.
- + We can rejoice that God has called us to be His people.

 **What makes worship, worship? What makes worship meaningful to you? What hinders your worship? What can you do to help eliminate those hindrances? Be ready to discuss your thoughts with your Bible study group.**

 **If God’s Word gives us wisdom and understanding, why do we sometimes find reading it to be a challenge? How are you doing in spending time in God’s Word? What changes can you make this week to make Scripture reading a regular habit in your life?**



Memorize Deuteronomy 4:9.

Prayer Needs
