The Lord is God

Deuteronomy 4:1-43

Key Verse: 4:39 “Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.”

These days we are shocked almost every day by the things which were happening around the world. Not long after the Orlando shooting, there were the two incidents of two black men being killed by the police, and the Dallas shooting followed response to these two previous shootings. On July 14th, the day of a French national holiday, in Nice France, a terrorist drove a truck, rushing into the crowd, and killed 85 and injured more than 100 people. Last Friday we heard of a failed military coup in Turkey, where there was an airport bombing that claimed 36 people’s death and many more injuries. There is no safe place on this earth. Without God, without morality and humanity, the vicious cycle of blood continues on this earth.

Today I want to view this world with the perspective of Deuteronomy. Let us study who our God really is, how he wants us to live as his people, and what is the result of our attitude toward God’s word. In Deuteronomy 4 Moses continues to give instructions to the Israelites who would cross the Jordan River and enter the promised land. Moses emphasizes the importance and necessity of acknowledgment of God and obedience to his word.

First, *Sh(a)ema Israel* (1-14) Look at verses 1,2. “***Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.***” The words, “Israel, hear…” are in Hebrew “*Shema Israel*”, which are the first two starting words in the Torah and Israel’s prayer book. The verb, “*She(a)ma*” means “listen attentively and obey” This word is repeated in Deut. 6:4.

Moses continues to instruct the Israelites on how to obey God and his words by using several synonymous verbs such as “follow” (1), “keep” (2), “held fast” (4), and “observe carefully” (6). God commanded his people to live according to the decrees and laws which he has taught them. They should not add or subtract from what God has said. They should have holy reverence toward God’s word. What did God promise them when they follow his words? When they followed God’s word, they would live and go in and take possession of the promised land. God guaranteed safety, security, and prosperity when they obey him and his words. Listening to God’s word and obeying him is not only a matter of visible and tangible blessings, but also a matter of life and death.

Look at verses 3-4. “***You saw with your own eyes what the Lord did at Baal Peor. The Lord your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal Peor, but all of you who held fast to the Lord your God are still alive today***.” Moses reminded them what had happened to those who followed Baal at Peor. This incident is recorded in Numbers 25. While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the Lord’s anger burned against them. (Nu 25:1-3) Then Phinehas, the priest, found an Israelite man who was sleeping with a Midianite woman and killed him. The same day the Lord God killed 24,000 Israelites who were yoked to the Baal of Peor with a plague. The Israelites saw with their own eyes how the Lord God destroyed all those who followed the idols, and how he saved all those who held fast to him. Hearing the Lord and obeying his word is not optional, but fatal.

Here the word “held fast” has the same meaning as a man is ‘united’ to his wife, (Ge 2:24) and as Ruth ‘clung to’ Naomi (Ru 1:14). Idolatry is spiritual prostitution. The right and good relationship between a husband and a wife requires ‘faithfulness.’ The word ‘faithful’ is ‘*Aman*’ in Hebrew. (Nu 12:7, Deut 7:9) The word ‘*Aman*’ is the same word when we make a marriage vow before the Lord God by saying, “Amen”. “Amen, …so it be, …truly.”

When his people hear God’s word and obey him, God’s blessings upon them are more than they can imagine. Look at verses 5-8. According to these verses, God’s blessings upon those who follow his commands and observe them carefully are summarized into two: First, they will be a wise and understanding people. Second, they will be a great people. They will be a wise and understanding people because God’s words give them wisdom and understanding to nations. Proverbs 9:10 says, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*” This whole world was created by God’s wisdom and power. We human beings, in our wisdom, cannot fathom the width, depth, length, and height of God’s wisdom and power. When we are born again and obey him carefully, we experience his wisdom and power.

Those who observe God’s word carefully will be a great people because God is with them. God hears when they pray. (7) They will be great because God gives them righteous decrees and laws. We become great when the great God is with us. We become great when God is near us and hears our prayer. We are great because we know God’s will and follow his way. Who is the truly great man in this world? The truly great man is the one who has the knowledge of God and lives according to his will like John the Baptist and the Apostles.

The meaning of the word ‘*Shama*’ extends to education of their next generation. Look at verse 9. “***Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them***.” Obeying God’s word is not only observing for themselves, but also teaching to their children. Deuteronomy emphasizes parental responsibility for their children’s spiritual education. The words, “you, your children and their children after them” are repeated in Deuteronomy (4:25,40, 6:2,7,20…) Parents must teach their children God’s laws and decrees so that they may live and inherit God’s blessing. Children must study the word of God and meet God personally and deeply. They have to struggle to hear God’s word personally and prayerfully. Our God is a God who speaks. Moses heard God’s voice at Mount Horeb, where the fire was blazing with black clouds and deep darkness. (11) At that time the Lord God spoke to Moses out of the fire. Moses heard the sound of words but saw no form: there was only a voice. (12) The Lord God declared to Moses his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which were written on two stone tablets. Moses asked his people to remember what God had said to them through him. (10)

I want all our children to hear God’s voice personally and deeply as Moses heard God’s voice at Mount Horeb. God revealed himself through his words. They hear God’s voice when they really want to hear. They hear God’s voice through their personal time of prayer, meditation, and Bible study. They hear God’s voice when they struggle to meet God and experience Him. Let us pray that we all including our children, friends, and students may hear God’s voice as Moses heard them at Mount Horeb. Amen.

Second, the Lord is God (15-43) What makes men’s heart corrupt? According to verse 16, men become corrupt when they make for themselves idols. (16) God hates idolatry. God commanded his people not to worship idols, not making an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal or bird or fish. Our God has no visible form. In verse 15 Moses said, “***You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire***.” Our God is invisible because he is spirit. God revealed himself through his words and his people heard his voice. God warned his people not to bow down to the sun, moon, and stars, but remember how God took them out of Egypt by his mighty power. (19,20) The Lord God was angry when he saw his people rebelled against him and worshiped idols. Our God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. (24) God consumed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire. (Ge 19) But here a consuming fire reveals God’s glory. According to Exodus 24:17, when Moses went up to Mount Sinai (Horeb), the glory of God appeared on the top of the mountain like a consuming fire. Our God is a jealous God. He is jealous when his people love their idols more than himself. It is the same as when a husband sees his wife love others more than himself. (Pr 6:34) Men’s corruption starts with idolatry. God knows the consequences of men’s idolatry, so he warns them to remember God their Creator and Savior and worship him only.

Moses knew that their children would become corrupt and would worship idols after they entered the promised land. He warned them that God would drive them out of the promised land and that they would be scattered. (26-27) They would worship man-made gods in the foreign land. (28) This thing happened later as Moses had warned them. When the Israelites abandoned God and worshiped idols, God scattered them to Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia. They had lived as strangers and slaves for a long, long time. They suffered as people who lost a nation. But they suffered more because the glory of the Lord left them.

But our God is a merciful God. God never gives up a hope for his people. When they repent and seek the Lord God, they will find him. Look at verses 29-31, “***But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the Lord your God and obey him. For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath.***” This thing happened in 538-432 BC when the Israelites returned to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. Finally, God restored them and healed them by sending Jesus Christ as their Promised Messiah. Our God is the God of hope. He provides an opportunity for another chance to meet him in the midst of men’s complete failure. If we seek the Lord with all our heart and with all our soul, we will find him and he will meet us. Jesus said in Matthew 9:13, “*For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners*.” The Apostle Paul describes God’s love and his hope for sinners in this, “*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*.” (Ro 5:8) Amen!

In verses 32-40 Moses repeatedly reminded them that the Lord is God and there is no other. The Lord God is the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth in the beginning. What other god created the whole universe except the Lord God? (32) What other god brought his people out of Egypt but the Lord God alone? Where is another people but the Israelites, who heard the voice of God out of the fire (33) and came out of other country by testing, signs, wonders, by war, and by God’s mighty hand? (34) Moses said in verse 39. Let us read verse 39. “***Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other***.” Here the Lord is ‘*Yahweh*’ (Jehovah) and God is ‘*Elohim*’ in Hebrew. Yahweh is Elohim in English terms. *Elohim* means ‘All powerful’ or ‘Almighty’. Our God is the Almighty God. There is no God Almighty except Yahweh. Therefore, Moses made a conclusive instruction in verse 40. Let us read verse 40. “***Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time***.”

Before Moses instructed the Ten Commandments, he proclaimed three cities of refuge; Bezer for the Reubenites, Ramoth for the Gadites, and Golan for the Manassites. (43) These cities of refuge were the shelters for those who killed people unintentionally. They could flee into one of these cities and save their lives. (42) These cities of refuge are the foreshadow of Jesus Christ in whom we could save our lives. Dr. Samuel Lee wrote about obedience like this in his personal note, “When we disobey God, we are responsible for all the consequences of our disobedience. But when we remain in Jesus’ words, Jesus will take over all the consequence of our sin. Let us remain in Jesus by putting all our burden of sin upon him and live obedient life to God.”