

Whom do you serve today? - revering our covenant God

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Date: 12 February 2017

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning. You'll find that in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 4. It's page 148, if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles.

Continuing our studies in the early chapters of this book, and reading this morning most of chapter 4, which brings us to the end of the first address of Moses, the first great sermon of the three sermons that are recorded in this book.

So, Deuteronomy, chapter 4, then, at verse 1, page 148. So says Moses, Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and rules that I'm teaching you, and do them that you may live and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving to you.

You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you. Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor, for the Lord your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor.

But you, held fast to the Lord your God, are all alive today. See, I've taught you statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you're entering to take possession of it.

[1 : 26] Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

For what great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as this law I set before you today?

Only take care and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children.

How on the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, the Lord said to me, Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children also.

And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire.

[2 : 41] You heard the sound of words, but saw no form. There was only a voice. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, the Ten Words.

And he wrote them on two tablets of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you're going over to possess.

Therefore, watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb, out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.

And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the hosts of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them.

The things that the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance as you are this day.

[4 : 04] Furthermore, the Lord was angry with me because of you, and he swore that I should not cross the Jordan, that I should not enter the good land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.

For I must die in this land. I must not go over the Jordan, but you shall go over and take possession of that good land. So take care lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he has made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the Lord your God has forbidden you.

For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.

You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you.

And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands that neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there, you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.

[5 : 40] When you're in tribulation, and all these things come upon you, in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God, and obey his voice. For the Lord your God is a merciful God.

He will not leave you, or destroy you, or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them. For ask now of the days that have passed, 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.

Did any people ever hear the voice of a God speaking out of the midst of fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any God ever 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 deeds of terror, all of which the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God, that there is no other besides him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you.

And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. 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, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day.

[7 : 20] Know therefore today, and lay it to heart, that the Lord is God, in heaven above and on the earth beneath. There is no other. Therefore you shall keep his statutes and commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land, that the Lord your God is giving you for all time.

Then Moses set apart three cities in the east beyond the Jordan, that the manslayer might flee there, anyone who kills his neighbor unintentionally, without being at enmity with him in time past. He may flee to one of these cities and save his life. Bezer in the wilderness, on the table land for the Reubenites, Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, let's turn, shall we, to Deuteronomy chapter 4, page 148, if you have a church Bible.

A chapter which is all about revering our covenant God. Now, the gospel of Jesus Christ never allows us to rest on our laurels, looking to the past, as if our salvation was something done and dusted for us long ago, when we first believed, when we first trusted Jesus.

[8 : 51] Once saved, always saved. You've heard that often. Well, that can actually be one of the most dangerous aphorisms in the evangelical phrase book.

Because according to Jesus and his apostles, endurance to the end will always mark out genuine saving faith. It is an essential requirement for those who will be saved for the judgment to come. That's according to Jesus. So, the New Testament, when it pictures the life of faith, never ever pictures it as standing still, does it? It's always moving, walking, running, pressing on.

Walk in a manner worthy of your calling as children of light, says Paul to the Ephesians. Walk, not out of step with the gospel, but in step with the Spirit of God, to the Galatians.

Endure, says the epistle to the Hebrews. Run with endurance, the race marked out for us. Straining forward, says Paul, I press on to the prize, to the goal.

[10:01] And so it has been always for those who have been walking the covenant way of the promised kingdom of God. And here, in Deuteronomy chapter 4, we come to the end of this first address of Moses, where he's been looking back, looking back at all God's grace thus far to his people.

Where God has been utterly constant in his covenant faithfulness. And so it has been a history of abundant grace, but also, at many times, sadly, necessary judgment because of Israel's great sin. And yet they're not destroyed. They're still here alive today, and they still have a future in front of them. And so Moses now gives a passionate exhortation to hear and to heed God's word today, and to go on hearing it tomorrow in the land.

And again, you see that word today coming all through the chapter, don't you? It begins at verse 1. Now, do what God commands and live. Verse 26, I call heaven and earth to witness today.

And verse 40, keep these commands that I command you today. And so it goes on again and again. The word of God and the call of God is never, ever just about the past.

[11:18] It's about today. It's about tomorrow. It's about every day that lies ahead of us. And here, says verse 4, is a new generation who are still alive today because they have held fast in faith through the wilderness years, held fast with God under Moses, their leader.

But, and this is the crucial point, if you look at verse 22, that Moses makes, Moses is no longer going to be with them as their leader to command them. And that's why he's so urgent in verse 23. Take care, lest you forget the gospel. Forget the covenant of the Lord your God in these future days. And all through this chapter, there's a passionate plea not to forget, verse 9.

Keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the great things that God has done, lest they depart from your heart. And Moses is deeply conscious that this story is going to be moving on without him.

I think that's the significance of verses 41 to 43 at the end there because they give a link to the future, to the next generation. They give a link to Moses' next address that begins in verse 44, but I think they're there to remind us that this is not just a book of sermons of Moses.

[12:36] You see the little snippet there about these cities of refuge. We'll read about those later on in chapter 19. But I think this little snippet is here to remind us that this is part of a story.

It's moving on. It's not just Moses speaking. This is a people moving on with God and with a real mission. They're moving on to the next stage of God's plan and God's purpose for them.

And Moses is deeply conscious that he has to urge ongoing commitment to them as they move on. And as they move on without him.

It's actually very like Peter's second letter in the New Testament. You remember, Peter is drawing near to his own death. He knows that the time when the apostles are there to guide the church, to command the church in person, is passing.

And so that's a letter that calls the people constantly to remember. Remember God's covenant. Remember, don't forget the words of the prophets. Remember, don't forget the commands of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through your apostles.

[13:38] apostles. Remember the true word of the true God so that you'll keep to his true path when we are no longer there. And that's exactly what Moses' concern is here in this chapter.

I mean, of course, it should be the concern, shouldn't it, of every Christian leader at whatever way you're leading to do everything that you can to set those in your care on the right path, on a safe path, so that they're walking in step with the gospel of the one true God after your time of influence comes to an end.

So above all, Moses is calling his people here to remember and to be absolutely clear as to who their God really is, what he has said and what he hasn't, how he does work and how he doesn't, so that they'll go on knowing him truly, so that they won't drift in their heart and in their soul, so they won't fail in their faith to endure to the very end, and so fail to gain the prize for which they've been called the great inheritance in God's everlasting kingdom.

So Moses' exhortation here, you will notice through the chapter, is all based on exposition. In other words, it's all based upon revealing to them truly who their God actually is because only if we know who our God is will we therefore be able to serve him truly, be able to walk onwards, run with

perseverance, press on towards the goal of the great prize.

So it's a real question for all of us today, this today, whom do we serve today? Are we clear about the God who's called us to follow him?

[15 : 22] Are we confused? Are we even ignorant about what kind of a God it is that we think we follow? Well, here's a chapter that says to us very, very clearly, behold, look at your covenant God.

It's a chapter that teaches us to know him and therefore to revere him as he truly is, the God of heaven above and earth beneath. And Moses, you'll see, doesn't hide anything in the small print, does he?

He puts before his people the whole truth about God so that they're making a fully informed decision as they move forward with him in the calling that he has placed upon their lives.

And the apostles and the Lord Jesus himself, they tell us, don't they, that all of these things in these scriptures, they're written for us. They're to teach us about the God whom we serve today, the God who, of course, has been made known to us ultimately in his total fullness in the person of the Lord Jesus.

So who do we serve today as the people of the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, let's try and see the key things in this long chapter but a very revealing chapter about the God in heaven above and earth beneath.

[16 : 35] First of all, verses 1 to 14. Moses surely here makes plain that our God is a speaking God and therefore his word is to be treasured and never forgotten.

Perhaps verse 9 is a key verse here. Take care lest you forget, but rather make these things known to your children and to your grandchildren.

And you can know and you can remember and teach the very words of this God because his commands, his instruction, his law is utterly clear.

Our true God, unlike what many theologians would want you to believe, our God is a God without ambiguity. Notice three great emphases here on the historic revelation of God's word that was given to God's people at Sinai and is reiterated here by Moses to the people.

First of all, God's commands, God's words are powerful. They're a matter of life and death. That's surely what verses 1 to 4 teach us. The sacred, the inviolable nature of God's law.

[17 : 48] You dare not mess with what God has spoken, verse 2. You don't add to it, you don't subtract to it because it gives life, verse 1. Or, if you reject it, it brings judgment.

That's what verses 3 and 4 are about. And notice the positive linking of God's law with life. That is the authentic Old Testament gospel.

Read Psalms. Read Psalm 1, Psalm 19. Read the long psalm, Psalm 119. To know your law is to know life, is the psalmist's testimony.

Because to do God's law, as verse 1 commands here, is, as verse 4 puts it, is to hold fast to the Lord himself. And that's what real gospel faith is.

It's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 1, that we are being saved if we hold fast to the word that has been preached to us. Holding fast to God's word is holding fast to him.

[18 : 53] And God's word can't ever be presumed upon. It can't ever be treated lightly. And that's what verse 3 warns us against. You can read the whole story of Baal Peor.

It's in Numbers chapters 22 to 25. It's all about the story of how Balak, the king of Moab, hired Balaam, the seer, the prophet, and he wanted him to curse Israel.

But of course, the only words he could speak in fact blessed Israel and gave the most wonderful revelation of their future, of the star of Jacob who would crush all his enemies, of the scepter from Israel that would rule and have dominion over all nations.

It was a time of this extraordinary giving of wonderful gospel promises to God's people about their future. And yet, in the midst of all that, the men of Israel went whoring with the women of Moab.

And they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor who was their Moabite sex god, the god of sex. They flagrantly denied the covenant of their god.

[20 : 00] And as a result, they put the whole of the future of the nation in jeopardy. No, says Moses, don't tamper with God's word.

God's word is for doing. It's for obeying. It's for submitting to as servants. It's not for presuming upon as though having got his covenant you could therefore behave any way you like.

No. And how much more so must that be true for us who have far greater clarity, far greater completeness of God's revelation through the Lord Jesus Christ, not just a servant in God's

household, but the son over the whole house of God.

Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I tell you, said Jesus? My mother, my brothers and sisters, are those who hear the word of God and do it.

You see, God's commands are not just about our own personal life, our personal morality, our personal relationship with God, although they are. There's a real impact on the wider world of the fidelity of God's people or their infidelity to his word.

[21 : 14] And that's what's emphasized here in verses 5 to 8 because to have God's words, his commands, is a great privilege. It's to bring light into the darkness of this world. We've already seen these verses that they stress the missionary nature of God's law for his people.

Israel were called to love and to live God's ways in order to witness, verse 6, in the sight of all the peoples, the nations, to witness to the glory of the one true God.

The Lord's people were to be a city set on a hill. They were to be a light shining in the darkness, the glory, the beauty, the goodness of the one true God. They were to be a light for the nations, as Isaiah said, to open the eyes that are blind that my salvation might reach the ends of the earth. But of course, as Isaiah also noted, the truth was so often very different from that. God's name was not praised, but blasphemed among the nations because of their disobedience, their failure to image the beauty of God to this world.

Of course, the Lord Jesus at last came to be that true light, to show the life of God to the world. But not only to show it in himself, to call his followers to love him and likewise to let your light shine so that people see and praise your Father who is in heaven.

[22 : 41] And that's our calling, isn't it? An extraordinarily privileged calling. As Peter says, to be that holy people, to proclaim the excellencies of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

And it's a real challenge, isn't it, to have that great privilege, to have that weighty responsibility. Because our task in these last days is even greater. It's even more urgent by far than it was for the people of Israel then.

But we can have great confidence, can't we? We never need to be ashamed of God's ways, of his commands for life. We never need to be ashamed of the Bible's morality, the Bible's ethics.

But God has told us when his people do live this way, then the world will see an understanding and a wise people. And they will take note and they'll have to admit that the people must serve a great and a gracious God.

Now, that might take time, of course. It will in a hostile world, in a skeptical world. But it does happen. History has shown it. When the real life of the Lord Jesus is seen and is heard and is experienced among a people who do live totally submitted to the Lord their God.

[24 : 01] There's a real missionary nature to God's law and it's our calling and our privilege to live for him. And thirdly, do notice also that God's commands are preserving for his people.

That's the emphasis in verses 9 to 14. God's word instills loyalty and prevents drift in his people. Look at verse 9.

The point there is that lest you forget, lest your heart and soul drift from the Lord, you must teach these words. Our God is a God who has appeared, who has acted and demonstrated his great acts in history.

And here they saw it. They saw it with their own eyes. But he's also a God who has spoken clearly in history. Verse 12. He spoke to them in the fire of Sinai.

And verse 13, notice, he wrote down his words to preserve his words. And verse 13, notice, he set in motion a teaching ministry of his words through Moses so that they would go on living and producing real faith and commitment, real obedience in his people to preserve their hearts.

[25 : 15] Notice the emphasis in verse 9. On keeping their souls, on keeping their very life, on keeping their hearts. See what he's saying? He's saying, it is the ongoing teaching of the word of God that imparts real spiritual life, real spiritual experience, real heart dynamism among his people.

that they may fear me all the days of their lives. The whole emphasis here is not just, is it, on the theophany, the appearance at Sinai, but on the clarity of God's words, his verbal revelation.

Our God's word is not, as the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, once said, like the groans of a spastic child who can communicate nothing but his presence and his inarticulate wanting.

These verses tell us the precise opposite. God's word is clear and it is unambiguous. And the abiding, living nature of this revelation as written, as preserved, and as taught will bring life and will also confer judgment from generation to generation.

Chris Wright has commented that the ear as the organ of understanding and obedience in relation to the spoken word of God was more religiously and ethically significant than the eye.

[26 : 49] Now, something we need to remember in today's church. Verse 12, the Lord spoke. You heard words. You heard a voice alone. And he declared, verse 13, and he wrote, and he commanded me, verse 14, to teach you that you might do his word.

It's pretty clear. And how much more so for us, for whom the word of God has become flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus and given God's final word to the world in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wasn't God's great command to us on the lips of the Lord Jesus at his ascension? Wasn't it, go and teach the world everything that I have commanded you?

Not show them pictures and ask them to imagine what their idea of God might be. No, our God is a speaking God. And he commands us to speak his words also because they are the words of life.

Not least, notice verses 9 and 10, not least, to our children and to our grandchildren. It's a terrible, terrible mistake that many make today, even in the evangelical church when they think of children's work and youth work.

[28 : 08] Oh, don't give the children too much Bible. We don't want to put them off church. Look at these verses if that's what you think. God says, do not deny our children the Bible.

That's how the life of God will surely not depart from their lives. God's word is a word of life. And it must be made known to our children, to our children's children.

He's not just talking there about formal teaching in Sunday school and in church and in the home.

He's talking about a whole lifestyle that communicates the word of life to our children.

Somebody's put it this way, children absorb attitudes from those who teach them. And if the glory of the biblical revelation is truly felt by us and real to us, it must surely become real to our children.

It's obvious. As is the reverse because if the real truth is that in fact you're not that committed, you're rather lukewarm to the Lord Jesus, you don't care much for the mission of his kingdom, well, don't expect to raise children like Billy Graham.

[29 : 19] It's just not going to happen, is it? Our God is a speaking God, a God without ambiguity and his word is to be treasured, not forgotten among his people.

It's to be cherished, it's to be lived out, it's to be passed on so that our souls are kept safe, so that our hearts don't drift all the days of our lives.

And our hearts can't drift and mustn't drift from this God because the second thing that we see in verses 15 to 24 is that the God that we serve is a jealous God.

He's a God without neutrality, his worship has to be kept pure, never trivialized. That's the clear point here in these verses. We need not just a revelation of God, but we need reverence for God.

For, verse 24, look, the Lord your God is a consuming fire, he is a jealous God. three times, Moses gives us stark warnings here not to drift, not to be seduced into idolatry of any kind.

[30 : 27] Verse 16, beware making images of creatures that God has made. Verse 19, beware turning to worship heavenly bodies. Again, mere things that God has just made for the good of all peoples.

Verse 23, take care, beware, lest by doing this you reveal, in fact, what is the heart of all idolatry. Forgetting the covenant of the Lord your God, the Lord who is your true and jealous lover.

Idolatry, you see, that is putting any created thing, be it of this world, be it something forged in our own imaginations, anything, putting it above the true and right love that we have for our God, for our creator, for our redeemer, for the lover of our soul.

Idolatry is adultery, spiritual adultery. It's like shattering a covenant far more unique, far more exclusive than our human marriage covenant and we know what tragedy, what misery, what damage is done always when that covenant is shattered.

The Lord will not tolerate a third party in our relationship with him. yet these warnings are stark, they're repetitive here because our hearts are so prone to that spiritual adultery.

[31 : 53] Why is that? Well, look here at the contrast between the true worship of God and the false worship as described here. It's a contrast, isn't it, between what is visible and what is principally audible.

images, idols, the sun and the moon and so on, they all have form, they're visible, but they don't speak. But the Lord, verse 15, is not visible.

They saw no form, but they heard his voice. He spoke out of the fire. And as Chris Wright says, idols are visible, but dumb. Yahweh, the Lord, is invisible, but eloquent.

And the only image you see that there is to be in this world of the one true God is the human beings who are made in his image and as his image to show forth the goodness and the glory and the holiness of God to the world as his people listen to his voice and obey his commands.

And again, Chris Wright says, what sets the Lord apart is not that he looks different, but that he calls for a people who will look different.

[33 : 07] And that's a challenge to us, isn't it, you see, because the great attraction of dumb idols is that they make no demands on us like that. There's no voice, there's no commands, there's no voice saying hear this and do this.

And so you can have your religion, your spirituality, your rituals, you can do your worship and still get on with life doing exactly the things you want to do your way. Isn't that attractive? And that's what all externalizing of religion does.

It allows you to carry on that spiritual aspect of your life quite apart from any real relationship with the real God. Quite apart from any need to do the things that he commands.

That's why liberalism in the church loves rituals. Robes and pictures and poems and all sorts of aesthetic things. Just as often the church of Rome does. And also many branches of the charismatic church likewise.

You see, anything that moves what you call the worship of God into the realm of the merely visible, the aesthetic, the numinous, the expressive, into that and away from the word of God removes that challenge of absolute submission to the one God.

[34 : 24] Absolute submission in a whole of life surrender to his every command, to his total control, to his way and not ours. And that, of course, is what the apostle Paul tells us in Romans chapter 12 verse 1 and 2 is what real worship is.

It's the only kind of spiritual worship that God wants from us. The worship of living, bodily sacrifice, living obedience to Jesus. But God's people, you see, are to be a people of his own inheritance, rescued out of bondage, out of slavery, not to be taken themselves back into bondage and slavery in idolatry.

That's not only self-destructive to our true calling as human beings, as the image of God, but it's a spit in the face of the faithful lover of our souls who has given his own blood for our lives.

And if we think that somehow our God is less jealous for us, whom the Son of God was crucified to save, we need to read the New Testament, don't we?

Read the book of Hebrews. Read Hebrews 12. Let us offer to God acceptable worship, that is, the worship of enduring obedient faith that he's talking about, for our God is a consuming father.

[35 : 50] just the same as here, a jealous God whose worship must be kept pure, never trivialized, never pushed to the side.

But even as we come to terms with that unavoidable reality, we've also got to hold alongside it the message of verses 25 to 31 that teaches that our God is nevertheless a God who is without bitterness, the God we serve is a merciful God whose covenant purposes of grace, he tells us, will never be forgotten, never abandoned, never destroyed, even by the tragic failures of his own people.

For, verse 31, the Lord, the Lord, your God, is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

There's no conflict there with what we just read in verse 24. Indeed, it's because God is a God who has promised mercy that he is jealous for his people's holiness because they shall be and must be the people that he has called them to be.

And God's holiness means that disobedience must be punished as it would be punished. Verses 26 and 27 here simply tell us exactly what happened ultimately in the calamity of the exile while Israel was put out of the land.

[37 : 21] Moses is a realist as God is a realist. He remembers that we are dust. He remembers that we are frail, that we are weak, that we are prone to wonder, that we are quick to fall and to disobey.

That's why Moses warns because he knows there's an inevitability about this disaster. We'll see that explicitly later on in chapter 31. But he also knows the extraordinary mystery of God's grace

and mercy that will triumph even over just and necessary judgment.

Look at verse 29. But, it's one of the great but-gods of the Bible, isn't it? But from there, from exile, from the depth of sin and failure and utter disaster, but from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him.

God's mercy will triumph whatever the cost. Because God's mercy is sovereign mercy, it is certain mercy. Yeah, notice the second half of verse 29 and verse 30.

Never without real repentance and heart obedience. You will return, it's certain, because God's grace is sovereign. But you will return and obey his voice.

[38 : 46] Because God's grace always demands and always evokes the real obedience of true faith. and all because God will never abandon his sworn covenant of grace.

You see that even here, so near the beginning of Israel's history with God, Moses is laying out a theology of history, of God's distinct plan and purpose for the world beyond the judgment and failure even of God's chosen people Israel.

Right into what Moses calls here the latter days in verse 30. the days when at last ultimate fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises would come to fruition through the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Go home later on and read Paul's letter to the Romans, Romans 9 to 11 and you'll see exactly where Paul gets his understanding of the plan and purpose of God. The plan that will bring salvation to all the nations despite the abject unfaithfulness, the failure of his people Israel and even their rejection of their own Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ when he comes.

But it is not as if the word of God has failed, says Paul. Because salvation could never depend merely upon man. No, he says, not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy.

[40 : 13] Our God is a merciful God and his purpose of grace for his people will never be abandoned, never be forgotten, never destroyed, even in the face of terrible failures.

He's a God who harbors no bitterness towards his people. Isn't that a wonderful reassurance for you and for me? Wonderfully reassuring perhaps if we are very conscious of our own sin, our own failure.

we know that we have been far away from where we should have been with God. Wondering if there's possibly a way back for somebody who's done what I've done.

Our God is a God of mercy. There is a way back. There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. There's a door that is open and you may go in because at Calvary's cross is where it begins when you come as a sinner to Jesus.

You will find the Lord verse 29. If you search after him with all your heart you will return to the Lord and obey his voice because our God is a merciful God.

[41 : 32] Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened unto you.

Do you recognize the same voice? Whoever comes back to me said the Lord Jesus I will never cast out. Our God is a merciful God.

And shouldn't that mean that if we're the people of this God we should be a merciful people? Yes realistic about sin and its consequences but also patient and merciful with those who have fallen with those who are in a mess.

Don't we need to take Jesus' words much much more seriously than we often do? Remember what he said? Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy not sacrifice.

For I came not to call the righteous but sinners. Our God is a God without bitterness. He's a merciful God. God. And finally verse 32 to the end our God the God whom we serve is a God without comparison.

[42 : 44] He is the only God and his uniqueness will be acknowledged by all his people forever.

Verse 39 therefore know today that the Lord is God in heaven above and earth beneath there is no other and therefore you shall keep his commandments and his alone because what he's saying is there's no other way for life and well-being for all time.

He's in all things unique. Nothing in time and history can compare with this God. He's unique in revealing himself to his people. That's the point in verses 32 and 33.

God does things and when he does the whole world notice but the whole history of the world has never seen such a thing as God coming so near and so clear in speaking his word to his people as he did at Sinai and how much more extraordinary and unique is the God who came near and the

person of his own son in the flesh to show us the father.

Muhammad never claimed to be the ultimate revelation of God. Buddha never claimed to be the ultimate revelation of God. Confucius nor any other. Our God is unique in revealing himself. Himself to his people. And he's unique in redeeming his people. That's the point in verse 34 isn't it? And again in these last days we look back not just to the great mighty redemption of Egypt but we look back to the great triumph the outstretched arm of power and might and judgment that took place at the cross where he disarmed principalities and powers and rulers and authorities to bring us into the kingdom of the son of his love.

[44 : 27] an extraordinary redemption. And therefore of course that puts a unique responsibility on us as people doesn't it?

That's what Moses is saying here in verses 35 to 40. Such a great revelation such a great redemption calls for a great response verse 35 to you it's been revealed that you might know that the Lord is God alone and to know him verse 39 is to obey him it's to lay it to heart it's to do says verse 40 to keep his commands alone.

See what he's saying he's saying that to know God is to know him with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and that will be real that will be visible that will be tangible it will be expressed in our submission to his mastery alone.

There's a wonderful simplicity in it isn't there wonderful liberation because we're freed from every other competing voice in this world every other expectation on our lives just his voice alone to direct us just his judgment alone that matters for all of our life that's why the prayer book is so right in that prayer that speaks of our God and says that God in his service is perfect freedom there's only one God and he's our God he's loved us he's redeemed us he's revealed everything we need for life and godliness so that will go well with us and our children after us what a wonderful liberation that is and all we need to do in life is to listen to him and to respond to him it's so simple not easy but it's wonderfully simple and where we stand on this side of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ how much more grace how much greater privilege and how much greater responsibility belongs to us this is my son said the

Lord in the voice from heaven listen to him and we have Jesus Christ the ultimate revelation of the only God the same God but in the gospel of the New Testament the great declaration that what he began in the great redemption under Moses he has brought to completion the great work of our Lord Jesus Christ in him God has spoken the final and ultimate word to man the word of a gospel that we are to treasure never to forget he's shown us ultimately to be jealous for his own name and declaring him to have the name above every other name that every tongue should confess him and in him he's also shown himself to be supremely merciful to accomplish salvation for all however far away they are for all who will call on him with all their heart and seek him so let me let me ask you this morning whom do you serve today is this God made known in

[47 : 36] Moses words and ultimate in the Lord Jesus Christ is this the God that you know and serve the speaking God revealing himself without ambiguity in our Lord Jesus the jealous God who will tolerate no rivals no neutrality the merciful God the God without bitterness who will forgive and restore us when we come to him and the only God the God without comparison unique in all his ways and if this God is the God we serve well how would anybody know it by looking at us by looking at us and listening to us it would be audible wouldn't it in the unashamed confession of our lips it would be visible the unmistakable character of our lives it would be clearly obvious to all that his commandments alone that his rule that his law is our liberating yoke and our joyful delight to obey that's the way that God through his people brings light into the darkness of this world salt into the decay wisdom and understanding into the confusion and the folly of a world that is so adrift from its maker that's the way of real witness it was then it is now

Daniel the prophet said of the last days that the people who know their God will be strong and do exploits and the wise shall make many understand and turn many to righteousness to shine like the stars forever and Moses is saying to us here in this chapter behold your God there is no other none like him revere him serve him through trusting Jesus Christ alone that it will go well with you you and your children and your children's children and that the world may know him and come to love him and know his grace and his mercy also whom do we serve today let's pray gracious God our father we thank you for your great revelation to us of who you are the

God who speaks words of grace and mercy and peace of promise and of warning that we should never forget them that our hearts would not grow cold our lives not drift from you our jealous lover

who loved us and gave your very self for us help us we pray each one of us in our own lives and all of us together as a people here help us to serve you and you alone today and all the days of our lives we might be to the praise of your glorious grace and we ask it for Jesus sake amen what Lord may we be to have ■■■ him to of will i will be to have em you as we are as sequinte ■■■