



OCTOBER 17, 2021 | REV. MINHONG SONG

“Take to Heart and Keep Them” (Deuteronomy 4:35-42)

³⁵ You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides him there is no other. ³⁶ From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, and you heard his words from out of the fire. ³⁷ Because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, ³⁸ to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today.

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. 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.

Cities of Refuge

⁴¹ Then Moses set aside three cities east of the Jordan, ⁴² to which anyone who had killed a person could flee if they had unintentionally killed a neighbor without malice aforethought. They could flee into one of these cities and save their life.

Life is all about choices. Whom you choose to be with and what you choose to do will determine your future path. Your attitude toward life is also a choice. For example, if you prefer hard work and responsible actions over easy life and irresponsibility, life will reward you with rich dividends.

The book of Deuteronomy is about choices. Moses tells the Israelites that before them are choices of life and death. What will they choose? In Deut. 30, he said,

15 See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.

19 This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

So, Moses makes it clear: choose life or death. It is your call. Our lives are the same, and what we choose in life will determine our life. So, we need to be careful about what we choose to do and whom we choose to be with.

In Deuteronomy 4, we find the concluding section of Moses' first sermon to the next generation of Israelites. These people are about to enter the land of Canaan, and Moses has some important messages to give to them.



Let us look at the background of this sermon first. The people of Israel and the LORD God are in a covenantal relationship. In Exodus 19, God enters a covenantal relationship with Israel.

5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

God promises to take care of them as his treasured possession and requires them to obey him fully and keep his covenant.

What is it that they are to keep? It is the Ten Commandments, and in a nutshell, it is what God requires of this nation. So, Moses goes to the top of Mt. Sinai and comes down with the two tablets containing the essential points of 1) worshipping the LORD only, as there is no other god (love the LORD your God) and 2) living out a morally pure life (love your neighbor).

Unfortunately, the first generation of the Exodus people does not live up to God's expectations. They spend most of their time complaining and arguing about the way God is leading them. They do not make it to Canaan. One by one, they die in the desert.

So, the group Moses addresses here is not the first-generation Exodus people but their children who grew up in the desert. Moses pours his heart out to this group of people and tells them why they must obey the LORD.

Today I want to share with you two things Moses emphasized to the next generation of the Exodus people as they prepared to enter Canaan.

First, learn from the tragedy of Baal Peor.

Moses refers to that tremendous tragic event that took place at Baal Peor. In Numbers 25, while Israel was staying in Shittim, the Israelite men indulged in sexual immorality with Moabite women. The real problem was that these women invited the men to the sacrifices to their gods. The men bowed down to the gods of Moab and made the LORD burn with fierce anger. The LORD punished these evil acts by bringing on a plague that killed 24,000 people.

But Moses points out an essential reality: while the LORD destroyed those who followed the way of Baal Peor, those who held fast to the LORD their God were spared of their lives! This is the point he wanted to get across.

Here the phrase 'holding fast to the LORD' means being united as in a man leaves his father's house and unites with his wife in Genesis 2:24. It means a total union and identification. So those who held fast or who united with the LORD were spared of the plague.

Moses wanted the next generation of young people to learn from this well-known tragedy of Baal Peor. God HATES idol worship because there is no other god than YHWH.

In Deut. 4:23-24,

3 Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. 24 For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.



Is God jealous?

We may have difficulty accepting that God is a jealous God because we often associate jealousy with immaturity. So, how can God show jealousy?

But if you love someone dearly and exclusively, and that person is in a deeper relationship with another person, would you not feel hurt and jealous? God does not tolerate his people courting other gods. After all, these are false gods anyway.

Moses tells the next generation not to forget what happened at Ball Peor (or with the Baal of Peor if the expression refers to the name of the local God and not the place).

We, the church, are the people of the new covenant by the blood of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:25). The blood of the lamb has purchased us, and we are now in a covenantal relationship with God. We must always follow Jesus. If we follow the comforts and pleasures of the world, our soul will die a slow death until we feel so distant from God.

We must instead follow the way of the cross. It may seem difficult and even painful, but it is the right way. Remember the words of Jesus, 'enter by the narrow gate.' (Matt. 7:12). We should not worry about what to eat, what to drink, or what to wear. These belong to those who do not know God. Instead, our concerns ought to be about seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness. We must place our total confidence in the One who is more than able to meet all our needs.

Moses reminds the people, 'Hey, listen! If you cling to the LORD, as in the days of Baal Peor, you will live.' Learn from the tragedy of Baal Peor.

Second, understand why God showed you the miracles.

Moses raises a series of questions. In vv. 33 and 34, two questions have one purpose.

33 Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of the fire, as you have, and lived? (referring to the theophany at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:16-19 à thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, Mt. Sinai covered with smoke, as the LORD descended on it in fire, the whole mountain trembling violently ...)

34 Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? (referring to the incredible exodus events and breaking of the Pharaoh's hardened heart by the ten plagues in Exodus 7 to 11).

He asks them why God did these miracles and allowed them to witness. Why?

The answer is clear: "You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him, there is no other" (Deut. 4:35).

'The LORD (YHWH) is God; besides him, there is no other' is a very important theological statement:

- The LORD (the one who goes by 'I am who I am') is the God of all, the creator, the sustainer, and the judge of all.
- All other so-called 'gods' are false as there is no other God.



When life is hard, and God seems far away, the people of Israel are to look back at these events, the theophany at Sinai, and the breaking of the Pharaoh's heart as evidence that God is alive and in charge.

We are going through a long period of the pandemic. It is like a long spiritual drought. We have lost a lot of spiritual momentum (no summer mission two years in a row, for example). We need to look back and remember how the Lord spoke to us and worked amongst us. This will give us the proper view of God.

My experience in the short-term mission trip to Amazon in 1984:

- The fund-raising
- Experiencing the Amazon jungle for the first time
- The various evangelism trips in the interior
- Witnessing lots of miracles on the field, including the casting of demons from a man

We all have our own stories of how God revealed himself to us. We remember the miracles he has done and shown in our lives. Well, cling to them, not for the miracles' sake, but for the sake of God who shows us who He is. It is so necessary in these trying times of the pandemic.

Let us recap.

Moses reminds the next generation of Israelites that they have in their midst the living God, the God who led His people out of Egypt, and the God who revealed Himself to his people at Mt. Sinai.

Acknowledge and take heart to this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. Keep his decrees and commands ... so that it may go well with you. (vv. 39-40).

Each day we must make the right choice of walking with the Lord. Listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit who is in you. And follow His leading. Learn to be like Jesus and follow what he has taught us.

May the LORD bless you! Amen.