



## A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

---

### WHO IS LIKE THE LORD? (4:1–49)

#### The Place of the Passage

Moses the preacher warms to his theme in Deuteronomy 4. With Israel's inconsistent past in view (chapters 1–3), Moses solemnly enjoins Israel to remember and keep what he has commanded them. Their very lives depend on it, as does their enjoyment of the land. To forget and disobey God's commands would not only compromise Israel's blessedness; it would also fly in the face of all that God is and all he has done for Israel. These crucial ideas—who God is, what he has done for Israel, and what Israel now is to do in response—are the great themes of the book, which this chapter weaves together. In so doing, it orients us to the overall message of Deuteronomy. For this reason we are dedicating a whole week's study to Deuteronomy chapter 4.

#### The Big Picture

Unlike any other god, the Lord has drawn near to Israel to save them and to reveal his law to them, and therefore they must be careful to keep his commands.

#### Gospel Glimpses

REVEALED RELIGION. Simply to know God is a gracious gift. The nations are reduced to speculation about what their gods desire, whether they are pleasing to their gods, and what the future holds (Jeremiah 10:5; Jonah 4:11). But Israel gets to hear God's voice from the fire (Deuteronomy 4:36) and through the preaching of his faithful messenger, Moses (4:1). Israel should marvel at having a God so near (4:7), a God who makes himself known so clearly to his people. Indeed, even after God ceases to appear in fire on Sinai, he is still near his people through the written Word. This close identification between God and his written Word explains the command neither to add nor to subtract from his words, for his written Word represents him and his authority. But even better than this written Word is the very climax of God's gracious revelation, Jesus Christ: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). In Christ, God's Word has graciously come near us, not merely in written words but as a human being.

ENDURING FAITHFULNESS. Verses 29–31 of Deuteronomy 4 astonish us with their description of God's enduring mercy. Even after Israel will sin grievously and God's righteous anger will come upon them to scatter them among the peoples, they will still have hope. This hope is rooted in God's tremendous compassion, for he is moved by the misery of his people, even when it is self-inflicted (v. 31). And their

hope is rooted also in God's faithfulness to his ancient promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 4:31). When all the initial fulfillment of these promises are removed by God's judgment (when they are removed from their land, and are left few in number), God says he will still remember what he promised to Abraham. In the work of Christ, God's promised compassion and faithfulness have arrived. Christ comes to fulfill the promises made to Abraham (Luke 1:72–73; Galatians 3:29). And in Christ, God compassionately receives his scattered people as the Father receives the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:20). Judgment has given way to reconciliation and resurrection.

### **Theological Soundings**

**THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD.** All of the commands in Deuteronomy stem from the Lord's being different from every other so-called "god." Verses 32–34 of Deuteronomy 4 drive home the uniqueness of the Lord with three powerful questions: Has any other event like the salvation of Israel from Egypt ever happened (v. 32)? Has any other people ever heard the voice of God and lived (v. 33)? Has any other god taken a people for himself from the midst of another nation through great wonders (v. 34)? The answer in every case is a resounding no! No such event! No such people! No such other god! The "gods" of all the other nations are paralyzed: they can "neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell" (v. 28). As Jeremiah mocks, they "cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good" (Jeremiah 10:5). The only things the Lord "cannot" do are leaving, destroying, or forgetting Israel (Deuteronomy 4:31). This unique relationship between Israel and their unique God is not a reason for boasting, as though they were any better than the other nations or inherently more deserving than them (4:37; 7:7; 9:5). Rather, it demands their exclusive worship and devotion.

### **Whole Bible Connections**

**CREATION RIGHTLY ORDERED.** The language of Deuteronomy 4:16–19 is filled with recollections of Genesis 1: the lists of creatures, the list of heavenly bodies ("sun," "moon," and "stars"), and the important concept of "form" or "likeness." These verses in Deuteronomy 4 recall the well-ordered world God made and they then apply this picture to the realm of worship: the biblical pattern is that God makes his own image (Genesis 1:26–28). He is the archetype and template for all creation, infinitely higher than all he has made. We are copies and pictures of him. Hence we must not claim for ourselves the right to make likenesses of God, as though we were his creator and could manipulate him. Part of honoring this creational order is respecting the difference between males and females. Using the same language as Genesis 1 and Deuteronomy 4:16–19, Romans 1:18–27 describes the perversion of all humanity, not just in our rejection of God in favor of images that we construct but also in our tendency to reject the basic creational distinction between males and females.

**IDOLATRY'S TREACHERY.** Faithfulness to God's covenant is like the faithfulness of a wife to her husband. Hence the faithful Israelites at Baal-peor were those who did not go after idols or sexual immorality but "held fast" (or "clung") to the Lord. God is steadfastly dedicated to Israel and treasures her as his own inheritance (Deuteronomy 4:20; 26:18). As in any dedicated marriage, God rightly expects Israel to return his fidelity, which in this case means worshiping him exclusively (4:19). This desire for exclusive worship is like the jealousy of a husband: the Lord is a "jealous God" (v. 24). In light of all that God has done for Israel and the explicit command he gives here, it comes as a knife thrust to read the same language repeated later in Israel's history: "They abandoned all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made for themselves metal images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal" (II Kings 17:16).

**Please answer the following questions:**

#### **Chapter 4**

1. The great choice facing Israel is whether or not they will obey the Lord. Their loyalty to God is an either-or, take-it-or-leave-it decision. They cannot pick and choose what they like from God's law, or add other things they wish God had included (v. 2). What reasons do these verses give for why they should choose to obey God with all that they are? (vv. 1–4)
2. According to Deuteronomy 4:5–8, what about Israel is so great?
3. What sets Israel apart from the rest of the nations? (vv. 5-8)
4. Verse 9 is the first of three times that Moses warns Israel to “take care”. What spiritual traps is Moses concerned that Israel will fall into, as described in verses 9–14?
5. Amid the terror of “darkness, cloud, and thick gloom” (v. 11) are several statements of purpose that reveal God's grace at work. How do these statements show God's grace?
6. God permits Israel to see many things, but He does not let them see Himself. And yet, even as God shrouds Himself in fire and cloud, He reveals something. What does God's refusal to be seen (v. 15) and His refusal to be represented by visible things (vv. 16–19, 23) reveal about His uniqueness?

7. God is uncompromising in His judgment (vv. 25–28) but also in His mercy (vv. 29–31). Even if God removed Israel from the land in judgment, Israel would still have hope for a future. What must Israel do to receive this mercy (v. 29)?
  
8. Why would God give Israel mercy (v. 31)?
  
9. The confession that the Lord alone is God is the great rallying cry of Deuteronomy. It is the first thing true faith confesses. According to this section, how was Israel to recognize that this core claim is true?
  
10. What are the categories of the law in verse 45?