

Deuteronomy 4:41-49

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Then [after explaining God's love as His motivation for choosing His people; read [Deut 4:37-40](#)] Moses set apart three cities across the Jordan to the east, ⁴² that a manslayer might flee there, who unintentionally slew his neighbor without having enmity toward him in time past; and by fleeing to one of these cities he might live [i.e., avoid being put to death by a relative ([לְאָזֵן gaal](#)) of the slain person; see [Deut 19:1-13](#)]: ⁴³ Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, and Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites. ⁴⁴ Now this is the law [[תּוֹרָה torah – law, instruction, direction](#)] which Moses set before the sons of Israel; ⁴⁵ these are the testimonies [stipulations] and the statutes [written laws] and the ordinances [judgments] which Moses spoke to the sons of Israel, when they came out from Egypt, ⁴⁶ across the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth-peor, 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. ⁴⁷ They took possession of his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites, *who were* across the Jordan to the east [according to God's sovereignty and faithfulness], ⁴⁸ from Aroer, which is on the edge of the valley of Arnon, even as far as Mount Sion (that is, Hermon), ⁴⁹ with all the Arabah across the Jordan to the east, even as far as the sea of the Arabah, at the foot of the slopes of Pisgah [the brief historical review shows Moses was addressing the second generation].

Summary:

In the first part of this pericope, Moses legislates three cities east of Jordan to be reserved as places of refuge, to which a manslayer could flee for safety (Deut 4:41-43). In the second part of this pericope (Deut 4:44-49), it is revealed that Moses is the one who gave Israel the law ([תּוֹרָה torah](#)), which law was given at the time when Israel was poised to enter the land of Canaan, just east of the Jordan River. The main body of the Mosaic law is recorded in Deuteronomy chapters 5-26. Prior to this section, Moses had explained it was God's love for His people that motivated Him to choose them for Himself (Deut 4:37-38), and if Israel would walk according to His commands, it would go well with them and they would enjoy long life in the Promised Land (Deut 4:39-40). The cities of refuge were evidence of God's love and mercy, which allowed people who accidentally killed another person to find protection until their case could be heard (Num 35:9-12, 20-25; Deut 19:1-13). It could be Moses legislated these cities of refuge early in his sermon because it met a pressing need. We know from other passages that a manslayer could seek refuge until his case could be heard and judged properly ([Num 35:9-12, 20-25](#); [Deut 19:1-13](#)). Additionally, guilt and punishment depended on two or more witnesses ([Num 35:30](#); [Deut 19:15](#)), which would help prevent secondary victims from being unjustly persecuted by a close relative ([לְאָזֵן gaal](#)) who typically executed family justice. Daniel Block states, "This policy illustrates the need for all judicial systems to take into account the lives of potential secondary victims. Even as it

grieves over accidental loss of life, a just society will guard against unwarranted violent responses to innocent acts.”¹

The text shifts in Deuteronomy 4:44-49, where a narrator—under divine inspiration—reveals Moses as Israel’s lawgiver. He writes, “Now this is the law which Moses set before the sons of Israel” (Deut 4:44). The word “law” is a translation of the Hebrew word תּוֹרָה *torah*, which commonly means *law*, *instruction*, or *direction*. The “law” refers to what follows in chapters 5-26. The Mosaic Law was operative until the death of Christ, at which time it was fulfilled by Christ (Matt 5:17-18), and rendered “obsolete” (Heb. 8:13; cf. John 1:17; Rom 10:4), having been replaced by the “law of Christ” which is now operational for the church (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2). Thomas Constable writes, “God gave the law to regulate the life of the Israelites religiously, governmentally, and domestically. This regulatory purpose is what ended with the death of Jesus Christ. The law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) has replaced the Old (Mosaic) Covenant by specifying new regulations for believers since Jesus Christ died.”² What Moses describes in Deuteronomy 4:45-49 is important, because it shows that what was revealed to Israel took place in time-space history. God had already revealed His love for Israel by choosing them as His special people, liberating them from Egyptian slavery, entering into a covenant with them at Mount Sinai, and providing all their needs as He directed them to the Promised Land. The blessings promised under the Mosaic Covenant were conditioned on obedience, and God now begins to provide clear expectation of His people so they understand their role in the relationship. Many of the laws presented in Deuteronomy had already been given in Exodus; so, it must be remembered that what Moses is providing in Deuteronomy is a restatement of many of those laws in sermon form, which includes exhortation to obedience. Jack Deere writes:

Moses set before the people God’s instruction (*tôrâh*, the word rendered Law, means instruction) in how to walk with Him. If the Israelites were to prosper individually and nationally they had to obey the stipulations of the covenant expressed in the form of decrees and laws. These were originally given three months after the Israelites came out of Egypt (cf. Ex. 20:1–17; 21–23). Thus Deuteronomy is not a new covenant but the renewal of a covenant previously made. But it was repeated east of the Jordan River near Beth Peor.³

In Deuteronomy, Moses is presented as a pastor teaching his flock what they need for a healthy relationship with the Lord and each other. Daniel Block writes, “As Moses had declared in 4:1 and will reiterate in 5:1 and 6:1, he stands before the people as a pastor-teacher, seeking to inspire his audience with a particular vision of God and to convince them to order their lives accordingly.”⁴

¹ Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 152.

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 4:44.

³ Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 272.

⁴ Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 152–153.