

The Book of Deuteronomy, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: A Call to Obey and Remember

Deuteronomy 4:1–49

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter brings two great doctrines to the foreground: the authority and sufficiency of God's word, and the oneness and uniqueness of God. Moses' command not to add to or take from God's word (4:2) establishes a principle that runs through all of Scripture (Proverbs 30:5–6; Revelation 22:18–19) and protects the church in every age from both legalistic addition and liberal subtraction. The student must come to see God's revealed word as complete, authoritative, and sufficient, a treasure to be guarded rather than edited.

Equally central is the confession that the Lord is God and there is no other (4:35, 39). This grounds the prohibition of idolatry, not in arbitrary rule but in the very nature of God, who is living, speaking, invisible, and utterly unique. This truth carries straight into the New Testament, where Jesus affirms the Lord is one (Mark 12:29) and Paul confesses one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 8:6). To worship anything else, or to reduce God to an image of our own making, is to exchange the living God for a lie.

The lesson also aims at the heart. Moses calls Israel to remember, to teach the next generation, and to seek God with all their heart and soul, with the tender promise of mercy for those who return to Him. The student is therefore being formed, not merely informed: to hold fast God's word, to tear down the functional idols that compete for his devotion, and to seek the one true God wholeheartedly. The Old Law given through Moses is now fulfilled in Christ and not bound on Christians, but its witness to the authority of God's word and the oneness of God instructs us still (Romans 15:4).

Question 1

Student Question:

From Deuteronomy 4:1–8, why does Moses tie obedience to God's statutes so closely to Israel's life, wisdom, and witness among the nations, and what does this reveal about the purpose and goodness of God's law?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses ties obedience to three things: life, wisdom, and witness. Keeping God's statutes is the way Israel will live and go in to possess the land (4:1); it is their wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples (4:6); and it makes the nations marvel, what great nation has a god so near and laws so righteous (4:7–8). Obedience is not joyless duty; it is the path of flourishing.

This reveals the purpose and goodness of God's law. The commandments were never arbitrary hoops. They expressed the character of a wise and holy God and were given for Israel's good (Deuteronomy 10:13). To obey was to align with reality as God made it, and so to live well and to shine before the watching nations.

There is also a missional dimension. Israel's obedience was meant to display God's wisdom to the world. A people living by God's righteous statutes would provoke the nations to ask about the God behind such laws. Holiness was to be a witness.

For the student, this reframes obedience. God's commands are not restrictions that diminish life but wisdom that enriches it. The Old Law is fulfilled in Christ and not bound on us today, yet the principle endures: God's revealed will is good, life-giving, and meant to make His people a light to the world.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Obedience tied to life, wisdom, and witness
- The goodness and purpose of God's commands
- Law as expression of God's character, not arbitrary rule
- Holiness as a witness to the nations
- The Old Law fulfilled in Christ, its principles instructive still

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Moses link obedience to life, wisdom, and witness?
- How does this reframe how we view God's commands?
- How is the obedience of God's people meant to witness to the world?

Question 2

Student Question:

Moses says keeping God's word is Israel's wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples (4:6). How seriously do you treat God's word as wisdom for daily life rather than as restriction? Where do you need to trust it more?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses calls God's statutes Israel's wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples (4:6). God's word is not merely true; it is wise, the most practical guide to a flourishing life. The nations would recognize this wisdom when they saw it lived out.

We often treat God's word as restriction, a list of things we cannot do. But Moses presents it as wisdom, the insight of the Maker into how His creatures truly flourish. To live by it is to live wisely; to ignore it is folly, however clever it feels.

The test is daily and practical. Do we actually consult Scripture as wisdom for our decisions, relationships, money, words, and priorities, or do we reserve it for Sundays and run our weeks by other counsel?

The student is asked where he needs to trust God's word more as wisdom rather than restriction, naming one concrete area. The aim is to move from grudging compliance to glad confidence that God's way really is the wise way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's word as wisdom, not mere restriction
- Trusting Scripture as practical guidance for life
- Treating the Bible as Sunday-only versus daily counsel
- Glad confidence versus grudging compliance

Discussion Prompts

- Do you treat God's word mainly as wisdom or as restriction?
- In what area do you most need to trust its wisdom?
- What would change if you ran your week by God's counsel?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Deuteronomy 4:2, Moses commands that nothing be added to or taken from God's word. What does this teach about the authority, sufficiency, and completeness of what God has revealed, and how does this principle carry through Scripture?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it (4:2). This single verse establishes a foundational principle about God's revelation. His word is authoritative, sufficient, and complete; it is not to be edited in either direction. To add is to bind what God has not bound; to subtract is to loosen what God has fixed. Both corrupt the word and dishonor its Author.

This principle runs like a thread through all of Scripture. Proverbs warns, do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you (Proverbs 30:6). Revelation closes the canon with a solemn warning against adding to or taking from the words of the book (Revelation 22:18–19). God guards His word jealously, for His people live by every word that proceeds from His mouth.

Both errors have plagued God's people throughout history. The Pharisees added their traditions until they nullified the commandment of God (Mark 7:6–13). Others subtract, softening or removing what offends them, until the word no longer rebukes or commands. Faithfulness

means receiving God's word whole, neither inflating it with human rules nor deflating it to suit human preference.

This protects the sufficiency of Scripture. What God has revealed is enough; we need not supplement it with human authority, and we dare not diminish it with human editing. For the church this means we speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where it is silent, holding the apostolic pattern as our complete and sufficient guide (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

For the student, this is foundational. The authority is God's, not ours. Our task is not to improve or revise His word but to hear it, hold it, and obey it. The same God who spoke at Horeb has spoken finally in His Son (Hebrews 1:1–2), and that word stands complete.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The authority, sufficiency, and completeness of God's word
- Two opposite errors, adding and subtracting
- The principle running through Scripture to Revelation 22
- Human tradition that nullifies God's command
- Speaking where the Bible speaks, silent where it is silent
- God's final word spoken in His Son

Discussion Prompts

- What two opposite errors does this command guard against?
- How does this principle appear elsewhere in Scripture?
- What does it mean to receive God's word whole and complete?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where are you tempted either to add your own rules to God's word or to quietly subtract the parts you find difficult? Be specific about one area.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The command not to add or subtract presses on the conscience because both temptations live in every heart. Some of us are adders, layering on rules, scruples, and traditions until our own preferences feel like God's law. Others are subtractors, quietly setting aside the commands we find inconvenient or culturally embarrassing.

Adding can look pious. It can dress private opinions in the authority of God and bind them on others. But it burdens consciences God has not burdened and shifts trust from God's word to human rules. Subtracting can look reasonable, even loving, but it silences God where He has spoken and leaves us as our own authority.

The cure for both is the same: submit to the word as it stands. Let it bind what God binds and free what God frees, neither more nor less. This requires humility, the willingness to be corrected by Scripture rather than to correct it.

The student is asked to name one specific area where he tends to add his own rules or subtract what he finds difficult. Naming the temptation honestly is the first step toward receiving God's word whole.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to add human rules
- The temptation to subtract difficult commands
- Dressing personal preference as God's law
- Making ourselves our own authority by editing Scripture
- Humility to be corrected by the word

Discussion Prompts

- Are you more tempted to add to or subtract from God's word?
- What is one specific area where this temptation shows up?
- What would it look like to submit to the word as it stands?

Question 5

Student Question:

From Deuteronomy 4:9–14, why does Moses press Israel so hard to remember Horeb and teach it to their children, and what does this teach about the danger of forgetting and the duty of passing faith on?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses presses hard: take care, keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and make them known to your children and your children's children (4:9). He recalls the day at Horeb when they stood before the mountain that burned with fire and heard God's voice (4:10–13). Memory is treated as a matter of spiritual life and death.

The danger of forgetting is real and recurring. Israel's whole history is a cycle of God acting mightily, the people remembering for a season, then forgetting and drifting into sin. Forgetting is not innocent; it loosens our grip on God and opens the door to idolatry and disobedience.

Against forgetting, Moses sets the duty of teaching. Faith is to be passed on deliberately, parent to child, generation to generation. What is not taught is soon lost. The covenant community survives by remembering together and handing the truth forward.

For the student, this is a call to active, intentional remembering and teaching. We forget easily; we must therefore work at recalling what God has done and at passing it on to those who come after us. Spiritual heritage is never inherited automatically; it is taught.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Memory as a matter of spiritual life and death
- The recurring danger of forgetting God
- The duty to teach faith to the next generation
- Faith handed forward deliberately, not automatically
- Remembering Horeb and the voice of God

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Moses treat remembering so seriously?
- What happens to God's people when they forget?
- How are we to pass faith on to the next generation?

Question 6

Student Question:

Moses warns, take care lest you forget the things your eyes have seen (4:9). What spiritual experiences or truths are you in danger of forgetting, and how can you keep them fresh and pass them on?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses warns, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life (4:9). Forgetting begins quietly, a truth that fades, an experience of God that grows dim, a conviction that loses its edge.

We are all prone to this. Answered prayers, seasons of God's nearness, lessons learned through hardship, all can slip away if we do not deliberately keep them before us. The fading is gradual, which makes it dangerous; we rarely notice until the warmth is gone.

Scripture commends practices that fight forgetting: rehearsing God's works, keeping His word before our eyes, teaching others, gathering with the saints, and the Lord's Supper itself, given so we would remember (1 Corinthians 11:24–25). Remembering is a discipline, not an accident.

The student is asked to name spiritual truths or experiences he is in danger of forgetting, and how he can keep them fresh and pass them on. The aim is intentional remembering that guards the heart and blesses the next generation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gradual, quiet nature of spiritual forgetting
- Keeping God's works and word continually before us
- Practices that fight forgetting
- Passing on what we are in danger of losing

Discussion Prompts

- What spiritual truths or experiences are you in danger of forgetting?
- How can you keep them fresh in your heart?
- Whom can you teach so that what you have learned is passed on?

Question 7

Student Question:

In Deuteronomy 4:15–31, the warning against idolatry is grounded in the fact that Israel saw no form of God at Horeb. Why is making any image of God so serious, and what does this reveal about the nature of God and how He is to be worshiped?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The warning against idolatry is grounded in a specific fact: at Horeb Israel saw no form, only heard a voice (4:12, 15). Therefore, Moses reasons, they must not corrupt themselves by making a carved image in the form of anything, man, animal, bird, fish, or heavenly body (4:16–19). Because they saw no form, they must not invent one.

This reveals something profound about God. He is invisible, living, and personal, known by His word rather than captured in an image. To make an image of God is to reduce the infinite Creator to a finite, lifeless thing, to exchange the glory of the living God for a substitute we can manage and control (Romans 1:23). Every idol is a lie about God.

Idolatry is serious because it strikes at the very nature of God and the nature of true worship. God is to be worshiped as He has revealed Himself, by His word and on His terms, not as we imagine or prefer Him to be. An image, however beautiful, inevitably distorts and dishonors Him. This is why the warning carries the threat of exile (4:25–27) and yet also the promise of mercy for those who return and seek Him with all their heart (4:29–31).

There is grace woven through even this warning. Moses foresees Israel's failure and exile, but immediately points beyond it: in your distress, when you return to the Lord and obey His voice, He will not fail you or forget His covenant (4:30–31). God's holiness about worship and His mercy toward the repentant stand together.

For the student, this passage governs worship to this day. God is to be approached as He has revealed Himself, in spirit and truth (John 4:24), not reshaped into an image, physical or mental,

that suits us. We do not dwell among carved idols, but we must guard against every reduction of God to something more comfortable and controllable than the living God who speaks.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Idolatry grounded in God having no visible form
- God as invisible, living, personal, known by His word
- An image reduces and distorts the infinite God
- Worship on God's terms, not ours
- The threat of exile and the promise of mercy together
- Worship in spirit and truth carried into the New Testament

Discussion Prompts

- Why does seeing no form at Horeb forbid making an image of God?
- What does an idol get wrong about the nature of God?
- How are we to worship God as He has revealed Himself?

Question 8

Student Question:

Idolatry begins in the heart long before it takes a visible form. What functional idols, things you trust, serve, or treasure above God, do you need to confront in your own life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Long before an idol is carved, idolatry is conceived in the heart. An idol is anything we trust, serve, or treasure above God, anything that takes the place in our hearts that belongs to Him alone (Colossians 3:5 calls covetousness idolatry).

Few of us bow to carved images, yet functional idols abound: money, status, comfort, approval, romance, career, even family or self. Whatever we look to for security and significance instead of God, whatever we will not surrender to Him, has become a rival god.

These idols are subtle precisely because they are often good things turned into ultimate things. The remedy is not merely to behave better but to dethrone the false god and restore God to His rightful place, loving Him with all the heart (Matthew 22:37).

The student is asked to confront the functional idols in his own life honestly, naming what he trusts or treasures above God. Self-examination here is uncomfortable but freeing; idols enslave, while the living God sets us free to worship Him alone.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Idolatry as a matter of the heart before it is visible

- Functional idols, money, status, comfort, approval, self
- Good things turned into ultimate things
- Dethroning idols and restoring God to His place
- Wholehearted love for God as the cure

Discussion Prompts

- What functional idols compete for your heart?
- How can a good thing become an idol?
- What would it look like to dethrone that idol and worship God alone?

Question 9

Student Question:

Deuteronomy 4:32–40 builds to the great confession that the Lord is God, there is no other besides Him (4:35, 39). What is at stake in the oneness and uniqueness of God, and how does this truth confront every rival to Him and carry forward into the New Testament?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter builds to one of the towering confessions of the Old Testament. Moses asks whether any other people ever heard God speak from fire and live, or saw a god take a nation out of the midst of another by signs and wonders (4:32–34). The conclusion is overwhelming: to you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides Him (4:35), and again, the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth beneath; there is no other (4:39).

Everything is at stake in this confession. If the Lord alone is God, then He alone is to be worshiped, obeyed, and trusted; every rival is exposed as nothing. The oneness and uniqueness of God is the bedrock of all true religion. It dethrones every idol, relativizes every human power, and demands undivided allegiance. There is no second god to hedge our bets with, no rival to share our hearts.

This truth is not abstract; it is grounded in history. God demonstrated His uniqueness by speaking, by delivering Israel from Egypt, by acts no other so-called god ever performed. Israel did not reason their way to monotheism; God revealed Himself in mighty, public acts so they would know. The uniqueness of God is a revealed fact, not a human theory.

This confession carries straight into the New Testament. Jesus quotes it as the first and greatest commandment: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love Him with all your heart (Mark 12:29–30). Paul affirms there is no God but one, one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 8:4–6). The oneness of God is not left behind in the Old Testament; it is the foundation on which the gospel stands, now revealing the Father, Son, and Spirit as the one true God.

For the student, this truth confronts every rival to God in his life and demands wholehearted devotion. If the Lord alone is God, then half-hearted, divided worship is a contradiction. The only response worthy of the one true God is to love Him with everything we are and to bow to no other.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Lord alone is God, there is no other
- The oneness and uniqueness of God as the bedrock of true worship
- Every rival exposed and dethroned
- Monotheism revealed in history, not reasoned by men
- Jesus affirming the Lord is one as the greatest commandment
- One God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament
- Undivided allegiance as the only fitting response

Discussion Prompts

- What is at stake in the confession that there is no other God?
- How did God demonstrate His uniqueness to Israel?
- How does Jesus carry this truth forward in the New Testament?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking across the whole chapter, the call to obey, the warning against idolatry, the oneness of God, the promise of mercy to those who seek Him wholeheartedly, name one specific way Jesus is forming you to hold God's word, worship God alone, and seek Him with all your heart.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter weaves together the threads of the whole lesson: hold fast God's word without adding or subtracting, worship God alone and make no idol, remember and teach, and seek the Lord with all your heart, with mercy promised to those who return. At the center stands the one true God who speaks, who is unique, and who is near to all who seek Him.

Jesus forms us through this chapter on every front. He is the living Word who reveals the Father (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1-2), so that holding God's word now means holding fast to Him. He affirms the oneness of God and commands wholehearted love (Mark 12:29-30). And He is the mercy this chapter promises, the one in whom we who were far off are brought near and find the God we seek.

The three great calls of the chapter, hold God's word, worship God alone, seek Him wholeheartedly, are not Old Testament relics but the very shape of Christian discipleship. The Old Law given through Moses is fulfilled in Christ and not bound on us, yet its witness to the

authority of God's word and the oneness of God instructs us still and is taken up and deepened in the gospel.

The student should name one specific way Jesus is forming him here: a renewed reverence for God's complete word, an idol to tear down, or a half-hearted seeking to make whole. The goal is a disciple who holds Scripture, worships the one true God alone, and seeks Him with all his heart and soul.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holding God's word, worshiping God alone, seeking Him wholeheartedly
- Jesus as the living Word who reveals the Father
- Christ affirming the oneness of God and wholehearted love
- The Old Law fulfilled in Christ, its witness instructing us still
- Mercy in Christ for those who seek God
- Naming one concrete area of formation

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the chapter's three great calls most challenges you?
- How does Jesus fulfill and deepen the truths of this chapter?
- What one step will you take to seek God with all your heart?