

There is No Other (Deuteronomy 4:32-43)

Matthew Williams

January 15, 2023

We tend to think of the world in two categories. The material world is where the story of human history goes down, where we're born, work, buy groceries, get married, raise children, you name it. The spiritual world, in contrast, is where God does his thing, where he works, moves, and does all the stuff people talk about in church on Sundays. Two worlds. Both are real. We do our thing over here. God does his thing over there.

There's a fatal flaw in that perspective. The God with whom we have to do is not doing his thing over there while we do our thing over here. He has acted, he is acting, and he will never stop acting in human history because our world is his world. He created it. He upholds it. He governs it. And is unceasingly working in it for the sake of his glory and our good. He's not just a God who exists. He's a God who intervenes.

As a tree is known by its fruit, or a man is tested by his deeds, so too God is known by his actions. He has not left it up to us to decide if he's really there, develop a variety of theories, and choose whichever perspective on the spiritual world we find most persuasive. No. He shows us exactly who he is and what he requires of us by breaking into our world in a way that exalts his supremacy and demands our allegiance.

He is not passive. And he is not silent. **The Lord exalts himself in revelation and redemption that we might know he alone is God and is supremely worthy of our devotion.**

Our pluralistic society is no less saturated with false gods than the Ancient Near East in Moses' day. We just call them respectable things like self-care, financial security, or professional success. We need to remember the LORD is God. There is no other. He is not God in one category or one part of the universe. He is not God in some situations in your life but not others. He is God and God alone in all places, at all times, in all situations!

The final words of Moses' sermon in Deuteronomy 1-4 culminate in a powerful declaration of the exclusive deity, singular unity, and utter worthiness of God. This all is grounded in the way he broke into Israel's story and through her, into the story of the entire human race. Verse 32, "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.”

The two great things the Lord did for Israel are the same two things he has done for us through Christ. **He exalts himself through revelation. And he exalts himself through redemption.**

1) GOD EXALTS HIMSELF THROUGH REVELATION (verses 33-36)

The way Yahweh took the initiative to manifest his glory through the words he spoke set him completely apart from the mute idols of Canaan. Verse 33, “Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the mist of the fire, as you have heard?” What’s Moses talking about? Something Israel experienced 40 years prior at a place called Mt. Sinai. The entire nation of several million people audibly heard the voice of God. Ex 19:16-19 tells the story.

“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.”

You saw “His great fire,” Moses reminds them in Deuteronomy 4:36, the physical manifestation of his consuming power, the resplendent majesty of his presence. You heard “His words,” a divine self-disclosure through the wholly suitable means of human language. It was a precious gift, Israel, an unprecedented action, something none of the nations around us had ever experienced or heard of. You didn’t behold a wooden statue, carved by human hands. Deuteronomy 4:12, “There was only a voice.”

And it wasn’t the result of some sort of innate merit or spiritual sensitivity on their part. Twice Moses says in verse 36, he “*Let* you hear his voice...he *let* you see his great fire.” It was an act of grace, an expression of God’s undeserved favor, in two senses.

First, it was an act of grace because we are naturally unable to recognize God’s voice. The sin in our hearts, the dark desire within that asserts our own authority instead of joyfully submitting to God’s, destroys our ability to discern the truth about God. We’re

not intellectually objective when it comes to the things of God. We are pervasively and grievously biased. Our insight is horribly skewed. Lies about God sound true. The truth about God sounds like a lie. It's the consequence of our inherited guilt and moral corruption and an expression of God's righteous judgment.

Our need is identical to Israel's. God must enable us to hear his voice. We have no independent ability to grasp who God is, to recognize his voice from all the other voices out there. The Spirit must open our eyes to see and our ears to hear the glory of God's self-revelation in Scripture, because we are naturally deaf and blind to spiritual reality. It's why the psalmist rejoices in Psalms 40:6, "You have given me an open ear."

The Lord was exceedingly kind to "Let" Israel hear his voice. Friend, he is exceedingly kind to let you hear the same. Whenever you read something in Scripture and marvel at the goodness of God. Whenever you hear something in a sermon, are freshly convicted of your need for a Savior, and compelled to cry out, "Help, Jesus!" If you share a doubt or fear with a friend and the encouragement they provide leaves you more aware God is sovereign, loving, and wise, you are a blessed man or woman indeed!

Christian, do not take the privilege of God revealing himself to you through words you can understand for granted. What kindness, what humility, for our Creator to freely and faithfully speak to us as his creatures in a way we can understand. Sinai was an act of grace because we are naturally unable to hear God's voice.

Second, Sinai was an act of grace because when Israel heard God's voice, she didn't die! What's the climactic marvel, the stunning miracle, at the end of verse 33? It's not the fact that God spoke. That much is entirely consistent with his personal and communicative nature. It's the fact that when you heard the voice of God speaking "Out the midst of the fire" you lived! Why is that so amazing? Because God's voice is an expression of the weight of his glory. Psalms 29:4, "The voice of the LORD is full of majesty." It's a revelation of the matchless splendor of his nature.

What does the collective testimony of Scripture lead us to expect when a holy God collides with sinful men? What does an entire generation of Israelite corpses buried in the wilderness say? What do Nadab and Abihu's charred bodies outside the temple say? What does Isaiah's cry in the courtroom of Yahweh, "Woe is me! For I am lost..." say? Or Peter falling at Jesus' feet and pleading, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Undone. Overwhelmed. Eviscerated. Destroyed. That's what happens to sinners when God reveals his all-consuming majesty.

That's exactly what God did at Sinai when he spoke to Israel out of the fire. Remember, both then and now, God's Word isn't just information about God. It is the self-revelation of God. To hear his voice is to be confronted with the glory of him who is of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look on wrong. Yet, when God spoke to her out of the midst of the fire at Sinai, she lived? Why? Because God's purpose in speaking wasn't to condemn her. It was to save her.

The reason God spoke to Israel is the same reason he speaks to us through his Word. Verse 36, "He let you hear his voice that he might discipline you." How did God "Discipline" Israel at Sinai? He gave her statutes and rules to follow that she might experience the life and joy of relationship with him. Both then and now, discipline is training in the way of righteousness. It's corrective – don't do this, and formative – do this instead! The law he gave Israel even contained provisions for how she could be forgiven and restored whenever she failed to obey.

Friends, we need the Lord's discipline no less than Israel. Why? Because wisdom in the things of God is not found by looking within or listening to yourself. Wisdom is found by listening to what God has said about himself. I'm not talking a subjective spiritual impression or internal sense of what's true. I'm talking about God's inerrant, authoritative Word, graciously given to us in the pages of Scripture.

Prov 6:23, "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life." Proverbs 1:5, "Let the wise hear and increase in learning." That's the gift God gave to Israel, the gift of hearing his voice – not to condemn her, but that she might be saved.

2) GOD EXALTS HIMSELF THROUGH REDEMPTION (verses 34 & 37-38)

Look at verse 34. There's a second utterly unique thing God did for Israel. "Has any god 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?" Moses describes what happened to Israel before she arrived at Mt. Sinai. The Lord rescued her from 400 years of brutal slavery.

How did he do it? Through a divine act of war against Pharaoh and all his host in the form of ten plagues. He turned the Nile River into blood. He filled Egypt with frogs, gnats, and flies. He killed all their livestock. He afflicted them with boils. He destroyed



their crops with hail, and what the hail left, swarms of locusts devoured. He filled their land with pitch darkness, “A darkness to be felt,” for 3 days. And finally, he killed all their firstborn sons.

It was more than a series of unfortunate events. It was personal. God himself worked salvation for his people by exercising judgment on her enemies. The moral arc of the universe didn’t cause the waters of the Red Sea to crash over the Egyptian army after Israel passed through on dry ground. God did. It was the might of his hand. The strength of his arm. The so-called “gods” of Egypt were powerless before him.

Verse 37 tells us what compelled the Lord to do so. He was fueled by holy love. “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.” Sometimes we think of God as a dispassionate sovereign, working all things according to the perfection of his will, unmoved by all the emotions that flood our hearts. Friend, that is not who God is. He is deeply emotional. The whole reason we experience emotions is because he created us in his image!

In the sovereign mystery of his will, he set his holy affection upon Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, compelled by nothing outside of himself to do so. And having set his affection upon them, he intervened in their life to turn their hearts back to him. He rescued them and their descendants from trouble without and trouble within. He took the childless and gave them offspring. He took the homeless and gave them a land. He took the weak, the poor, and the enslaved, and carried them on eagle’s wings. He did for Israel what she could never have done for herself. Why? Because he loved her.

Friend, he loves you too! So much in fact, that two thousand years later, he worked a far greater deliverance for you, deliverance from slavery to sin and death! The singular “Offspring” in verse 37 points forward to more than God’s sovereign choice of Israel. It points forward to Jesus, God’s Chosen Son, who embodied in his life of obedience all Israel was supposed to be. And it points forward to the church, Christ’s chosen bride, whom the Father purposed from eternity past to rescue through Christ’s death and resurrection.

The gospel isn’t a hidden deliverance any more than the exodus from Egypt. It is a public or in the words of verse 31, a “Before-your-eyes” kind of rescue. Galatians 3:1, “It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.” Through the public proclamation of the gospel, God confronts sinners like us with the glorious truth of his power to save in an immeasurably greater way than he confronted Israel.

To be a Christian is to be loved by the Father, chosen in the Son, and brought home to heaven through the faith-sustaining, perseverance-producing power of the Spirit. And even more than the first exodus, it's personal. He doesn't send plagues. He gives us life by laying down his life. God exalts his name in revelation. And he exalts his name in redemption. He did it for Israel. He's done the same thing for us, brothers and sisters.

The Word of revelation God gave Israel no less than the acts of redemption he performed for Israel, marvelously revealed his glory. But the Word God has granted us in Christ, the good news of the Word Made Flesh, is immeasurably better.

Hebrews 12:18–24, “For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them... But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

As God brought Israel to his place, into the land of her “Inheritance” in the words of verse 38, so too he brings us “In” to his place through faith in Christ. Into the spiritual kingdom of his redemptive rule. Into the family of the church through baptism and membership. Ultimately, he brings us home to heaven.

But here's what we must remember even as we rejoice in the progression of revelation and redemption as we move from God's actions under the Old Covenant to God's actions under the New. Then and now, revelation and redemption have the same goal. And that goal is found in verse 35 and again in verse 39. Moses says it twice because it's that important. It's the divinely intended effect of everything he has said for the last four chapters! Verse 35, “To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.”

3) GOD IS EXCLUSIVELY WORTHY OF OUR DEVOTION (verses 35 & 39-40)

No other god has revealed himself like our God, brothers and sisters. What other god has provided an inerrant Word that testifies of his glory? What other god has come to earth as a man to lay down his life for us? Sure, other religions purportedly offer

pathways to the divine, but it's never the good news of God saving us. It's a hundred variations on us saving ourselves.

The utter uniqueness of God's actions in revelation and redemption, then and now, point to utter uniqueness of his person. There is no one else like him, not because he's the best god or a preferable god among an assortment of real options. But rather, he is the only God, the True, the Living God! Isaiah 46:9, "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me."

Is that not your greatest need in every situation you find yourself in? To know who is God? To know who is on the throne? To know where to look to make sense of the brokenness of life in this world? To know where to find meaning in the midst of futility, hope in the midst of sorrow, gladness instead of shame and freedom instead of slavery?

When your adult child says, "Don't call me." When your boss says, "We're letting you go." When your spouse says, "I don't love you anymore." When yet another friend moves away or gets married, and it feels as if life is passing you by. What does every moment of our life have in common? It's a moment, a "Today," where we need to know and lay it to heart (verse 39) "That the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."

We don't believe that because we like the thought or because it's an easier way to navigate a dog-eat-dog universe. We believe that because that is what God has shown us about himself. His acts of revelation culminating in Christ testify of his supremacy.

He does not ask you to believe on a whim that he is God and there is no other. Through his actions in human history he shows us that he is God and there is no other! The call to trust God alone in verse 39 is grounded in his actions in verse 37. Because he loved, chose, and brought you out of Egypt, know therefore today that the LORD is God!

Now be careful. The point of reviewing Israel's spiritual experience is not to encourage her (or us) to trust in her subjective spiritual experience. Nor to reduce the foundation of faith to the finite dimensions of personal perception, as if what "We have seen" or "We have known" or "We have experienced" is the arbiter of what is actually true! No. The point of remembering God's actions in history is that we might trust in what God has objectively shown us about himself through his actions in history.

You do not want your “Faith” in God to ebb and flow on the tide of your latest spiritual experience or your fluctuating emotions. That’s not faith in God at all! That’s faith in your own experience. Trusting your personal experience of revelation or your personal experience of redemption is altogether different than trusting the God who makes himself known through revelation and redemption. Don’t place your faith in what you feel your personal experience says about God, but what God has already told us about himself through the person and work of Christ.

And what does that kind of monotheistic faith in Jesus, that Christ is LORD and there is no other, look like in action? How do we know if we are really laying to heart the fundamental tenet of our faith, that God is one, that he alone is exclusively worthy of our devotion? Through the way we obey his commands. Look at verse 40. “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...”

The divinely intended effect of Moses’ words is not a people who say, “Aha! Look at us. We know the truth about God unlike all those social justice warriors out there. Look at our doctrine! Look at our theology! The reformation fathers would be proud.” No, they wouldn’t, brothers and sisters, not if a correct Statement of Faith is all we have. James 2:19, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”

The whole reason God exalts his name in revelation and redemption is to show us that he is exclusively worthy of our devotion – not in the abstract, but through faithful obedience of his commands! That’s the true test of our theology. That’s the true measure of our orthodoxy. That’s what sets a genuine Christian apart from a demon. It’s not about what we know. It’s about whether the pattern of our life confesses or denies that the LORD Is God and there is no other.

Think of it this way. When obeying God’s Word in all it says feels really hard. If you find yourself thinking, “Surely, there must be another way to find life. This doesn’t feel life-giving at all!” What do you need to remember? The LORD is God and there is no other. You cannot avoid him. You can ignore him. You can pretend he’s not there. You can act like you are god and he is not. But in the end, you cannot create a different spiritual reality.

You are a creature, fashioned by God in his image and for his glory. You are accountable to him and his purposes will prevail, whether in salvation or judgment. May it be the

former friend! For the Lord loves you. He died for you because he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. He longs for you to know him! He longs for you to enjoy him! Not just because he's "Right" or "True" but because he is exceedingly good!

Mind you, when Moses encourages Israel in verse 40 to "Keep God's commands *that* it may go well with you," he's not talking about a works-based salvation. Scratch God's back and he'll scratch yours. No! He's saying the path of obedience to God's commands, starting with his command to repent of our sins and hold fast to Jesus, is *always* a path of blessing and the *only* path of blessing.

Psalms 31:19, "Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!" The Lord is exclusively worthy of our devotion and those who choose to submit to him will find life and life abundant.

CONCLUSION

But what if we fail? What if you find yourself living as if someone or something else is more worthy of devotion than Him? Maybe in your head you know they are not more worthy than God, but you like running after them because they don't require what he requires, or they permit you to maintain a shred of authority over your life? What then?

That's when the passage that comes next, right before Moses launches into the 2nd major section of the book in verse 44, is a balm for the soul. The Mosaic law established something called cities of refuge throughout the land of Israel. It was a place where anyone who unintentionally killed someone fled for protection from an avenging relative of the deceased. It was a place they could expect a fair trial and preserve their life. A place where an Israelite who needed mercy could find it.

Friends, what a picture of the refuge we have in Jesus – not just for unintentional sins, but even for intentional sins, sins we knowingly commit! When despite what we know of God's exclusive worthiness through revelation and redemption, we still look to other people and things to give us life instead of him, there is a place where you can flee. It's the only place we can safely flee. It's the cross of Christ where God died for your sin so you could find mercy.



As the Mosaic law ensured cities of refuge were close at hand, so too the cleansing fountain of Christ's blood lies close at hand, ready and waiting, whenever we experience conviction of sin. Hebrews 4:15-16. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

God has revealed his glory in Christ. God has redeemed our souls through Christ. **In both revelation and redemption, the Lord exalts himself that we might know he alone is God and supremely worthy of devotion.** Obey his Word accordingly this week, friend. And when you forget who he is and fail to obey, don't run from him. Run to him, for there is no other God. There is no other Savior. And no sinner beyond the infinite stretch of his mercy.