

Deuteronomy: Deuteronomy 4

Session 3; Dr. Cynthia Parker

This is Doctor Cynthia Parker and her teaching on the book of Deuteronomy.

This is session 3 on Deuteronomy 4.

Introduction to Deuteronomy 4 as a Hinge Chapter

Okay, see you in this lecture. We are taking a look at Deuteronomy 4; Deuteronomy 4 is such a special chapter. I really love this chapter. I'm glad we're spending an entire lecture on this one chapter because it is so full of amazing things that we need to take a look at. It is full of Eden-type echoes. We'll hear some of that. In fact, I would say that as we get into chapter 4, four is like the heartbeat, the drumbeat, of Deuteronomy. So, there are words that we catch for the first time, phrases that we touch for the first time in Deuteronomy, here in chapter 4. But we are going to hear them echo and reverberate throughout the whole rest of the book here; with chapter four, we're catching the heart of the book of Deuteronomy.

So, we have the chapters that we just took a look at, chapters 1, 2, and 3, and they gave us this historical narrative, a bit of the historical background. So we spent a little bit of time looking at where we are placed not only geographically but also historically, and so we got all of that in chapters 1, 2, and 3. So, chapter 4 is going to act as a hinge chapter for us. So, we're moving from the historical narratives toward the law code, which we're going to pick up in a little bit. Until we've got this, people were standing at the edge of the border, looking into the land that they have been told God is giving to them, and we will be picking up the requirements for how to act once they get into the land.

Chapter 4 is kind of taking us there to this. This hinges between the historical narratives and the law.

It is, like I said, the heartbeat of the book and says things that we're going to catch from chapter 4. We're getting the idea that history, the history and the narratives we told before, are so important. The idea we're going to pick it up for the very first time just as this land has been created for them. It's the good land, it's the land that God is giving to them and says you can flourish in this land, but we're catching for the very first time there may be potential for an exile. So that shows up for the first time in chapter 4, with the there's never just the threat of exile. We get there is the potential of exile, but restoration is also possible, and so that is a theme which we will hear a few different times in the book of Deuteronomy. We catch for the first time here. In chapter 4, the idea that history is significant, there's a potential for exile, but just as the exile is possible, the return is also possible, which shows up in chapter 4.

We're going to see that chapter 4 creates really nice bookends, with the very end of Deuteronomy chapters 29 to 30. I actually could spread this out and say, all the way to chapter 32. Even we could say this, but we're going to hear. Once we get into chapters 29 and 30, those lectures were going to say, "Doesn't this remind you of chapter 4?" So, there's phraseology, and it seems that ends up on both sides. That creates really nice bookends around all of the complicated talk around the law, 3. All of this is in Deuteronomy 4.

On Listening (Shema)

So, we're going to also find that Deuteronomy 4 starts with the idea of Shema, "listen." Now, this concept in Hebrew, and for the original audience, was not just to simply listen to something that's being told to you. When you are told Shema "to listen," it is a listen here and do. The doing part being tied into the

listening part. Do not just listen and intellectually play with the concepts in the ideas and see if you agree or disagree. It's not that it is "listen," so that you can comprehend and do. We hear this big cry of "listen Israel." What is happening? We're going to get that now, and 4:30 that it'll be echoed in chapter 6 and then all throughout the whole rest of Deuteronomy

So, we also have this idea that Moses is presenting "statutes and judgments." That phraseology, those two things together or something is repeated very often in the book of Deuteronomy. The statutes and the judgments are life. So, there are again, it's not just laws and a list of rules and regulations you have to follow. It is God's way of helping his people understand how to flourish as people in the land. So, the statutes and the judgments always equal life.

Moses follows that up with, if you do them, that is wisdom, right? So, it's in hearing, listening, doing the things that God has told you. Paying attention is your wisdom, and that wisdom becomes greatness. And we'll see in chapter 4 this idea that greatness will be seen in the eyes of even the surrounding people who are all around the Israelites. There is a warning that comes with it is you have to guard your heart because if you go in, if you start to think you are doing anything on your own efforts, instead of the history, remembering the history of everything God has done before you, if you start relying on yourself, that is when the possibility of exile will happen. So, you must guard your heart so that you're careful to remember that you are actually relying on God.

So, let's go ahead and start with Deuteronomy chapter 4. So Deuteronomy 4, this is where we're already starting to get some of these key phrases that are repeated throughout the book.

Moses says "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 to you. 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."

And so, we get this initial opening, and we're going to already start to hear a -- if you listen and obey the statutes and commandments, you have life. And the contrast is this warning that if you disobey, it'll equal death, and that comes in the form of remembering an event from their past,

Remembering God's Mighty Acts

In verse 3, it says, "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." Now, it's actually going back and remembering what that event is that is being referred to. You would have to go back and read Numbers chapter 25, I believe. Numbers 25 goes back and tells you the story. It's a story of the Israelites as they are traveling and they end up going through Baal-peor, and they intermarry with people, and they blend cultures, and they start to worship the idols of other people groups.

Moses, is saying remember that when you were worshipping other idols and other gods, those people are not here with us today, but you are. So, remember, because it's the statutes and the judgments of God that equal life.

And verse 4, this is where he says, "But you who held fast to the Lord, your God are alive today, every one of you."

Echoes of Genesis 3

Verse 5, "See I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the Lord, my God commanded me, that you should do this in the land where you were entering to possess it." Now I'm going to pause for just a second because this is where I personally hear additional echoes of the Genesis narratives. They're not very obvious, but what we see in this conversation, Moses, when you go into that land, it is God's way of living in that land that allows you to have life and to flourish. If you go into that land and you choose to disobey God, the exile or death is what the result is.

That actually sounds a little bit like Genesis chapter 3, right? In Genesis 3, God had the garden prepared for the humans living in the garden, and the command was to eat. Take care to do everything that you want; just don't eat from that tree over there.

Obedience = flourishing, Disobedience = exile

But as soon as they choose to go against what God says, that is when they are exiled and torn apart from the place that was created for them, it's we're starting all ready to hear the same kind of warning is going to be used throughout the book of Deuteronomy. The idea is that the land has the potential to be something like an Eden. That potential means that there's also a potential for exile to be taken out of this perfectly created place, and that is all going to hinge on what kind of obedience the people have. Will they be faithful to the way that God has told them to live? And if they are, they will flourish and have life, and God will be in their midst, and their land will provide everything that they need. But if they don't, they will be taken out. We're starting to hear that echo, even here at the beginning of chapter 4.

It will continue in verse six; this is where you need to remember the map from one of the previous videos. So, if you remember, when we talked about the trade routes, all coming through the land of the Bible, we're hearing that Deuteronomy is already quite aware of its contents, and the land and how the land functions. Listen to verse 6,

So, "keep and do them." Meaning the statutes and commandments "for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the people who will hear all of these statutes will say, 'Surely, this great nation is a wise and understanding people, 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? For what great nation is there that had statutes and judgments as righteous as this law of which I'm setting before you today?'"

There's a recognition that if the people go into their land and live according to the way that God, the standards that God has set up for his people, other people will see that. Then you could ask the very logical question, how would all these other people, see them and know,

Well, they're in the middle of the trade routes, right? So those people Traders from Egypt, going up to Mesopotamia or going into the Arabian Peninsula, the idea is as they passed through the land of the Israelites. If the Israelites are living according to God's covenant and according to God's statutes and commandments, then people, as they passed through, should notice that there is a lived difference in the way people are living.

Remember/Do not Forget Repetition

So, 4:9 "Only keep to yourself and keep your soul diligently. So that you do not forget the things 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, remember the day you stood, before the Lord your God at Horeb, number Mount Sinai, where 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 they may teach their children.' Because there's an interesting contrast, we will be talking about it in greater detail in another lecture, but in these two verses, we have in verse 9, "Do not forget," and in verse 10 "remember." These are more themes that Deuteronomy pounds on and pounds on over and over. But this is something that we should think about or at least notice; we're going to see it here. We'll talk about it more later.

What is it that they're not supposed to forget, and what is it that they're supposed to remember? So, let me read those verses again for you.

Verse nine, so halfway through, says, "So you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen, and do not depart from your heart, all the days of your life." Verse 10, "Remember the day you stood, before the Lord, your God at Horeb, When the Lord said to me."

What is it? That they're not supposed to forget. They're supposed to actively remember what's their history. Write the story even if it is the narrative of their parents, even if they were not the ones at Horeb. It's remembering that narrative because through that narrative, they get to know who God is, what God has done, and, therefore, who they are as God's people.

Seriously enough, in Deuteronomy, they are never told to remember all the laws even though the law code is right in the middle and takes up the most chapters in Deuteronomy. They're always told to remember God's character in the way that he's already acted.

Food, that is really interesting and a good thing for us to keep in mind as well. The verse 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, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. 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. 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." Interesting. They were getting a retelling of the story at Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai. But the finger of God is absent. The presence of God is demonstrated in this theophany and nature shaking, darkness, gloom, lightning, thunder, right? It's a very impressive inspiring event, but there is no image of God, that is present. The fire. Yes, but an actual image. No.

Warning Against Idols

So, we're going to build on this in the next couple of verses. In verse 14, it says, "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." And here's another warning. "So, watch yourself carefully since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire. So that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourself in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish, that is in the water below the earth. And beware, do not lift, up your eyes to the heavens, and see the sun, and the moon, and the stars and all the hosts of heaven and be drawn away, and worship them and serve them those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the people under the heaven."

We have to pause because I think this is really interesting. So, we have the setting up of the story. You were at Horeb, God showed up, you made a covenant, but you couldn't see an image of God. Now, we know from the exodus

story that the follow-up to that was Aaron, and the people decided to make a golden calf, right? That needing an image to focus their love and adoration are such a strong motivator for humans.

And so, we have in this discourse in chapter 4; we have this caution, be careful because you remember the story of Horeb. But now, when you go into the land, and you need to follow the statutes and commandments, make sure that you don't follow the instinct to create an image for yourself.

Now there's a list of images, so let me read that list and then you tell me if that rings any bells and if it sounds somewhat familiar to you, especially in some of the things I've already said about how I think Deuteronomy echoes other books. So we have the likeness of male or female, animals on the earth, winged birds, creeping crawling things, depending on how you want to interpret the Hebrew of that, the likeness of any fish and the sun, the moon, and the stars. Now we'll pause because the sun, moon, and stars; people really did worship these celestial beings and especially during the time of the Assyrians and Babylonians, and later Israelite's history. It was very common, and we find out from the prophet Jeremiah that the Israelites had adopted that kind of worship into society and that worship of other things was there. But I would say, although most commentaries focus on verse 19, I think that the whole list is really important. If you put that whole list together, perhaps maybe it sounds like Genesis 1. Because when you died creates, he creates places, in the first 3 days, and then he puts things in those places, right? And the order of it is the exact opposite as what's listed here in creation, male and females were created at the end, the sun, moon, and stars were created at the beginning and day 4.

To actually this list goes day 6, day 6,, day 5, we go back to day six but they five and a four.

What is that telling us? Well, it could be that as soon as you decide that you want to create a likeness for your heavenly Father and you do it in this way, it's like flipping the creation upside down.

So, there is something about the backwardness, and brokenness of creation where when God created, he created, and he created men and women to be in his likeness. So, when the men and women, built in God's likeness, decide to create a likeness for God, it's flipping everything on its head.

Fire at Sinai

So, do we get to verse 20? And now we're kind of finishing out a thought here, but the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace from Egypt to be a people for that position. So I love this because we started this segment all the way back up in verses 11 and 12 with God showing up as fire and in clouds right to don't create an image for him. Then at the end of verse 28 it is because God pulled you out of the furnace of Egypt. Remember who the Creator is, and if we get, for the very first time, this idea that Egypt is a place of slavery and a place of oppression. We're going to come back to Egypt in the role that Egypt plays in the book of Deuteronomy.

So, we have the fire of Sinai. The fire of Egypt doesn't react to the fire of Sinai by creating something to mimic who God is instead, let God be the Creator and the Shaper.

So, we get this segment, a couple of verses here where Moses is being told he doesn't get to enter into the land. In verse 23, it says to "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 for the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

Warning that Forgetting Leads to Exile

And then we get this extended warning. "Be careful when you become a father, when you're parents, when you have children and grandchildren, don't forget," right? And the problem is, there's this foreshadowing of the exile, of the fact "but when you do." So, there's a hope that you won't forget. But when you do forget, "you shall not live long on it, or in the land God is giving to them, but will be utterly destroyed. The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, you will be left few in number among the nations, where the Lord drives you. There you will serve gods, the work of man's hand and stone, which neither see nor hear nor smell." This is something the prophet Isaiah picks up on, and he also talks about how it is absolutely ridiculous to worship things that are created by human hands.

"But from there, you will seek the Lord your God; you will find him if you search for him with all of your heart and your soul. 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. 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 had sworn to them" (Deut. 4:29)

"Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you since the day that God created man on earth and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything been done like this great thing has anything been heard like it," right (Deut. 4:32). So, we get the warning of what there is going to be. There will be consequences if you choose to worship other gods. But even though you're scattered among the nations, even though you have dropped to a few in number, those who turn return to God and repent, there's a

restoration that is possible. To the idea that the basic Creator, God then, is the Creator God that will fight on their behalf.

In verse 34, it says, "Has any god ever tried to take for himself a nation from within another nation." This is God who took them out of the oppressive furnace of Egypt.

"And by trials, by signs, and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand by an outstretched arm and by great terror, as the Lord your God did for you. And Egypt before your eyes? To you, it was shown so that you may know that the Lord he is God, there is no other besides him." That is yet again, another statement that is repeated often throughout Deuteronomy. The God that the Israelites serve is one God, and there is no other in his midst, or among him. there's no other that is his equal. Therefore they really should not be worshipping any other gods?

I'm going to skip to verse 39. It says, "Know therefore today, and take it to your heart that the Lord he is God, in heaven above and earth below. There is no other. So, you shall keep his statutes in his commandments, which I'm giving to 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." That should already sound like an echo of the very first part, the very first verse that we read in chapter 4

3 Cities of Refuge in Trans-Jordan

Now, the concluding verses in chapter 4, totally switch gears. So, we move from this idea of the concept of the land near the place, but not forgetting, rather remembering who their God is to Moses. Now, setting up three cities of refuge. They will all be on the Eastern side of the Rift Valley, so, on the side outside the land. So it ended the area where they had already been in the

regions where they had conquered Sihon, and in those regions, they were supposed to set up three cities of refuge.

Now, the concept of a city of refuge is something that will come up again, and we will discuss it once we get into the law code. But I do want to point out here in chapter 4 those three cities of refuge.

They are named very specific places given. In fact, if we think over the last couple of lectures that we've had to have been a lot of geographical details, regions, routes, people groups, names of cities, to lots of very specific things that identify the differences in land and the differences in people living on that land.

Prospective Overview

What I want you to pay attention to as we move forward into Deuteronomy is as soon as we cast our vision forward to this land, this place where we're going, this place has so much potential. The details of the geography that will rip the people apart and separate them are no longer mentioned. It is considered one land; we don't get city names, we don't get tribal designations. In fact, the idea that there are even tribes with leaders of the tribes is also not mentioned; we start to move into cities, the bigger cities, smaller villages, how do we unify people? But once we get into the land, we stopped hearing Deuteronomy mention things very specifically. So, we'll talk about this in a little bit, especially when we get to chapter 11 because chapter 11 has this perfect opportunity to name a very significant city, and it does

Set the time, but what is Deuteronomy doing? As it is creating a place, a picture of the type of place where the Israelites could be.

Summary of Deuteronomy 4

So just in summary, we're going to look and say, in chapter 4, we have seen the idea of Mount Sinai. We've made this little comparison between Mount Sinai and a potential garden or at least borrowing from garden images. The idea is that you are actually created in God's image. And so, to flip that around is death, or the rejection of the way that God has established things to be, and God himself cannot be reduced to a portion of his creation. So that is something that the biblical narrative is very firm on: God always stands outside of creation bigger than and cannot be encapsulated into a small image or into a idol because he's so much bigger and broader than that.

It is from here we're going to move on to chapter 5 and dip our toes into the law code.

This is Doctor Cynthia Parker and her teaching on the book of Deuteronomy. This is session 3 on Deuteronomy 4.