

# Adult Teaching Resources

September 2, 2018



Doing, and Being  
(September 2-November 25)

**Deuteronomy 4:1-15 (RCL 4:1-2, 6-9) – “Following Through”**

Psalm 146 – “Trusting God”

Isaiah 50:4-9 (RCL 50:4-9a) – “Standing Firm”

Psalm 1 – “Living Wisely”

Psalm 124 – “Offering Praise”

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# Following Through

## Deuteronomy 4:1-15 (RCL 4:1-2, 6-9)

### FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Bible Background

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*“But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children ...” Deuteronomy 4:9*

This is Labor Day weekend. Officially, tomorrow is Labor Day and we celebrate our workers and vocations. Unofficially, tomorrow marks the end of summer. Labor Day marks the beginning of a new school year, and for many of us, marks the year by which we plan and structure our lives.

In today’s passage, we are reminded what we are to do as faithful followers of God. We are reminded what we are to teach others, especially our children, as faithful followers of God. Today’s passage comes at the perfect time—a passage of instruction as a new school year begins.

### Opening

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After everyone arrives, ask the group to share their favorite “back-to-school” memories. Encourage them to share their own memories, the ones they experienced through their children, and if appropriate, the ones of their grandchildren.

What did you look forward to at the beginning of a new school year?

Was there something special you had to buy that you couldn’t wait to get at the beginning of the new year?

What words of instruction did your parents share with you as school started?

What words of instruction did you share with your children as school started?

What do you remember your teachers telling you on the first day?

What did you most look forward to with a new school year?

## Reading the Bible

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Why should Israel give heed to statutes and ordinances? (so that they may live to enter and occupy the land the Lord is giving them)

What are we to add or take from the commandments? (add nothing to them)

What is Moses' purpose for teaching the statutes and commandments? (it will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear the statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!")

Who are we to teach? (our children)

What did God say to Moses at Horeb? ("Assemble the people for me, and I will let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me as long as they live on the earth, and may teach their children.")

How did God speak? (out of fire)

What did God declare? (his covenant, the ten commandments)

What did God charge Moses to do? (teach the statutes and ordinances)

## Making Connections

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Thinking back through your life, when have you been told to pay special attention or to follow the rules closely? What were you told? What did you do?

Are you typically a rule follower or one who prefers to push the boundaries? What are the benefits of both? What are the consequences?

What is Moses' concern with the Israelite not following commands?

Our Lesson Writer says, "The people were scattered far and wide to: they might claim to be an ethnic people, but we're no longer a nation." How does following laws and ordinances unify a people or a nation? When have you seen unification? When have you seen chaos?

How does following laws and commandments reflect the relationship between people and God? What is the people's responsibility? What is God's responsibility?

When someone older than you, either now or in your past, made you pay attention to the way things were done (laws and commands), how did you respond? Did you respect their wisdom and urging? Did you ignore it and do your own thing?

## So What?

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Form small groups. Give each group a piece of paper and pen to make some notes. Ask these questions for small group discussion:

What do you want today's children to know—about life, about relationships, about God?

What do you want today's children to remember—about life, about relationships, about God?

What do you want today's children to value—about life, about relationships, about God?

How will you teach today's children?

Give each group some time to discuss the questions and then ask everyone to come to the larger group with their ideas to share. Take some time sharing and listening to each group, reflecting on what is said and practical ways to teach the children.

## The Challenge

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This week, take one idea shared from the “So What?” section and apply it to a child in your life. What will you teach? How will you teach it? Who will you teach it to? Make time this week to do it.

## Prayer

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*Loving God, we have your statutes and commands before us. We have been entrusted to teach not only the children, but all others. Help us to teach others your ways. Amen.*

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**The text**—The Revised Common Lectionary lists only Deut. 4:1-2 and 4-9, skipping the short section about Baal-peor and stopping short of Moses’ injunction to teach the law to their children. We’ll expand the text to include vv. 1-14.

**Deuteronomy**—The book of Deuteronomy is shaped in the form of one or possibly three connected sermons that Moses reportedly delivered as Israel stood on the verge of entering the land of promise: as presented, it amounts to a lengthy “farewell address.” The book includes a restating of the ten commandments, along with supplemental commentary and additional laws. This gave rise to its English name: “Deuteronomy” means “second law” (from Greek *deuteros* [second] *nomos* [law], used as a title in the LXX). The Hebrew name of the book is *haddebarim*, “The Words,” because that is the first word in the book.

While the speeches may have roots in ongoing Mosaic traditions, it’s likely that the words we read are the work of someone who lived long after Moses, constructing speeches designed to support the theological agenda of the priests in the late seventh and early sixth centuries, BCE. Purporting that Moses was responsible for the law would give the writing an added sense of authority.

The final edition of Deuteronomy was probably compiled during the exile, but an earlier version was known as early as 621 B.C., when it was “found” during renovations in the temple ordered by King Josiah and presented to the king as an ancient book of law that had fallen from use and been lost. Josiah apparently used the teachings of this book as the basis for promoting a revival of Yahwism and various religious reforms in Judah (2 Kings 22-23).

Thus, while Deuteronomy is written as an address to Israelites who had not yet entered the land, it was mainly a message to people who had lived in the land for many years – but were in danger of losing it – or had lost it already.

The Deuteronomic writers built their work on the theme of blessing and cursing, the premise being that God would bless the righteous and curse the wicked. Later writers (called “Deuteronomistic”) used this same theology as the basis for the books of Joshua - 2 Kings (with the exception of Ruth), commonly known as the “Deuteronomistic History.” Their purpose was to explain the exile by showing that Yahweh had not been defeated or deserted his people. Rather, the exile was a natural result of Israel’s sinful ways that had been practiced over many years. Even Josiah’s revival, they concluded, was too little and too late to stop the impending invasion of the Babylonians, which was nothing more than God’s punishment for Israel’s errant ways.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Context**—Here’s one way to outline the book of Deuteronomy.

- I. Introduction and Moses’ First Sermon (1:1-4:43)
  - Historical review of the wilderness journey (1:6-3:29)
  - Exhortations to give heed (4:1-43)
- II. Moses’ Second Sermon (4:44-26:19)
  - The giving of the law at Sinai (5:1-11:32)
  - Additional statutes and ordinances (12:1-25:19)
  - Rituals, and an interlude (26:1-27:26)
  - Conclusion (28:1-68)
- III. Moses’ Third Sermon (29:1-30:20)
- IV. Moses’ Last Days (31:1-34:12)
  - A final charge and the writing of the law (31:1-13)
  - The commissioning of Joshua as Moses’ successor (31:14-23)
  - The Song of Moses (31:30-32:47)
  - The blessing of Moses (33:1-29)
  - The death of Moses (34:1-12)

**No adding or subtracting**—The warning in v. 2 that nothing should be added or taken away from Moses’ covenant commands is similar to stipulations found in treaties and other legal documents known from the ancient Near East. Often called a “canonical formula,” the verbiage is designed to emphasize the authority and unchangeable nature of the covenant.

Commentators often note that Rev. 22:18-19 contains a similar warning not to add to or take away from the “words of prophecy” found in the book. While some argue that this warning effectively “closed the canon” of scripture, the author of Revelation was clearly referring to his own work, and not to the Bible as a whole, which did not yet exist in its present form.

**A fiery sermon**—The earth-shaking, mind-blowing events of vv. 11-13, in which Yahweh spoke in terrifying fire from the mountain, are described more fully in Exodus 19:16-25 and 20:18-26.

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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### Was the land a gift or a condition?

Moses began his sermon by saying its purpose was “so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you” (v. 1b).

Have you noticed the tension within the verse? On the one hand, here and elsewhere the land is described as an outright gift: it is “the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you” (v. 1b).

On the other hand, Israel’s ability to actually enter and occupy the land seems to be conditioned on their willingness to “give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you might live to enter and occupy the land ...” (v. 1a).

So, which is it? Is the land to be given unconditionally, as a result of promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Or does possession of the land depend on whether the people are faithful to hear and obey the teachings of Moses?

Christopher J. H. Wright suggests that we don’t have to see the positions as being in conflict. Rather, “we can understand them within the balance of indicative and imperative that underlies the relationship between God and God’s people throughout the whole Bible. Behind everything stands the unconditioned grace and faithfulness of God to the divine promise. The land would be given. But secure possession of it, long life, and enjoyment of it were dependent in each generation on the people’s response of committed loyalty and obedience” (*Deuteronomy*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012], 46).

The remainder of Deuteronomy, and the “Deuteronomistic History” that follows (Joshua-2 Kings, with the exception of Ruth) makes it clear that the authors believed God gave the land, but could also take it away. When the people were faithful, Yahweh would rout their enemies and give them peace. When they disobeyed and went after other gods, Yahweh would bring enemies against them or even send them from the land, into exile.

Indeed, this is one of the major purposes of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History: to show that Yahweh had not been defeated by the gods of Assyria or Babylonia, but had intentionally allowed invaders to take the land from the Israelites due to their infidelity.

Christians may have a similar experience. When we trust in Christ and follow faithfully, we experience the freshness of forgiveness, the confident joy of living well, and the loving fellowship of other believers – the “land of promise” available to believers. When we fall away from Christ and turn to our own way, however, we discover the loneliness of exile from the fellowship of Christ and fellow believers.