

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Exhortations to obedience, Deuteronomy 4:1. Nothing to be added to or taken from the testimonies of God, Deuteronomy 4:2. The people are exhorted to recollect how God had destroyed the ungodly among them, Deuteronomy 4:3; and preserved those who were faithful, Deuteronomy 4:4. The excellence of the Divine law, Deuteronomy 4:5, Deuteronomy 4:6. No nation in the world could boast of any such statutes, judgments, etc., Deuteronomy 4:7, Deuteronomy 4:8. They are exhorted to obedience by the wonderful manifestations of God in their behalf, Deuteronomy 4:9-13. Moses exhorts them to beware of idolatry, and to make no likeness of any thing in heaven or earth as an object of adoration, Deuteronomy 4:14-20. He informs them that he must die in that land as God had refused to let him go into the promised land, being angry with him on their account, Deuteronomy 4:21, Deuteronomy 4:22. Repeats his exhortation to obedience, Deuteronomy 4:23, Deuteronomy 4:24. Predicts the judgments of God against them, should they turn to idolatry, Deuteronomy 4:25-28. Promises of God's mercy to the penitent, Deuteronomy 4:29-31. The grand and unparalleled privileges of the Israelites, Deuteronomy 4:32-40. Moses severs three cities on the east side of Jordan for cities of refuge, Deuteronomy 4:41, Deuteronomy 4:42. Their names, Deuteronomy 4:43. When and where Moses gave these statutes and judgments to Israel, Deuteronomy 4:44-49.

Verse 1

Hearken - unto the statutes - Every thing that concerned the rites and ceremonies of religion; judgments - all that concerned matters of civil right and wrong.

Verse 2

Ye shall not add - Any book, chapter, verse or word, which I have not spoken; nor give any comment that has any tendency to corrupt, weaken, or destroy any part of this revelation.

Neither shall ye diminish - Ye shall not only not take away any larger portion of this word, but ye shall not take one jot or tittle from the Law; it is that word of God that abideth for ever.

Verse 6

Keep - and do them; for this is your wisdom - There was no mode of worship at this time on the face or the earth that was not wicked, obscene, puerile, foolish, or ridiculous, except that established by God himself among the Israelites. And every part of this, taken in its connection and reference, may be truly called a wise and reasonable service.

The nations - and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people - Almost all the nations in the earth showed that they had formed this opinion of the Jews, by borrowing from them the principal part of their civil code. Take away what Asia and Europe, whether ancient or modern, have borrowed from the Mosaic laws, and you leave little behind that can be called excellent.

Verse 9

Only take heed to thyself - Be circumspect and watchful.

Keep thy soul diligently - Be mindful of thy eternal interests. Whatever becomes of the body, take care of the soul.

Lest thou forget - God does his work that they may be had in everlasting remembrance; and he that forgets them, forgets his own mercies. Besides, if a man forget the work of God on his soul, he loses that work.

Lest they depart from thy heart - It is not sufficient to lay up Divine things in the memory, they must be laid up in the heart. Thy word have I hidden in my heart, says David, that I might not sin against thee. The life of God in the soul of man can alone preserve the soul to life everlasting; and this grace must be retained all the days of our life. When Adam fell, his condition was not meliorated by the reflection that he had been once in paradise; nor does it avail Satan now that he was once an angel of light. Those who let the grace of God depart from their hearts, lose that grace; and those who lose the grace, fall from the grace; and as some have fallen and risen no more, so may others; therefore, take heed to thyself, etc. Were it impossible for men finally to fall from the grace of God, exhortations of this kind had never been given, because they would have been unnecessary, and God never does an unnecessary thing.

But teach them thy sons - If a man know the worth of his own soul, he will feel the importance of the salvation

of the souls of his family. Those who neglect family religion, neglect personal religion; if more attention were paid to the former, even among those called religious people, we should soon have a better state of civil society. On family religion God lays much stress; and no head of a family can neglect it without endangering the final salvation of his own soul. See the note at the conclusion of Genesis 18:32 (note), Genesis 19:38 (note), and Deuteronomy 6:7 (note).

Verse 15

Ye saw no manner of similitude - Howsoever God chose to appear or manifest himself, he took care never to assume any describable form. He would have no image worship, because he is a Spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth. These outward things tend to draw the mind out of itself, and diffuse it on sensible, if not sensual, objects; and thus spiritual worship is prevented, and the Holy Ghost grieved. Persons acting in this way can never know much of the religion of the heart.

Verse 16

The likeness of male or female - Such as Baal-peor and the Roman Priapus, Ashtaroth or Astarte, and the Greek and Roman Venus; after whom most nations of the world literally went a whoring.

Verse 17

The likeness of any beast, etc. - Such as the Egyptian god Apis, who was worshipped under the form of a white bull; the ibis and hawk, among the fowls, had also Divine honors paid to them; serpents and the crocodile among reptiles; besides monkeys, dogs, cats, the scarabaeus, leeks, and onions! See this explained at large, Exodus 20:4 (note).

Verse 19

When thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars - The worship of the heavenly bodies was the oldest species of idolatry. Those who had not the knowledge of the true God were led to consider the sun, moon, planets, and stars, as not only self-existing, but the authors of all the blessings possessed by mankind. The knowledge of a rational system of astronomy served to destroy this superstition; and very little of it remains now in the world, except among a few Christian and Mohammedan astrologers; those miserable sinners who endeavor, as much as possible, to revive the old idolatry, while vainly professing to believe in the true God! Nor is it to be doubted that God will proceed with them as he has done of old with the worshippers of the host of heaven. Sound philosophy is next in importance to sound divinity; and next to the study of the work of grace is that of the operations of God in nature; for these visible things make known his eternal power and Godhead.

Verse 20

Out of the iron furnace - From this mention of the word iron furnace there can be little doubt that the Israelites were employed in Egypt in the most laborious works of metallurgy. Digging, smelting, and forging of iron in so hot a climate must have been oppressive work indeed.

Verse 21

The Lord was angry with me - And if with me, so as to debar me from entering into the promised land, can you think to escape if guilty of greater provocations?

Verse 24

Thy God is a consuming fire - They had seen him on the mount as an unconsuming fire, while appearing to Moses, and giving the law; and they had seen him as a consuming fire in the case of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their company. They had, therefore, every good to expect from his approbation, and every evil to dread from his displeasure.

Verse 26

I call heaven and earth to witness against you - A most solemn method of adjuration, in use among all nations in the world. So Virgil, Aen., lib. xii., ver. 176, etc.

Tum pius Aeneas stricto sic ense precatur:

Esto nunc Sol testis et haec mihi terra vocanti -

Fontesque fluviosque voco, quaeque aetheris alti

ReIIgio, et quae caeruleo sunt numina ponto, etc.

Then the great Trojan prince unsheathed his sword,

And thus, with lifted hands, the gods adored:

Thou land for which I wage this war, and thou

Great source of day, be witness to my vow! -

Almighty king of heaven and queen of air,

Propitious now and reconciled by prayer, -
 Ye springs, ye floods, ye various powers who lie
 Beneath the deep, or tread the golden sky, -
 Hear and Attest!
 Pitt.

God and man being called upon to bear testimony to the truth of what was spoken, that if there was any flaw or insincerity, it might be detected; and if any crime, it might not go unpunished. Such appeals to God, for such purposes, show at once both the origin and use of oaths. See the note on Deuteronomy 6:13.

Verse 27

The Lord shall scatter you among the nations - This was amply verified in their different captivities and dispersions.

Verse 28

There ye shall serve gods - wood and stone - This was also true of the Israelites, not only in their captivities, but also in their own land. And it may now be literally the case with the ten tribes who were carried away captive by the Assyrians, and of whose residence no man at present knows any thing with certainty. That they still exist there can be no doubt; but they are now, most probably, so completely incorporated with the idolaters among whom they dwell, as to be no longer distinguish able: yet God can gather them.

Verse 29

But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord - God is longsuffering, and of tender mercy; and waits, ever ready, to receive a backsliding soul when it returns to him. Is not this promise left on record for the encouragement and salvation of lost Israel?

Verse 30

When thou art in tribulation in the latter days - Are not these the times spoken of? And is there not still hope for Israel? Could we see them become zealous for their own law and religious observances - could we see them humble themselves before the God of Jacob - could we see them conduct their public worship with any tolerable decency and decorum - could we see them zealous to avoid every moral evil, inquiring the road to Zion, with their faces thitherward; then might we hope that the redemption of Israel was at hand: but alas! there is not the most distant evidence of any thing of the kind, except in a very few solitary instances. They are, perhaps, in the present day, more lost to every sacred principle of their own institutions than they have ever been since their return from the Babylonish captivity. By whom shall Jacob arise? for in this sense he is small - deeply fallen, and greatly degraded.

Verse 33

Did ever people hear the voice of God - It seems to have been a general belief that if God appeared to men, it was for the purpose of destroying them; and indeed most of the extraordinary manifestations of God were in the way of judgment; but here it was different; God did appear in a sovereign and extraordinary manner; but it was for the deliverance and support of the people.

1.They heard his voice speaking with them in a distinct, articulate manner.

2.They saw the fire, the symbol of his presence, the appearances of which demonstrated it to be supernatural.

3.Notwithstanding God appeared so terrible, yet no person was destroyed, for he came, not to destroy, but to save.

Verse 34

From the midst of another nation - This was a most extraordinary thing, that a whole people, consisting of upwards of 600,000 effective men, besides women and children, should, without striking a blow, be brought out of the midst of a very powerful nation, to the political welfare of which their services were so essential; that they should be brought out in so open and public a manner; that the sea itself should be supernaturally divided to afford this mighty host a passage; and that, in a desert utterly unfriendly to human life, they should be sustained for forty years. These were such instances of the almighty power and goodness of God as never could be forgotten.

In this verse Moses enumerates seven different means used by the Almighty in effecting Israel's deliverance.

1.Temptations, $\times\check{x}i\times^a$ (massoth), from $\times\times\textcircled{\times}$ " (nasah), to try or prove; the miracles which God wrought to try the faith and prove the obedience of the children of Israel.

2. Signs, אֹתוֹת (othoth), from אָתָּה (athah), to come near; such signs as God gave them of his continual presence and especial providence, particularly the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire, keeping near to them night and day, and always directing their journeys, showing them when and where to pitch their tents, etc., etc.

3. Wonders, מוֹפְתִים (mophethim), from $\text{יָפַח$ (yaphath), to persuade; persuasive facts and events, says Parkhurst, whether strictly miraculous, and exceeding the powers of nature, as Exodus 7:9; Exodus 11:9, Exodus 11:10; or not, as Isaiah 20:3; Ezekiel 12:6, Ezekiel 12:11. It probably means typical representations: in this signification the word is used, Zechariah 3:8. Joshua, the high priest, and his companions were $\text{אֲנָשֵׁי מוֹפְתִים}$ (anshey mopheth), typical men, raised up by God as types of Christ, and proofs that God would bring his servant The Branch. All the dealings of God with this people, and even the people themselves, were types - present signifiers of distant facts and future occurrences.

4. War, מִלְחָמָה (milchamah), hostile engagements; such as those with the Amalekites, the Amorites, and the Bashanites, in which the hand of God was seen rather than the hand of man.

5. A Mighty Hand, יָד חֲזָקָה (yad chazakah); one that is strong to deal its blows, irresistible in its operations, and grasps its enemies hard, so that they cannot escape, and protects its friends so powerfully that they cannot be injured. Neither stratagem nor policy was used in this business, but the openly displayed power of God.

6. A Stretched-Out Arm, זְרוֹעַ מְתוּיָה (zeroa netuyah); a series of almighty operations, following each other in quick astonishing succession. Let it be noted that in the Scriptures,

1. The finger of God denotes any manifestation of the Divine power, where effects are produced beyond the power of art or nature.

2. The hand of God signifies the same power, but put forth in a more signal manner.

3. The arm of God, the Divine omnipotence manifested in the most stupendous miracles.

4. The arm of God stretched out, this same omnipotence exerted in a continuation of stupendous miracles, both in the way of judgment and mercy. In this latter sense it appears to be taken in the text: the judgments were poured out on the Egyptians; the mercies wrought in favor of the Israelites.

7. Great Terrors, $\text{מוֹרָאִים גְּדוֹלִים}$ (moraim gedolim); such terror, dismay, and consternation as were produced by the ten plagues, to which probably the inspired penman here alludes: or, as the Septuagint has it, $\text{ἐν τῇ ὁρᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκείνου ἐπὶ τὸν Αἴγυπτον, ὡς ἐπὶ τὸν Αἴγυπτον, ὡς ἐπὶ τὸν Αἴγυπτον, ὡς ἐπὶ τὸν Αἴγυπτον}$, with great or portentous sights; such as that when God looked out of the cloud upon the Egyptians, and their chariot wheels were taken off, Exodus 14:24, Exodus 14:25. More awful displays of God's judgments, power, and might, were never witnessed by man.

Verse 41

Then Moses severed three cities - See the law relative to the cities of refuge explained, Numbers 35:11 (note), etc.

Verse 43

Bezer in the wilderness - As the cities of refuge are generally understood to be types of the salvation provided by Christ for sinners; so their names have been thought to express some attribute of the Redeemer of mankind. See them explained Joshua 20:7-8 (note).

I Suppose the last nine verses of this chapter to have been added by either Joshua or Ezra.