

# Deuteronomy 11:18-21

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*The Israelites are instructed to constantly reflect on God's covenantal laws, to diligently teach them to their children, and to share these laws with the entire community.*

This section is a repetition of [Deuteronomy 6:6-9](#) with some minor variations. Moses asked the Israelites to constantly reflect on God's covenantal laws, *You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul.* The verb translated *impress* means "to put," "to set," or "to place." In other words, Moses asked the Israelites to place *these words* on their *heart* and on their *soul*. The word *heart* describes the seat of feeling, and of the intellect. The word *soul* refers to the invisible part of man and is the seat of desires and passions. Together, the words *heart* and *soul* emphasize complete obedience to Yahweh. In sum, Moses asked each individual Israelite to constantly reflect on the covenantal principles in order to remain faithful to their Suzerain God ([Joshua 1:8](#); [Psalms 1:2](#)).

Just as Moses figuratively spoke of placing God's commandments on the *heart* and on the *soul*, he also spoke of wearing copies of the *commandments* on the body. This is a figurative way of stressing the importance of these laws. Moses repeats the command from [Deuteronomy 6:8](#), *to bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.* Stated differently, the Israelites were to constantly have God's commandments in view and in mind, in order to carefully observe them. Such a careful observance of God's laws would demonstrate Israel's genuine love for God and would be a public demonstration of their commitment to Him. It would also cause them to live in a self-governing manner, serving one another and creating mutual benefit. This of course would lead to a society full of prosperity and safety.

Not only did the individual Israelite need to constantly reflect on God's laws, he needed to pass the knowledge to his descendants as well. In other words, the knowledge of God should leave the individual's private heart to reach his own family in the home. Moses stated again that the people needed to *teach* God's commandments *to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.* The piling up of these pairs of contrasting verbs together is

a literary device (called a merism) that combines two contrasting words to refer to an entirety. Accordingly, the contrast between *sit in your house and walk along the road* would be an ancient way to say “24-7.” This combination suggests that the teaching was not meant to be a one-time activity. Rather, it was to be done on a regular basis. It was to be constant and continual.

Moses also commanded the Israelites to remember God’s covenant principles every time they left their homes and came back. He then told the people to *write them on the doorposts of your house*. Not only did the Israelites need to write these laws on their *doorposts*, they also needed to *write them on their gates* (in a figurative way). The *gates* refer to the *gates* of the cities because in ancient Israel, most houses did not have *gates*. Moses used the word *gate* (city gate) here because it was the most appropriate place to make public any matters since people would constantly pass through it as they traveled back and forth to the city ([Ruth 3:11](#); [Proverbs 31:31](#)).

Thus, writing God’s laws on the doorposts of the houses and on gates figuratively implies sharing God’s laws to the community so that they, too, could become acquainted to the laws of God. Doing so would cause Israel to live the way God intended for them to live: *as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* ([Exodus 19:4-6](#)). They were to live in a self-governing manner, serving one another to mutual benefit.

Moses concluded this section by spelling out the purpose for obeying these commandments. He said to Israel that they were to obey the LORD *so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens remain above the earth*. The verb *multiply* refers to numerical growth, a form of blessing that was common in the ancient Near East. Thus, the Israelites were promised longevity in the land of Canaan if they would carefully obey the entire corpus of God’s laws. The expression *as long as the heavens remain above the earth* implies permanence. It is a vivid way of saying that if the Israelites walked in obedience, they would have the land forever.

If God’s people remained faithful to His commandments, they would not be removed from the land of Canaan. God granted the land of Canaan to Abraham and his *descendants forever* ([Genesis 13:15](#)). This was an unconditional and irrevocable promise ([Romans 11:29](#)) and was a reward to Abraham for faithful service. God chose Abraham’s descendants (Israel) to be His own possession ([Exodus 19:4-6](#)) and they were the ones who would inherit the land in perpetuity.

However, in order to live and prosper in the land, required them to honor their covenant with God and walk in obedience. The grant of land as a reward to Israel's fathers would never fail. But in order to enjoy the benefits of that grant required carefully obeying God's covenantal laws. The Israelites would lose the privilege of living and remaining in Canaan if they proved unfaithful to their Suzerain (Ruler) God.

**Biblical Text:**

**<sup>18</sup> “You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. <sup>19</sup> You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. <sup>20</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, <sup>21</sup> so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens *remain* above the earth.**