

What People Are So Blessed as Israel?



SABBATH—OCTOBER 30

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Deuteronomy 4:1, 2; Numbers 25:1–15; Deuteronomy 4:5–9; Deuteronomy 4:32–35.

MEMORY VERSE: “I’m giving you the laws of the LORD today. What other nation [people group] is great [shown so much favor by God; blessed] enough to have rules and laws as fair as these?” (Deuteronomy 4:8, NIV).



Moses wants the people to see the mercy of God in their experiences.

AS WE SAW, DEUTERONOMY 1–3 shows us the history of Israel. Moses helps the people remember their past for a special reason. Moses wants the people to see the mercy of God in their experiences. In chapter 4, Moses stops teaching and starts preaching. His sermon is about how God will continue to keep His agreement after Israel messes up.

Deuteronomy 4 starts with the Hebrew word “**we‘attah**.” “**We‘attah**” can be written as “And now” or “So now.” The people finish hearing Moses tell them about everything God did for them in the past. “So now” the people must do what God tells them to do (read Deuteronomy 10:12).

The first verb that we read in Deuteronomy 4 after the words “So now” is “**shema**’.” “**Shema**” is the same verb that Moses used in the Shema prayer we learned about in lesson 4. “**Shema**” also means “hear,” “listen,” or “obey.” Moses says this verb again and again all through Deuteronomy.

So, now we see why chapter 4 starts with these words: “ ‘Now, Israel, listen to the laws and to the commands that I teach you. Obey them and you will live. Then you can go in and take the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors [family members in the past], is giving you’ ” (Deuteronomy 4:1, ERV).

DO NOT ADD OR SUBTRACT (Deuteronomy 4:1, 2)

What warning does Moses give the people about the rules and laws God gives them? Read Deuteronomy 4:1, 2 for the answer. Why does Moses warn Israel right away about not changing the laws?

Moses tells the people to obey the law. Then right away Moses tells the people not to add to these words or subtract from them. Why does Moses say that? Who would ever want to change the law of God?

We know the answer, of course.

“Satan tried to change the law of God before he was thrown out of heaven. Ever since, Satan never has stopped trying to do this same work. Satan tricked humans into believing the lie he told the angels in heaven before God threw him out. Satan said the law of God is wrong and needs to be changed. A large number of Christians show by their behavior that they accept this lie.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, page 107, adapted.

Look at the history of Israel. Israel got into trouble whenever they paid no attention to the law of God, right? This behavior is the same thing as their removing some of the important rules from the law. The Israelites also added to the law of God whenever they made laws that God did not command. These man-made laws went against the law of God.

Read Matthew 15:1–9. How do these verses show us the same thing that Moses warned the children about in Deuteronomy 4:1, 2?

Soon after God gave the Israelites the land that He promised them, they often paid no attention to His warnings. One of the things God warned them not to do was bow down to statues. But the people did not obey God. They started to follow many other false ideas from the people around them, too. Sometimes the Israelites made these false ideas part of their worship of the Lord! By the time Jesus came, many wrong ideas were part of the Jewish religion. As Jesus Himself said, these false ideas were the same as making the teachings from God “‘not important,’ ” and “‘useless,’ ” (Matthew 15:6, ERV, NIrV).

In what ways do we need to be careful not to add or remove anything from the things God tells us?



Satan tricked humans into believing the lie he told the angels in heaven before God threw him out.

BAAL PEOR (Numbers 25:1–15)

In Deuteronomy 4:3, 4, Moses tells the people a little bit more about their history. Moses wants the people to learn some important spiritual lessons from their past.

Read Numbers 25:1–15. What happened in this story? What Bible truth and important lessons should the people of Israel learn from this awful experience?



Satan sends Midianite women to the men of Israel.

As we saw already, God commanded the Israelites to destroy some of the people groups around them. These stories do not make us comfortable, for sure. At the same time, the story about Baal Peor may help explain this command from God. God chose Israel to be His special witnesses. He wanted Israel to teach other people about Him and His love. God wanted His people to be living examples of His love, too. But often the Israelites turned against God. They failed to be examples of His love.

The people fail at Baal Peor. The Israelite men have sex with Midianite women. Often in the Bible, sex sins are a word picture for worshiping false gods (read Hosea 4:12–14). But at Baal Peor, the sex sins are not just word pictures. The sex sins are real. Satan sends Midianite women to the men of Israel. The women worship false gods. The women invite the Israelite men to have sex. The men allow these women to lead them into sin.

For sure, these sex sins lead the Israelite men into spiritual sins next. The Israelites start to worship false gods. “ ‘So Israel joined themselves [those people] to Baal [the false god] of Peor’ ” (Numbers 25:3, NLV). How do they join themselves to Baal? The Israelites give their hearts to this false god and make offerings to it. The people are willing to throw away everything they learned about the real God for a false one. And all for what? Sex.

How did this ever happen? Easily. The men made their hearts and minds hard against God after the first sin. Then the men were ready to do the next sin. So, first they sinned with their bodies. Then they sinned with their minds. The second sin was the real plan of Satan all along.

Our minds and bodies are closely connected. What happens to one part of us changes the other part, too. What can we learn from Baal Peor about why we must be careful to practice self-control at all times?

STICK WITH THE LORD YOUR GOD (Deuteronomy 4:4)

Thousands of people died when they followed Baal at Peor. “ ‘The LORD your God destroyed all your people who followed the false god Baal at that place’ ” (Deuteronomy 4:3, ERV). But not everyone followed Baal.

Who were they?

“ ‘But all of you who stayed with the LORD your God are alive today’ ” (Deuteronomy 4:4, ERV). What makes the people who do not sin with Baal different from the ones who do sin? What message is in Deuteronomy 4:4 for us about sin and our power over it? Where do we get that power from?

Do you see the word “all” in this verse and in the verse before it? “All” the people who followed Baal at Peor were destroyed (Deuteronomy 4:3, ERV). “ ‘But all of you who stayed with the LORD your God are alive today’ ” (Deuteronomy 4:4, ERV). The Bible shows us only two groups in this story: the group for Jesus, and the group against Him (Matthew 12:30). Are things any different today?

The Hebrew word for “stayed” in Deuteronomy 4:4 is “**dbq.**” This word shows us someone who has a strong wish to be joined to something or someone else. The same Hebrew word is used in Genesis 2:24: a man shall leave his family and join with his wife (read also Ruth 1:14). We see this word with this same meaning four more times in Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 10:20; Deuteronomy 11:22; Deuteronomy 13:4; and Deuteronomy 30:20). In each verse, the idea is the same: the people must stay with their God. They must hold on tight to Him. The people need to give their lives fully to Him. They must accept His strength. When they do, God helps His people win the fight against sin.

Read Jude 24 and 1 Corinthians 10:13. What do Jude and Paul say here that Moses says in Deuteronomy 13:4?

God keeps His promises. He can keep us from sinning. But we must join ourselves fully to Him, just as the loyal Israelites did at Baal Peor. If we do, then we can be sure that God will help us stay obedient to Him.

How do prayer, Bible study, worship, and fellowship help us “[stay] with the LORD” (Deuteronomy 4:4, ERV)?



“All” the people who followed Baal at Peor were destroyed.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SO BLESSED AS ISRAEL? (Deuteronomy 4:5–9)

The next few verses in Deuteronomy 4 are some of the most beautiful verses in the whole Bible. For sure, one can say that the most important message of Deuteronomy is found right here in these verses. The rest of the book is just an explanation about them. Whatever view you have about Deuteronomy, think about the important rules shown in Deuteronomy 4:5–9. Then ask yourself: What meaning do these rules have for our lives today?

Read Deuteronomy 4:5–9. Why does the Lord say these words to His people?

The Lord wants His people to understand that He chose them for a reason. Israel is a special people. God told Abram His plan right from the start when he left the Chaldees: “I will build a great nation from you” (Genesis 12:2, ERV; read also Genesis 18:18).

Why did God want to make Israel so special? Because God wanted Israel to “bless other people” (Genesis 12:2, ERV). Then God planned to use Israel “to bless all the people on earth” (Genesis 12:3, ERV). How did God plan to do that? By sending Jesus to be born in Israel. Until that time, God wanted His people to be the same as a light on the earth: “I will make you a light for the other nations [non-Jews]. You will show people all over the world [on the earth] the way to be saved” (Isaiah 49:6, ERV).

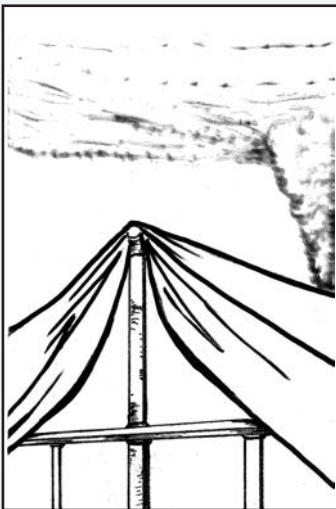
Think about this idea: Israel worshiped the God who made the stars. This same God is the Lord of both heaven and earth. The people around Israel worshiped stars, rocks, stones, wood, and demons (Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 106:37).

Wow! Can things get any more different than that?

In Deuteronomy 4:5–9, Moses names two things that make Israel special. First, the Lord is near to His people. He lived in the Holy Tent in the middle of their camp. Second, Israel is special because of all “the laws and rules” (Deuteronomy 4:5, ERV) God gave them.

Read Deuteronomy 4:32–35. What else is the Lord saying to His people in these verses? How does this message show the people the special work God gave them to do?

For sure, God gave Israel so much. The question is: How will His people answer?



The Lord is near to His people. He lived in the Holy Tent in the middle of their camp.

YOUR WISDOM AND GOOD SENSE (Deuteronomy 4:6)

As we have seen, Deuteronomy 4:1–9 explains why Israel is so special. These verses also show the work God gave His people to do. All through these verses, we see an important idea: Israel must obey God. They must do what He commands.

Read again Deuteronomy 4:6. What does the Lord say will cause other people to say that Israel has wisdom and good sense?

When we first look at Deuteronomy 4:6, we may think that the laws and rules were wise and understanding. But that is not what the verse says. Yes, the Lord taught His people wise laws and rules. But the wisdom and good sense of the people came from keeping the laws and rules. So, the obedience of the people was their wisdom and good sense.

Israel had the most wonderful laws and rules that any country on earth ever had. But what good were all these laws if Israel refused to obey them? When Israel lived the law, they showed their wisdom and good sense to everyone around them. So, again and again, God commanded His people to obey Him. Their obedience showed the Bible truth about God and His love to people everywhere.

“The people must obey the law of God. Then they will become a success in the eyes of everyone on earth. God already gave His people wisdom and skill to make beautiful things. This same God will continue to teach His people. He will make their lives better when they obey His laws. Then they will not get sick. God also will give His people very smart minds. The people will show God in all their success and riches. God chose His people to be a kingdom of religious leaders and princes. God gave them everything they needed to become the most powerful country on earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 288, adapted.

Read Matthew 5:13–16. What is Jesus saying to us in these verses? How does this message show the same thing Jesus said to Israel in the Old Testament? What does this message mean to us today, as Seventh-day Adventists?



God chose His people to be a kingdom of religious leaders and princes.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The war between good and evil started in heaven. Satan has been hard at work on this plan since he decided to disobey God. Satan went to war against God to get rid of His law. God threw Satan out of heaven. But Satan continued his war against God on this earth. Satan has been very busy. He tricks men with his lies. Then Satan leads them to break the law of God. Satan leads some men to throw out one of the commandments. Satan leads other men to throw out the whole law. In the end, the same thing happens. The person that is guilty of breaking one law shows he does not respect the whole law. This man will, by his example, lead other people to sin. In this way, this man becomes guilty of breaking the whole law. James 2:10.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 582, adapted.



The men of Israel lost their good sense and self-control.

Let us read what Ellen G. White wrote about Baal Peor: “The people of Israel did what God told them not to do. Then Satan caught the people in his trap. Satan charmed the Israelite men with music and dancing. The beauty of the Midianite women also charmed the men of Israel. Then they threw off their loyalty to the Lord. The men joined in joking and eating. They drank wine. They lost their good sense and self-control. Their wish to have sex took full control of them. Then they bowed down to statues. They offered gifts on altars to false gods. They took part in worship that lowered their hearts and minds.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 454, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think about the ways that God has chosen Seventh-day Adventists to do a special work, the same as He chose Israel in Bible times. Think about all that God has given us compared to the people on earth and the people in other churches. The question for us is: What are we doing with what God gave us? How are we showing our wisdom and good sense to the people?
- ② The Lord does not force us to follow Him. We must choose to follow Him. After we make this choice, how do we hold on to Him and not let go?
- ③ What does it mean to change the law of God? Is it possible for us to add to or subtract from the law and not really know what we are doing? Explain your answer.

WHAT IS THIS BOOK ABOUT?

A stranger gave a Bible to a 12-year-old girl. The girl was on her way home from school in Japan. The girl was not interested in the book. So, she put the book on a shelf in her bedroom. Later, she found the book when she cleaned her room. She decided to give the book to her eight-year-old brother, Ryotaro.

“Do you want to read this book?” his sister asked.

Ryotaro wondered what the book was about. When he looked more closely at the book, he saw the word “Bible” on the cover. Ryotaro saw a Bible at the house of his grandfather. Since that time, Ryotaro felt curious about what the Bible said.

“Yes,” Ryotaro told his sister. “I want to read this book.”

The Bible was now his.

Ryotaro started reading the Bible from the beginning. This Bible had only the New Testament. As he read the book of Matthew, Ryotaro wondered, “Who is Matthew?”

Ryotaro learned about a Man named Jesus. Jesus healed many sick people. Ryotaro learned that Jesus was a wonderful and powerful Person. When Ryotaro finished reading Matthew, he wondered what happened next in the Bible. So, he started reading the next book, Mark. The story was much the same as the story he read in Matthew. So, Ryotaro quit after reading only half the book of Mark.

After that, Ryotaro read only parts of different books. He wished to know more about Jesus. The family of Ryotaro was not Christian. So, Ryotaro did not tell them about his wish to know more about Jesus.

The Bible became an important part of his life. The Bible also had a page filled with promises. There were promises for the times when Ryotaro felt sick or was having a bad day. Every time Ryotaro needed peace, he read the promises. With a pencil, Ryotaro underlined the verses he liked. When he left the house, he always carried the Bible with him. Ryotaro did not know how to pray. No one ever taught him. But when he went on trips with his family, he always said, “God, please protect us.”

Soon he decided to go to Okinawa Saniku Junior High School, a Seventh-day Adventist school. Father and Mother learned about this school on the internet. Ryotaro hoped to learn more about Jesus at this school. Today, Ryotaro is 12. He lives with other boys at the Adventist school. Not long ago, he announced to his parents that he wished to be baptized.

Ryotaro and his family learned about the Adventist school from the internet. Part of the 13th Sabbath Offering this quarter will help many Japanese people, including young people. The offering will help them learn more about Jesus from the internet. Thank you for giving a big offering.

INSIDE
Story
by AIKI SAITO



The Bible became an important part of Ryotaro's life.

