

# OpenTheo

## May 3rd: Deuteronomy 4 & Luke 3:23-38

May 2, 2020



### Alastair Roberts

Moses exhorts the people to obedience. Luke's genealogy of Jesus.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Deuteronomy chapter 4 1. The Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day. Furthermore, the Lord was angry with me because of you, and he swore that I should not cross the Jordan, and that I should not enter the good land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. For I must die in this land, I must not go over the Jordan.

But you shall go over, and take possession of that good land. Take care lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the Lord your God has forbidden you. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and

earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you.

And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God, and obey his voice.

For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you, or destroy you, or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them. For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened, or was ever heard of.

Did any people ever hear the voice of a God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any God ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God, there is no other besides him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire.

And because he loved your fathers, and chose their offspring after them, and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above, and on the earth beneath, there is no other. Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for all time. Then Moses set apart three cities in the east beyond the Jordan, that the manslayer might flee there.

Anyone who kills his neighbor unintentionally, without being at enmity with him in time past, he may flee to one of these cities and save his life. Beza in the wilderness on the table land for the Reubenites, Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites. This is the law that Moses set before the people of Israel.

These are the testimonies, the statutes and the rules, which Moses spoke to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt. Beyond the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, in the land of Sihon the king of the Amorites who lived at Heshbon, who Moses and

the people of Israel defeated when they came out of Egypt, and they took possession of his land and the land of Og the king of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites who lived to the east beyond the Jordan. From Eroah which is on the edge of the valley of the Anon, as far as Mount Sirion, that is Hermon, together with all the Araba on the east side of the Jordan, as far as the Sea of the Araba, under the slopes of Pisgah.

In Deuteronomy chapter 4 we move into the next phase of Moses' teaching. This is still Moses' first address but it's the conclusion of it. Moses has described their journey to the land and now he moves to discuss their future life in it.

If Deuteronomy chapters 1-3 focus particularly upon obeying the Lord's specific directives about going into the land, fighting against their enemies and these sorts of things, now we're focusing upon obeying the Lord's commandments. And in particular they're supposed to learn from things like their failure at Baal Peor where they were promiscuous and idolatrous, the events described in chapter 25 of Numbers. All of this is providing exhortation for their future obedience within the land.

They are on the brink of entering into the land and they need to be prepared for the faithfulness that the Lord requires of them. This all provides them with reasons for obedience. In encouraging them to keep the law of God, Moses provides them with a number of motivations or reasons for obedience.

First of all they're supposed to learn the lessons of places such as Baal Peor, the lessons of disobedience to the law of God and the things that happen to those people that reject the Lord and rebel against him. A further motivation is found in the reputation that they'll gain for wisdom as they obey the law of God in the sight of the nations. They're supposed to learn again from the theophanic encounter at Horeb or Sinai, the way that they witnessed the glorious presence of God and his voice speaking to them.

They're supposed to think about the threat of exile and scattering and use that as a spur to faithfulness. They're supposed to consider the uniqueness of the Lord and his relationship with Israel, a relationship such as no other nation enjoys. And they're supposed to recognise that as they obey the law of God they will flourish in the land.

It's a possibility opened up for them in their future. The third address of Moses in chapters 29-30 returns to these themes and these two addresses frame the central section of the book. It is the first two commandments that Moses especially emphasises in this book.

They must have no other gods besides the Lord and they must not worship idols. They should have learned the lesson of Baal-Pior, where they yoked themselves with Baal. They also need to learn the lessons of Horeb and the Exodus.

They are both proof of the Lord's uniqueness and also the fact that God should not be

represented in any physical form. The passage moves backward from their current situation in Beth-Poor back through the experience of Horeb and back to the earlier part of the events of the Exodus and God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Looking back upon their itinerary they're supposed to see the developing revelation of God and what it means to be faithful or unfaithful and the consequences of those things.

It's an exhortation to obedience again with the warning of banishment if they reject the law. There's a repeated emphasis upon consideration upon mindfulness, remembering, pervading the text. They are to remember what they have witnessed and to learn the lessons of what they have seen.

They are given commandments and rules. Is there a difference between these things? Some have suggested that commandments are those things that are more transparent to our understanding. We know why God tells us you shall not murder but rules are a bit less apparent.

A rule is something like the law concerning the red heifer. There are ways in which we can understand that but it requires deep meditation and reflection. It's not immediately apparent.

They are charged not to add or to subtract anything. Now clearly there's going to be added case law. They're going to reflect upon the laws that God gives them and develop them into further case law speaking to specific situations.

They're going to have positive law that addresses situations that are not envisaged within the law as it's given Sinai. There are many ways in which they will add to this body of law but they're not supposed to add anything that's replacing it. They're not supposed to add in a way that would subvert the fundamental uniqueness of the Lord at the heart of Israel's life.

And I think the import of this particular instruction is more apparent when we see it in the context of the chapter in which it's placed where the focus is upon not serving gods other than the Lord, not bowing down to idols, not making idols. That is what it would mean to add or subtract, to do the sort of thing that they were doing with Baal-peor, the way that they would be adding to the worship of God the worship of some other god. From the events of Baal-peor they're supposed to learn not just the consequences of rebellion but also the preservation of the righteous, those who stood firm, were preserved.

As they live by the law it will prove to be a blessing for them. The law is connected here with wisdom and it's a wisdom that will be seen in the sight of the whole nations. They live in the sight of the nations.

What happened to Israel at the Exodus, what happened to Israel at Horeb, what

happened to Israel in bringing them into the land is something that has significance for the whole of the world. They are a light to the Gentiles. What God is doing with Israel is a lesson for all peoples to learn from.

It's a revelation of who the creator God is. It's a revelation of the way his world works, the principles by which we're supposed to approach it. There is something different about Israel.

They are a people who dwell alone, a people who are set apart from the nations as an example to the nations. The other nations are supposed to look at this people and say what a wise and understanding people. What a people that they have their God so close to them.

The law here is connected with wisdom. The law itself is a manifestation of wisdom. The commandments that are given are commandments that stand out from the nations.

The nations all have laws but when you look at the laws of the nations and compare those and contrast them with the law of God you'll see the difference. There is something about the nation of Israel that sets them apart and it's not that they're particularly numerous, it's not that they're particularly powerful. What sets them apart is the wisdom of the words that God has given to them.

It's the near presence of the Lord to them and in these things they will find their glory if they persevere in them. The connection of wisdom with law also highlights the importance of meditation upon the law. The law is not just a series of rules to be enforced by Israel's leaders with criminals and transgressors to be punished.

That's not the purpose of the law primarily. The purpose of the law is to train people in righteousness. This is a means by which people will gain wisdom, insight into the world.

It's a means by which the society will become one of justice and this law is given not just for the civil authorities of Israel. It's given for all the people and for all the people to meditate upon, to reflect upon, to chew over this law constantly and as they chew over it to recognise the deeper logic of it. It's a training in truth and ethics.

It's a training in what it means to please the Lord. It's a training in what it means to live well and as we go through the book of Deuteronomy it should become apparent that it is precisely in the interplay between the condensed principles and the expanded principles that literacy and understanding in the law and in the world will be achieved and Israel's kings in particular were supposed to have the law of God written out by themselves that they could reflect upon it on a regular basis. This is something that's celebrated in the Psalms.

The person who is righteous meditates on the law of God day and night and becomes like a fruitful tree planted by streams of water. This is something that we see in Psalm

119 in particular as David goes through all the different ways in which the law is his delight, brings him understanding and wisdom and truth and the Israelites are charged to teach this law to their children. They're supposed to pass it on to generations after them and in that process of passing it on to come to a deeper understanding of it themselves.

You can look back to Genesis chapter 18 verse 19 to see some of the importance of what it means to teach children the law of God. God says concerning Abraham, for I have chosen him that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. Israel must learn the lessons of Horeb, the lessons of Sinai and the great theophanic appearance of God's glory.

They're supposed to act as a historical witness to this event. Now many of the people who are hearing Moses here were not actually present 39 years previously at the events of Sinai and Theophany that but Israel itself is a historical witness to these things and these things pass down generation after generation so each generation shares in that fundamental event. In the same way the church is called to be a continuing historical witness to what God has done in Christ.

They heard a voice but they saw no shape. The Lord is a God who speaks and you relate to the Lord primarily through his word, through reflecting upon his law, not through making or bowing down to images in the way of the nations. Idolatry is seductive and appealing and the people must be vigilant against it.

Idolatry presents people with a way of controlling God, of limiting God, of having some sort of handle upon God. It's a theological technology perhaps, a way of manipulating God and putting God into our service, of making God safe. But God is a consuming fire.

God is a jealous God. He will not be replaced by our fetishes, by those things that we put in place of him. The many ways in which we seek to efface him and relate to something that's far more domesticated and safe but God is not a safeguard.

Heaven and earth are called as witnesses. If they reject the covenant they will perish from the land and be scattered among the other peoples in sharp contrast to the blessings of faithfulness. However even in the death of exile hope is held out for them and as I mentioned earlier these themes are returned to in Deuteronomy chapter 29 and 30 in chapter 30 verses 1 to 6. And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you and return to the Lord your God you and your children and obey his voice in all that I command you today with all your heart and with all your soul then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.

If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven from there the Lord your God will gather you and from there he will take you and the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your father's possessed that you may possess it and he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers and the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live. Israel's experience of God is unique as is what God has done for them. They witnessed the theophanic glory of God at Sinai and they heard the voice of the Lord.

They saw no shape so they should not make an idol but what they have seen is unique as is what God has done for them. God took Israel from Egypt a nation from another nation so much greater and more powerful. He proved in the process his power over all of the Egyptian gods.

The Lord alone is God in heaven above and on earth below. This is a strong statement of monotheism and this statement of monotheism is a key note for understanding the book of Deuteronomy. God is unique and Israel in their relationship to God is not just relating to a god of their particular nation.

Israel is relating to the god of the whole earth. Israel is relating to the god who created all things. The god who rules supreme and unrivaled over all others.

All other powers are beneath him. All other powers are created but he is uncreated and Israel then is a witness to this one true god. They're supposed to be a light to the nations.

The other nations should see them and see that there is something different about this people. That this people stands out from all of their neighbours. That the law that this people has, the law that has been given to them by the Lord, that as they obey it they grow in wisdom and that that wisdom is something that sets them apart, that makes them different, that shows grace, that shows truth, that shows insight into reality and as they see that they should be drawn to the light of Israel.

Moses then lists three cities of refuge and we have the description of the cities of refuge in Numbers chapter 35 verses 9 to 34. The manslayer could flee to the city of refuge and find safety there and he would remain there until the death of the high priest. The chapter ends by introducing the discourse that follows.

A discourse in which Moses declares and unpacks the law. A question to consider. How would you summarize Deuteronomy chapter 4's critique of idolatry? Luke chapter 3 verses 23 to 38.

Jesus when he began his ministry was about 30 years of age being the son as was supposed of Joseph the son of Heli the son of Mathat the son of Levi the son of Melchi the

son of Janai the son of Joseph the son of Matathias the son of Amos the son of Nahum the son of Esli the son of Nagai the son of Meath the son of Matathias the son of Simeon the son of Josech the son of Jodah the son of Joannan the son of Risa the son of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel the son of Neri the son of Melchi the son of Adai the son of Kosam the son of Elmadom the son of Ur the son of Joshua the son of Eliezer the son of Joram the son of Mathat the son of Levi the son of Simeon the son of Judah the son of Joseph the son of Jonam the son of Eliakim the son of Meliah the son of Menah the son of Matathah the son of Nathan the son of David the son of Jesse the son of Obed the son of Boaz the son of Salah the son of Nashon the son of Minadab, the son of Admin, the son of Ani, the son of Hezrom, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Sirad, the son of Rehu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. Luke chapter 3, after the baptism of Jesus, ends with a genealogy and it describes Jesus entering into his ministry at the age of 30 years old. This is the same age that the priests would have begun their ministry.

It's the same age as Joseph begins to serve Pharaoh, that David becomes king and Ezekiel in the 30th year sees the heavens opened and sees visions of God. So in all of these cases we're seeing an entrance into some sort of ministry whether it's prophetic ministry in the case of Ezekiel, whether it's kingly ministry in the case of David, whether it's the ministry of stewardship in the case of Joseph or the ministry of the priests in the temple. There's a different setting of the genealogy here than we find in Matthew.

In Matthew it comes at the very beginning of the book in chapter 1 and it's set out in 42 generations divided into three sets of 14 and particularly emphasising David and Abraham. This doesn't introduce the gospel but rather it occurs after the baptism and before the temptation. However it does frame this as a sort of beginning of sorts.

It's the beginning of Jesus' ministry and it lies between two key events. The father's statement of Jesus' sonship leads into this. Now this genealogy is also interesting in other ways.

It moves backwards rather than forwards. Most of the genealogies that we have in scripture start off with the oldest figure and then move forward to more recent times. This starts off with Christ and then moves backwards and it goes back to the very, very beginning, to Abraham as the son of God.

There's a cosmic scope that opens up here. Genealogies serve a number of different purposes. One of the things that they do is to gather large periods of time together and large stories are condensed within a genealogy.



We have a sense of the different figures who are involved and the legacy that a person might be bearing in what they're doing. Typically the further you go back in a genealogy the more it becomes a matter of diminishing returns. If we go back far enough just about anyone can be seen as a descendant from some great ancestor because their genealogy has spread so wide and has been so mixed in with other peoples.

Which of us is not descended from Adam or from Noah? While this is the case however, Jesus in the beginning of his ministry is related to these figures in a different way. He holds their destiny within himself. Jesus takes the destiny of the whole human race and he's going to live it out and bring it to its head.

So it's not just that he has the blood of Adam in him. All of us are descended from Adam. No, it's the fact that Jesus will achieve for the human race what Adam once lost and failed to achieve.

When we look at this genealogy and compare it with Matthew there are a number of problems though. It seems as if very few names are shared in common, certainly once we get past David. Even the numbers of names are very different.

Matthew structures his genealogy according to 314s whereas Luke is a genealogy of 77. Some have suggested that Matthew's is the genealogy of Joseph whereas the genealogy in Luke is that of Mary. But in both cases it's Joseph that is connected with the genealogy of David in particular and there's no reason to believe that Mary was descended from David.

For the numbers of the names we should not worry that much about that. The genealogies are not necessarily comprehensive. They don't necessarily include every single figure.

Luke's could be a lot more extensive than Matthew's in this regard. Other suggestions include the possibility that one is a sort of royal line and the other is a father-son line of genealogy. If for instance you were to trace the kings of the United Kingdom and go all the way back and trace the genealogy you would get a different list from the list of those who sat on the throne in order and Matthew seems to follow this line of royal succession whereas Luke departs from it quite radically.

So maybe that's part of what's going on. Both Matthew and Luke seem to have some structuring device for their genealogy. Matthew's is very apparent.

It has the three sets of fourteen and it's divided according to key events and key characters - Abraham, David, the descent into Babylon. And Luke's does not have quite so clear a pattern. But yet it is 77 names and these can be broken into 11 lists of 7 names.

And there are key names at specific points. David starts the 7th list of 7 names.

Abraham starts the 9th.

Enoch the 11th. Perhaps with the focus upon the number 7 we're supposed to hear Jubilee themes. 7, 7 times 7, 70 or 70 times 7, or maybe in this case 77, are all numbers that have that sort of resonance and perhaps that's part of what Luke is trying to do here to frame what Jesus is doing as a Jubilee type event.

It's also interesting that it goes back. While this is a feature found in common with other genealogies of the time, most of the genealogies of Scripture move forward from father to son all the way down rather than from son to father. That movement from son to father is most common when we see someone's pedigree set out, that they are someone who has title to a particular office or role.

Perhaps seeing as this comes at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we're supposed to see it in this light. However, although it is important for Luke and elsewhere in the Gospels that Jesus is traced through David, that he belongs to the Davidic line, he comes through Nathan, which is surprising. In Matthew it's Solomon.

In seeking clues to try and understand the reason for this, some have observed Zechariah chapter 12 and seen there the possibility of Nathan's line being set apart from the rest of the house of David. Perhaps there is a particular significance to the line of Nathan, but if there is a particular significance, I don't have an idea what it could be. A further interesting detail is the absence of the name of Jechoniah, or Jehoiachin, from Luke as the father of Sheolteel, whereas he is present in the Gospel of Matthew.

Luke mentions a different father for Sheolteel. Now this might be in part related to Jeremiah chapter 22 verse 30, where there's a curse upon Jechoniah. Thus says the Lord, write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.

Yet we do hear that in 1st Chronicles chapter 3 verses 16-17 he did have a son. The descendants of Jehoiachin, Jechoniah his son, Zedekiah his son, and the sons of Jechoniah, the captive, Sheolteel his son. Now Sheolteel may have been adopted, and the differences between the two genealogies may be explained this way.

One way or another, these genealogies are complex, and we have to resort to some difficult explanation to reconcile them. We have to think in terms of levirate marriage, or in terms of adoption, or in terms of a royal line and a natural biological line, or in terms of Mary's line and Joseph's line. There are many different options of various merits.

Jesus' genealogy and ancestry are complex, containing many stories that have not been told to us. This of course is true of most people's genealogies. The important thing is that the Son of God has taken his stand in history.

He has come in the middle of history. He's the one who takes the human race and its

story upon himself, and he stands as part of a line of promise, running from Abraham, through the patriarchs, to David, and down through the history of Israel, and being fulfilled at that moment in history. The Christmas Carol talks about the hopes and fears of all the years being met in Bethlehem that night, and one of the things that the genealogy of Luke is doing is showing us that the hopes and fears of all the years are met in the figure of Jesus Christ, that at this juncture in history, this weight is coming upon his shoulders just as he's about to go out and start his ministry.

He is the one who's bearing the weight of the world. The genealogy ends with the words, the Son of God. Adam was the one who had God as his father.

In a particular way, God formed him out of the dust of the earth. But Christ, in the events immediately preceding this, has been declared to be the Son of God by the Father's voice speaking from heaven, you are my beloved Son. And in what follows, Jesus is being tested concerning his Sonship by Satan in the wilderness.

So the theme of divine Sonship is another crucial part of Luke's genealogy and why he has it in this way and in this place. A question to consider. Thinking about the genealogies of the Old and New Testament, can you think of some of the various purposes that they are performing in their different locations?