

Deuteronomy 10:16-22

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Moses asks Israel to set apart their heart before God and not rebel. They are to love and execute justice without partiality, including to aliens dwelling among them, for they were alien enough in Egypt. This reflects how God judges. It shows His love for all peoples. Israel should glory in God's love and care for them.

Having commanded the Israelites to obey their Suzerain (Ruler) God completely, Moses now asks the people to respond appropriately to God by showing humility and gratitude. He commanded them to *circumcise* their *heart*. Circumcision—the act of cutting off the foreskin of the males—was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham ([Genesis 17:9-14](#)). It was a visible, outward action, which served to remind the Israelites that they had a covenant with their Suzerain (Ruler) God, a covenant which gave them unconditional benefits, but which also came with significant responsibilities, and conditional provisions with substantial consequences for obedience or disobedience ([Genesis 17:13](#)).

Outward actions like circumcision were not a mere formality. They were intended to lead to a changed heart. Actions can lead to changed thinking, and circumcision was a constant reminder of belonging to a family that God set apart for special service. The most important and acceptable circumcision should occur (metaphorically) in the inner being (in the heart). Our hearts should be set aside for special service. Moses commanded the people to *circumcise* or set apart their *heart* to walk in constant harmony with God's way.

Moses further commanded the Israelites, saying, *stiffen your neck no longer*. To be stiff-necked means to rebel against the prescribed commands. It likely pictures a yoked animal that will not yield to the direction of the reins—the animal desires to go its own way rather than yielding to its master. Being stiff-necked is equal to the word “stubborn,” which occurred the previous chapter. Moses urged the Israelites to avoid rebelling against the LORD. It would be meaningless to continue to practice physical *circumcision* with no real understanding of who God is or what He requires. God desired *circumcision* of the *heart*, to walk in obedience to God rather than walking with a stiffened *neck*, insisting on following their own way. As God

said in verse 13, He knows what is for their (and our) *good* much better than we do.

The God of Israel is worthy of being obeyed. He is *the God of gods*; He is the true God who created everyone and everything. Since He designed the world, He knows how it works best, and desires our *good*. So we ought to trust Him. All other “gods,” whether demons, idols, or anything else we might fear or serve are nothing compared to Him. He is the one true power in the universe. The God of Israel is also *the Lord of lords*; that is, He is sovereign over all other authorities. He is *the great, the mighty*, the all-powerful God.

He is the *awesome God who does not show partiality*. This expression can be literally translated “He does not regard faces in judgment,” meaning “it doesn’t matter who you are, where you are from, or how much money or prestige you have” when God judges. As the supreme judge, the Suzerain God treats all matters with complete justice and righteousness (1:16-17). The God of Israel does not *take a bribe*. The essence of ancient idolatry was based on giving the idol a *bribe*, an offering, in order to get what you wanted. That’s not the way God works. God is not manipulated. He always gives a just decision.

As Moses explained to Israel, the LORD *executes justice for the orphan and the widow*. In the Bible, an orphan usually refers to a child without a father. A widow is a woman who has lost her husband to death and remains unmarried. These two people groups (orphan and widow) were among the ones who had the least power in the society, and they were easily exploited by others. So, the LORD actively helps these people as He executes righteous judgment. He does not show *partiality* based on class standing.

God made it clear that He had set apart Israel and shown them a special love, *above all peoples* (v. 15). But Israel’s special standing was intended to bless all the nations of the earth, as God promised Abraham in [Genesis 12:3](#). Israel was to serve a priestly function to other nations, to serve as an example of how best to flourish ([Exodus 19:5-6](#)). In order to be consistent with this calling, in addition to executing *justice for the orphan and the widow*, the LORD *shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing*. An *alien* is someone who resides in a foreign country. An *alien*, who may have fled his homeland for political or economic reasons, does not usually enjoy the same privileges as a citizen. In fact, he is usually among the ones who suffer from injustice. But every human is precious in God’s sight. That is why the LORD shows love to the *alien* and provides for him, as He does for the other peoples.

Just like the LORD loves the *alien*, He expects His covenant people to show love to the *alien* as well. As Moses clearly stated, *So show your love for the alien*. According to Jesus, the two great commands that sum up God's Law was to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. Israel needed to show love for the alien as neighbors. They needed to remember what it was like to be an *alien*, for they themselves *were aliens in the land of Egypt*. In Egypt, the Israelites lived as aliens for about 400 years. There, they knew nothing but slave labor and were mistreated by Pharaoh and the Egyptians. However, the LORD their God redeemed them from slavery in order that they might live as special people to Him. And God did not want them to treat others harshly, but rather to *show love for the alien* living among them.

This is in total contrast with God's specific instruction to annihilate the current inhabitants of Canaan. God marked the Canaanites for judgement because of their corruption. Their behavior. And those who repented, like Rahab, were spared. God made it clear that the norm was to treat an *alien* with neighborly love. Therefore, God urged them to show no partiality when they administered justice and to *show love* to the aliens who lived *among them*.

Moreover, the Israelites were commanded to *fear the LORD* their God, to *serve Him and cling to Him*, and they were to *swear by His name*. To *fear* the LORD is to care most of what He thinks and says, and whether He approves of our attitude ([Deuteronomy 5:29](#); [6:2, 13](#)). To *serve* God means to follow His commands, and walk in His ways. The verb translated here as "to *cling*" expresses emotional closeness and loyalty. Moses used the same verb in [Genesis 2:24](#) to explain how a man leaves his parents to "be joined" to his wife to "become one flesh" (see also [Deuteronomy 4:4](#)). Israel was to love God as a wife loves a husband.

Finally, the people of God were to *swear by His name* only. Swearing by the name of Yahweh (taking an oath) signifies the recognition of Yahweh as the only sovereign God, and the ultimate authority.

Moses also told Israel, *He [the Suzerain God] is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen*. Some translations render the literal phrase *He is your praise* as saying God is worthy of praise. But the literal rendering and context seem to indicate that God and His *great and awesome* deeds, *which* their eyes had seen, were Israel's *praise*. The thing that set Israel apart, the thing they ought to glory in, was that their God had done mighty things for them. Israel's glory was God's care for them.

Israel's Suzerain God redeemed them from slavery in Egypt with "a strong hand and an outstretched arm" ([Deuteronomy 4:34](#); [5:15](#)). Yahweh was also the one who multiplied His people from the seventy people who went down to Egypt with Jacob ([Genesis 46:27](#)). Moses declared, *Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven*. In speaking this observation, Moses reflected the wording of God's promise to Abraham while he was still without a child, that he would have numerous descendants, too many to easily count, like the *stars of heaven* ([Genesis 15:5](#)). This again shows God's faithfulness. It displays His *great and awesome* deeds that He performed on behalf of His people. He is Israel's *praise*—what Israel should glory in.

Biblical Text:

¹⁶ So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. ¹⁷ For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. ¹⁸ He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹ So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. ²⁰ You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name. ²¹ He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen. ²² Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons *in all*, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.