

# Deuteronomy 4:41 to 5:6

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     6, Deuteronomy 4, verses 41 through chapter 5, verse 6 is where we will be at for our text this evening as we just continue to make our way through the book of Deuteronomy and in particular through the Old Testament or through Scripture in general as we're just gradually making our pace through there and we have come to this place in the text tonight as we continue on. You understand the setting and we always want to put this in proper context.

It helps us do that. The theme of the book of Deuteronomy really is exactly what the name is, which is second law. It's what Deuteronomy means in its little interpretation. It's second law and it doesn't mean like another law. It's the second telling of the law, the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, and it's going to be restated in chapter 5 starting in verse 7.

And going through the text there. But if you remember, this is Moses' final address, the nation of Israel before they cross the Jordan River, before they go on dry ground again across the Jordan, go into the Promised Land, and they begin to conquer and dwell within the Promised Land. They're at that place. They're really on the banks of the Jordan River here.

And he is expounding, as Deuteronomy chapter 1 tells us. He takes it upon himself to expound the law or to make clear what God is expecting of them. And we've seen how chapter 4 in particular is really the thing that throws the door wide open because for the first three chapters, Deuteronomy 1, 2, and 3, he kind of looks back at their past, of where they've been, and the faithfulness of God, and how they've got to where they're at. And chapter 4 really swings the door open to the law. And the bulk of the book of Deuteronomy chapter 5 to like the, I can't remember, it's 25th or 28th chapter. It's really just this expounding of the law. It's just making it clear.

He gives us the Ten Commandments again in chapter 5 and then really begins to hash it out. What does it look like in everyday life? What does it look like to put these things into practice? What does it look like to live in obedience to God's standard? And then he ends with blessings and curses. And, you know, if we do this, there's the blessings. If we don't do this, there are the curses and the mountains of the Lord that are going to correspond to the blessings and curses. And then we know at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses dies and God buries him. The people mourn. And then we go into the historical writings of the book of Joshua and following. So really this is a book that is closing the chapter on the Pentateuch, the first five books of scripture, but really introducing us to more and more of what God is doing in the history of his people. So let's pray.

[ 2 : 49 ] Lord, we thank you so much just for allowing us to be here tonight. We thank you for this opportunity. And God, we are privileged every time we gather together and we open up your word and we understand the blessing that that is. And God, we pray that you'd speak to us now through your word and pray, Lord, that it would be your voice that is heard, not the thoughts or the opinions or even the interpretations of man, but it would be the very word of God that would grip us to the core of our being and Lord, mold us and shape us and conform us more and more to your image for your glory and honor. We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Deuteronomy chapter 4, starting in verse 41 and going into chapter 5, verse 6. If you remember, Moses has just reiterated the holiness of God and the presence of God and really what God is doing about how God has in particular taken these people for his own possession. The last time we were in this, he said, consider from all under the heavens, has there been any other people who's ever heard the voice of their God? Is there any other people that has ever had a God who would go into a nation and take from within that nation his own people? Is there anybody else that has such a relationship with the Lord their God as you do? He's encouraging them to obedience. He's encouraging them to faithfulness. Now, I'll tell you this. We understand there are genres of scripture, right? I know we're on Sunday nights and we'll try to make it a little bit more exciting than normal, but it's also good to have some teaching. By the way, those are two different offices of a pastor. He is to preach and teach, right? He is to preach the message and he is to teach the word and it's part of the responsibility.

So anyway, complete side note there. But we understand all these genres that we have in scripture and we have love stories, we have poetry, we have historical writings and they're written in time and space and history and God moves the men of God by the spirit of God to write the word of God in their context.

Some Bible scholars will tell you, and I think it really bears a little bit of weight of repeating, that the book of Deuteronomy mirrors what would be very common in history when Moses is delivering this of how a ruling monarch would reiterate the covenant with the people he rules over.

Okay? This is what I've done for you. This is how I've brought you to myself. This is what has happened. This is what I require of you. This is what that requirement looks like. And this, if you obey me, this is what will happen. And this is, if you disobey me, this is what will happen. So it is kind of this mirror image of God is doing so much more than telling his people the law again, right?

He's doing so much more than asking Moses to preach a message. God, we need to understand this, God is showing and dictating to his people what it looks like to live in the covenant relationship with him. We need to be careful and interpret those things because this isn't just some legal standard of rules and regulations. Do this, don't do this, behave this way, make sure you don't eat this food, make sure you don't touch this, make sure you behave this way, make sure you don't carry anything. We don't want to take it to where the Pharisees and the religious zealots took it in the time of Christ where we have all these laws and rules and regulations, but there's no relationship, right? The reason God has these things in here is we're going to live in relationship with one another. And as we live in a covenant relationship, this is what your life is going to look like.

[ 6 : 40 ]

It's going to look different. And he is giving them clarity here. And it's a merciful thing that God does that. But we read in Deuteronomy chapter four, starting in verse 41, then Moses set apart three cities across the Jordan to the east that a manslayer might flee there who unintentionally slew his neighbor without having enmity towards him in time past. And by fleeing to one of these cities, he might live. Bezerin, the wilderness of the plateau of the Reubenites, and Ramoth, and Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan and Bashan for the Manassites. Now this is the law which Moses set before the sons of Israel. These are the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which Moses spoke to the sons of Israel when they came out from Egypt across the Jordan in the valley opposite Beth-de-or 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. They took possession of his land and the land of Ag, king of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites who were across the Jordan to the east from Aurora, which is on the edge of the Valley of Arnon, even as far as Mount Sihon, that is Hermon, with all the Arab across the Jordan to the east, even as far as the sea of the Arab at the foot of the slopes of Pisgah. Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully. The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today. The Lord spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, while I was standing between the Lord and you at that time to declare to you the word of the Lord, for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain. He said, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and just stop right there. I want you to see this evening an introduction to the law, because Moses now is done rehashing the past, so to say. We'll see in just a moment that he declares some things from the past. He is done looking back, and he really is focusing his attention looking forward, and looking forward, he is going to reiterate or reemphasize the importance of the law and that covenant in which they are living with the Lord their God, and how their lives would look different, and how they should look different, because if you remember, they are to live lives of difference so that other people would notice them and see them and take notice and say, there is something peculiar about that people, and people would observe them, and in their observation, they would say, well, the only difference is they are in this relationship with the one they call the Lord their God, and he seems to be making a difference in their life, and God is going to use them to draw people to himself through their display of this covenant, and Moses here is introducing the standards, that is the Ten Commandments of what God expects and what God demands, and he's going to introduce these again, and then after the introduction of them, he's going to begin to work it out and expound it and make it clear and show them exactly what it looks like to live in such a way. When we get to them, we'll read them next time we get together, probably Wednesday night, the Lord allows us to. We see in these Ten Commandments that they are more than standards and rules and regulations. They are also a reflection of the character of God. They begin to show who God is, right? And they begin to show his concern and his longing and his desires for his people to look like him. But as he introduces that, I think there are three very particular events here that if we're not careful, we kind of glance over them and we don't give them much more thought, like this establishing of the three cities and where they were staying at when he said this. Why do these things matter? Now, I fully believe, and I assume you do too, that God did not make mistakes

in the Word of God, that everything is there intentionally, that everything is written perfectly. I believe the Word of God is perfect. I believe it's accurate. I believe even what we would call the incidentals are there for a purpose. And I believe that God has so arranged his scripture to speak to us in a powerful way as Moses here is introducing the law. He has already declared how his people are set apart. You're set apart. You are set apart people for the glory of God. And now that's what he's done all of chapter four up to this point. And now he's going to declare to them that they are set apart by their standard. And as he introduces it, I want you to see three very moving truths.

Number one, there is the gracious provision. Because when we hear law, we think rules. We think rulership, which we should. God is the ruler and the authoritative figure. But when we hear law, we don't think grace, right? We hear law, we think restrictions. We think regulations. We think all these things. And it's there. But I think it's important that Moses displays God's gracious provisions before he declares God's high standard. And he does that with, then Moses set apart three cities. These cities of refuge. They're important. The cities of refuge are very important. You know that God has declared to Moses that when they enter the promised land, they should have cities of refuge.

And when they go into this place, and you remember from our study in the book of Leviticus, how these cities of refuge were to be places to which someone could run to. And what is awesome about this and what is wonderful about these cities of refuge is a foreigner could run there. You know, a slave could run there. A native of the land, someone from Israel descent or Jewish descent could run there.

Anyone living among them could run there. And it was if you had accidentally killed someone. Maybe it's not that you had strife or not that you had anger or bitterness towards them. Maybe you were working in the field together and it was completely accidental. Well, now in those days, you know, you had blood feuds. You killed my brother. I'm going to come kill you and your brother. You know, that's just the way it works. That was just, I mean, it was like the wild, wild west, I guess you could say a little bit. It was, it was just, they took matters into their own hands. But, but God in his grace and his mercy says, we're just not going to live it up to man to decide what's right and wrong. I'm going to provide places or cities of refuge that you could run to. And when you run to that city of refuge, you're free. You can live there, right? They're not going to hand you over. Now the elders of that city were going to meet you at the gate. And when you got there, you would have to declare your case to them and, and they would judge your case. Now, if you were guilty, if they said, well, no, no, I think there's more to the story than that, right? I think you, you were really seeking to kill this individual or you, you really had it in your heart and in your mind of bitterness and anger.

[ 13 : 39 ] And then they would hand you over to the judge. But if you came and you were innocent and you really didn't mean to do it, then the elders would welcome you into this city of refuge and you would be there and you could live your life there free from concern or free from retribution until the death of the high priest. And after the death of the high priest, then you could, you were free to move back because then you're exonerated. But if you left that city of refuge before the high priest's death, then if the blood avenger found you, then he was innocent because you had a place you could go stay safely. You just chose to move outside that realm. Now that's, that's a long discussion because we understand Jesus is our city of refuge, right? He is our place of refuge. We, we go to Christ even in our guilt and, and is there, we find freedom from the avenger. It is there, we find forgiveness for the sin and that high priest, he is our great high priest. He's never going to die.

So we can't ever leave the presence of Jesus Christ. We can never leave the presence of his provision. But what we see is Moses sets three cities across the Jordan to the east because there were going to be more set up on the other side of the Jordan River when they go into the promised land. But two and a half tribes are now occupying this land to the east. The Transjordan area where Sihon and Og used to have their kingdoms, Amorite kingdoms, and now we have two and a half tribes over here. So God's not going to exclude them. So they established three cities. Now that's gracious. That's gracious. Right? Before God declares his holy standard, he, he provides a way for man to find freedom to live. He provides a way for man to find security and he makes it accessible. One of the great things that we see in the Old Testament is every one of these provisions of God are accessible to all because he sets them up in such a manner. Now we would just overlook this and say, oh yeah, well there were some cities over there to declare. He sets them up in such a manner so that any who may need it can access it. And this is God's idea, not Moses's idea.

Right? He who is going to say, do not kill provides a way that if an accident happens, you have a way to secure your own life. You can run to that city. You can flee to that city. And I don't think that it's just happenstance that before we get to the declaration of God's standards and, and the weight of all of that, in which if we were to be honest that none of us could read the 10 commandments and say we would ever live through that. Right? Because according to the 10 commandments, every one of us have fallen short somewhere. And it tells us in the New Testament that if we've fallen short in one point, we're guilty of the whole thing. Right? At some point, somebody that we have to acknowledge, we failed here and therefore we are deserving of judgment. But God in his grace shows us that before there's judgment, there's a city of refuge. And what a gracious provision to start out with.

Before Moses says, these are the things that you, you shall and you shall not do because they're divided in that way, the you shalls and the you shall nots. Before these, let me show you that God is making accessible to you a place of refuge. That's good. That's grace. That's wonderful.

Because those places of refuge are pointing to a person who is Jesus Christ. And when we read this Old Testament and we, we see these standards that are so high and unattainable, we are so thankful for God's gracious provisions of a place of refuge who is Jesus Christ. So we see here the gracious provision.

[ 17 : 32 ] Secondly, we see the victorious position because again, he's really introducing the law and he's going to say, this is what God expects of you. And this is what God demands of you. And this is how you should live. But where is he declaring this at? It says, now this is the law, verse 44, which Moses set before the sons of Israel. These are the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances, which Moses spoke to the sons of Israel when they came out from Egypt. Now, so, okay, well, that would be good.

And then he begins to tell us exactly where he is saying it at, right? He says, across the Jordan and the valley opposite Beth Peor in the land of Sihon, king of the Amorites who lived in Heshbon, whom Moses and the sons of Israel defeated when they came out from Egypt, they took possession of his land and the land of Og, king of Bashan and the two kings of the Amorites. And he just, he goes on and on and on. Why does that matter? Why does that matter? Because literally they are standing in victory, right? They are living in a land that belonged to kings more powerful than them.

Sihon and Og were two big boys on the block, right? There were these chants about how powerful Sihon and the god Chemosh of Sihon was on that side of the Jordan. Others would declare that the god of Chemosh and Sihon king are victorious in their strength. And when we read the book of Numbers, we saw how the nation of Israel used that song that others of that land would declare how great Sihon was, they used it kind of in mockery and said, well, yeah, he was good, but not bigger than our god because the nation of Israel had defeated them. And it wasn't because of their own strength, right? They, in their own strength, are not big enough or powerful enough or mighty enough or large enough to run out Sihon and Og out of the land. Og, remember, he's a giant. He's the one that, his tomb covering is huge. It's like 13 feet long by 9 feet wide.

It's called his bedstead. And we saw how the little interpretation of that is probably a rock, a large rock with an iron wrapping around it that would cover his tomb. That's how big of a hole they had to dig for him. He's a big guy. But what we see is the very place that God is declaring his standards is a place of victory. Because if God is gracious to provide places of refuge, and if God is so powerful to ensure you stand in victory, then shouldn't God's people respond in obedience?

Because he is saying, look, it's not like I'm unable. I have already shown you the victory. I've already shown you my might. I've already shown you my ability. God has declared to them through the very, I mean, they literally were standing in a place of victory. And they're standing there and they're going, you know, this is our land now.

[ 20 : 40 ] This belongs to us. We don't deserve this, but God has brought it about. And now since God has provided this position we stand in, surely we should move forward in absolute obedience.

Because now as we put ourselves in the position of those who are hearing it, we realize that, yes, God has given us places to run to. Yes, God has raised us up victoriously over our enemies that have come before us.

And yes, God is deserving of our obedience. And then as we move into chapter 5, and by the way, I won't be very long tonight, and that's okay. I don't think I went very long this morning. I won't be very long tonight, and I don't say that apologetically. I got in trouble Wednesday for apologizing, so I'm not apologizing. I'm just making a declaration to you. Sometimes my mind has to stop short. Sometimes it can go long. But as we go into chapter 5, we see the third thing, and it's their testimonial past. Because Moses begins to introduce this through a gracious provision. He shows them their victorious position, and then he reminds them again, one more reminder before they hear the standard of the past that testifies to them. Because he declares here, this is God's expectation.

Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking to you in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully. They were to hear, to learn, and to observe. This is not something just to be listened to lightly. This is not something to go, okay, well, yeah, that sounds pretty good. They were to hear them. They were to learn them. And they were to observe them. We've already seen in Deuteronomy chapter 4, how they were to teach them to their children. We will see again in Deuteronomy chapter 6, how they were to speak of them often to their children. When you walk down the road, when you sit down in your house, when you lie down, write them on the doorpost of your doors, and write them on your foreheads, and write them everywhere you go. Everywhere you go, you are to be doing this.

You are to be putting these into practice. Well, how could you teach those who came after you if you did not first hear them and learn them yourself? So this was not something to be taken lightly. This is something that comes with a lot of weight of responsibility. And he declares to them that it is worth hearing, it is worth learning, and it is worth observing because of their past.

[ 23 : 17 ] And I love how he bridges the gap because if we're this generation now, the generation that is standing before Moses, there's only three people in the whole congregation that were over 20 when the nation failed to enter the promised land some 38 years prior. Right? Moses.

He's not going across. Moses knows he's dying. And Joshua and Caleb. So only two. Only two would have been what we would say old enough to really remember what it was like standing at Mount Sinai.

You know, the smoke and the thunder and the fire and the brimstone. Some of them may have vague memories of when they were young. Some weren't even alive. And there would be this temptation. We find it repeated in the book of Judges. I kind of alluded to it this morning. There would be this temptation to say, well, that was an experience of our fathers, not an experience of us.

To say, well, that has nothing to do with us. Because Judges starts its sad trajectory with this, that all of those who knew the God of Joseph, not Joseph, all those who knew the workings of the God in the wilderness died.

Those who had followed Joshua, those who had walked with Caleb, they passed away. And the people forgot. They didn't teach the generation that came after them. They didn't learn these things and repeat these things and observe these things.

[ 25 : 01 ] They weren't familiar with what God, that's why so many of the Psalms speak of what God did in the wilderness, to remind the people of what had happened there. But we see this. He reminds them, he says, Then Moses summoned all, Israel said to them.

One commentator says it very well, that what is about to take place is all-inclusive. It's not just for a select few. This is for everybody, right?

This standard, this covenant, this expectation of God, is for all of Israel. It's not just for the leaders. It's not just for the Levites.

It's not just for the priests. This is for everyone. So he summoned all of them. And he says, Here's this testimonial pass.

He doesn't say God made a covenant with our fathers. He says God made a covenant with us. Because that which had happened in the past now finds application in the present.

[ 26 : 15 ] He says, The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today. Again, the inclusion of all of us, and the reality that that which we look back on in the past, we cannot say, well, that's what happened back then.

Because we have to say, back then God made a covenant with me now. This covenant is for me. This expectation is for me. This is what he's declaring to them.

The past testifies to them that God was speaking to them and declaring the standard to them. It says, The Lord spoke to you face to face in the mountain from the midst of the fire while I was standing between the Lord and you at that time to declare the word of the Lord.

For you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain. He said, Again, it's just this reminder of the holiness and the glory of God. And, you know, many of them probably would have just a vague memory, if any memory whatsoever.

And Moses is just telling them, The things of the past, they are applicable today. It is for you. They need to hear that. Because they're not about to hear a law that was given to their fathers.

[ 27 : 27 ] They're about to hear a covenant that God has given to them. It matters. Because our faith doesn't rest on what God did for someone else.

Our faith rests on what he's done for us. And he declares to them, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. This is one of the few times that Moses goes back in the book of Deuteronomy to the place of slavery.

Now, some of them could probably honestly say, like the Pharisees would later say to Jesus, I've never been enslaved to anyone. I've never been enslaved to anyone.

Some of them weren't born when they were in Egypt, right? Some of them would have been born in the wilderness. But God is declaring, I am your Redeemer.

I am he who brought you out of the land. What is he saying? That past, that testimony in the past, you would still be slaves if it wasn't for me. I have set you free.

[ 28 : 33 ] And now, again, this introduction is just a motivation for the people because, look, if God is so gracious to provide places of refuge in our most troublesome moments, if God is so mighty to ensure that we stand in positions of victory, and if the past testifies to us of all that he has done for us, then surely, the standard he's about to declare is worth our obedience.

It's worth our commitment. We need to learn these things and hear these things and observe these things because of all he's done in the past.

Now, I know, we're looking at this Old Testament, right? We're on this side of the cross. We're on this side of the empty tomb. But the standard of God for his people has not changed.

God still declares we live in a covenant relationship of obedience with him, that we hear what it is he's telling us, that we learn it in our lives so that we can declare it to the people who come after us, and that we observe all that he commands us to do.

Right? We know that. We, like the nation of Israel, like Moses here, can look at these things. We can see the gracious provisions of God in our own life.

[ 29 : 59 ] Nobody else had to provide the things that he has richly provided for us. We can see the victories he's already given us over past enemies, and we can see the victories that he allows us to stand in on a daily basis.

And we can hear the testimony of the past resonating how God's faithfulness with his people, God's faithfulness with his church, God's faithfulness towards us moves us to live today to respond in obedience to all that he is declaring to us.

See, when God speaks, he doesn't just speak in void. He speaks on the foundation of all that he's already done. And it's good for us as we open up the word and we see to take the same approach that Moses did to say, well, if God is who he says he is, and he is, and if he has done in my own life all that he has declared he has, and he has, then shouldn't I hear him, learn of him, and observe him in all that I do for his glory and his alone.

Let's pray. Lord, I thank you again for this night and I thank you for your word and we thank you for the richness of the Old Testament passages.

God, we pray that even as we study the historical interactions you have with your people that we would be moved to live lives of obedience today. Lord, that our hearts and minds would be set upon living in that covenant relationship with you, following you for your glory and your honor, lifting your name and your worthiness up for all to see.

[ 31 : 45 ] May we be a people set apart by our obedience to you and may you be magnified through it and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.