

Deuteronomy 10:12-15

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After recounting the story of the molten calf incident, Moses reminds the Israelites of God's love for them, and strongly commands the Israelites not to repeat the sins of the past, but to walk in complete obedience to their Suzerain God, Yahweh, because it is for their good.

God's covenant relationship with Israel required faithfulness on both parts. The Suzerain (Ruler) God repeatedly demonstrated His love and faithfulness to Israel. He could have continued His faithfulness through Moses, but showed His compassion when He forgave their sinful act of idolatry with the molten calf and asked them to proceed on their journey to the Promised Land ([Deuteronomy 9:25-29](#); [10:10-11](#)). Moses now reminds the Israelites of their covenant obligation toward their Suzerain God, saying, *Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you?* God's covenant with Israel contains provisions that are conditional and unconditional. The word "now" links this passage with the previous section, in which Moses reminded Israel that the LORD accepted his request not to destroy them. In this context Moses asked a question to remind the Israelites that the LORD was their God and that they were in a covenant relationship with Him. They were His vassals and He was their Suzerain ([Exodus 19:4-6](#)). Four specific requirements describe how God intended for Israel to obey Him in order to gain the promised blessings. God emphasizes here the conditional aspects of the covenant, that *the LORD their God* requires in order to gain the promised benefits.

Moses now answers his question, and lists four requirements *the LORD God* has for *Israel* to gain the promised rewards:

(a) The LORD demanded that the Israelites *fear* Him. To *fear* God is to consider consequences from disobedience to not be worth the risk. We all obey what we fear. We often fear failure in the eyes of other people to be of greater concern than displeasing God. God desires that we care more of what He thinks and says than what other people think and say. To place a higher emphasis on whether He approves of our behavior than the approval of any others ([Deuteronomy 5:29](#); [6:2, 13](#)). To fear God is to follow his commands to live wisely rather than foolishly, to speak and act in a way that pleases God ([Proverbs 9:10](#); [Psalms 111:10](#)).

(b) The LORD required His vassals (Israel) *to walk in all His ways*. The term translated as “ways” [derek, in Hebrew] literally means “road,” or “path.” However, Moses frequently used it in Deuteronomy to refer to the way the Israelites were to live; that is, in accordance to the laws of God. Thus, to walk in God’s ways implies Israel’s response to the covenantal laws of God, manifested by a sense of dynamic, mutual engagement. To *walk in all His ways* was to live in a manner that would lead to great flourishing of the entire community. Rather than having one person dominant over the others, the community that walked in God’s ways would treat one another with respect, not defrauding, not stealing, not envying their possessions. A significant part of the promised blessing was the natural consequences of obeying God’s law to respect other people and their property.

(c) The Suzerain God also asked Israel to *love* Him. To love God is to live in complete obedience to Him. and to His covenantal laws (6:4; 11:1; 30:16; [John 14:15](#)). This love was to be the appropriate response to the LORD because He is the merciful God who redeemed Israel from slavery, protected and provided for them, and continually fathers them to seek their best interest.

(d) The LORD asked the Israelites to *serve* Him *with all their heart and with all their soul*. The verb translated *serve* is the same word translated “labor” in the restatement of the Ten Commandments in [Deuteronomy 5:13](#), speaking of doing “labor” for six days. God desires that we expend effort to do all we do according to His ways. That we walk in His ways in all aspects of daily life. The word “heart” describes the seat of feeling, and of the intellect, as in [Deuteronomy 7:17](#):

If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’

The word “soul” refers to the seat of personhood. In verse 22 of this chapter the same word is translated “persons”. Together, the words *serve*, *heart*, and *soul* emphasize who we are as persons, all we think and all we do. God is asking for complete obedience in all aspects of life. The way to receive the greatest blessing is through full obedience to Yahweh, Israel’s Suzerain God.

Moses summarized these four requirements in one: *To keep the LORD’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good*. God’s *commandments* and His *statutes* are His covenant stipulations. The Israelites were commanded to observe all of them in order to live as loyal vassals to their Suzerain God. God gives the reason why they should obey:

because it is *for their good*. All of God's commands are given to provide the best life for His people. God is a benevolent Father who desires the best for His children. (But often, the children cry because they desire candy instead of vegetables.)

Israel's Suzerain (Ruler) God is unique and sovereign. He is all knowing, so He knows what is for your *good*. Moses stated, *Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it*. Israel's God is unique because He is the only true God. *Heavens* and *earth* belong to Him. The words "heaven" and "earth" are employed as a figure of speech which combines two contrasting things to refer to an entirety. Here they show that God is sovereign over the whole creation. He alone is God since everything belongs to Him. Israel's God created and rules over the entire universe.

Nevertheless, although the LORD alone is sovereign over the entire universe ([Exodus 19:5-6](#)), He chose to direct His love upon a particular man named Abraham and his descendants. As Moses said to Israel, *On your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them*. God was not obligated to *love* Israel. God *chose* to love them. And God also *chose* to bestow His love upon *their descendants after them, even Israel above all the peoples, as it is this day*. God's love for Israel was *above all the peoples* not because of their righteousness ([Deut 9:4](#)). It was because of God's promise to Abraham. And God's special affection will not mean God has a lower standard of behavior for Israel. Rather, God will have a much higher standard. God's intent is for their *good*.

The *LORD chose their descendants* to be in a covenant relationship with Him. The covenant will make it clear what kind of behavior brings blessing. It will demonstrate behavior that leads to a community that flourishes. It was God's desire that Israel serve a priestly function, to be an illustration of how best to flourish to other nations ([Exodus 19:5-6](#)). Israel, Abraham's *descendants*, enjoyed the privilege and attendant responsibilities of being in a covenant relationship with the true God ([Exodus 19:5-6](#); [Deuteronomy 7:7](#)). The Israelites were told very specifically how to discharge their responsibilities; how to obtain the blessings of obedience. They were to *fear the LORD their God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve Him wholeheartedly, and to keep all His commandments*, in order to enjoy the benefits of this special covenant.

Biblical Text:

¹² “Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ *and* to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? ¹⁴ Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. ¹⁵ Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, *even* you above all peoples, as *it is* this day.