

YAHWEH OUR GOD, YAHWEH IS ONE:

A SERMON ON DEUTERONOMY 6:4

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Delivered at Northwestern College (MN), March 16, 2010

Introduction

I invite you to open your Bible's to Deuteronomy 6:4–5, the passage Jesus pointed to as “the most important” commandment (Mark 12:29–30). “Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one. And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” The section starting in 6:4 runs through 8:20 and clarifies *the nature of covenant relationship*, the essence of which is covenant love. In this introductory unit *the focus of covenant love* is given in 6:4, *the locus of covenant love* in 6:5, and *the contexts for covenant love* in 6:6–9. Today's message is on verse 4. The focus of covenant love is “Yahweh our-God, Yahweh is one.” Where your Bibles have “the LORD,” I say “Yahweh” because in the original, the biblical authors actually wrote and proclaimed God's name, Yahweh, wherever you see LORD in all caps. This is why I use it the way I do, and we'll get a taste for why this is significant in a moment.

Few verses in the Bible are more densely packed with theology or more foundational to a proper worldview than verse 4. Verses 4 and 5 are often called the “Shema” because that's the Hebrew word behind the English “Listen!” or “Hear!” in Moses' call. With this word, “Hear!” Moses, God's mouthpiece, urges the community of God to tune their senses toward a glorious, life transforming truth: “Yahweh our-God, Yahweh is one.” This morning I want us to consider the meaning and significance of this amazing verse. We will approach the passage from two angles: (1) *Yahweh* our God; (2) Yahweh is *one*.

Yahweh our God

The name Yahweh means “He causes to be.” When God talks about himself, he says, “I AM,” but when we refer to him we say, “Yahweh”—“He causes to be” (Exod. 3:13–15). God is more than the causer of all (thus, his own title “I AM”), just like C.S. Lewis is more than the author of Narnia. But if Lewis were to get into the story itself, like God has entered into our world, the characters in the story would declare him to be the causer (author) of everything. God's name means he is the causer of everything in our world. As Paul declares in Romans 11:36, “From him, through him, and to him are all things.” This amazing portrait of God is very important in Deuteronomy. Look with me at Moses' summary of the Exodus event in Deuteronomy 4:32–35:

³²For 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. ³³Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? ³⁴Or 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 great deeds of terror, all of which Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? ³⁵To you it was shown, that you might know that *Yahweh is God; there is no other besides him.*

The one who created man on the earth (4:32) entered into Israel's world with glorious clarity and power. We learn in 4:33 that his presence has the potential to kill, and yet he graciously disclosed himself and his will in a way Israel could understand. In 4:34 we are reminded how Yahweh, the causer of all things, controls all natural elements and judges those who are against him. The text speaks of "trials and signs, wonders and war." Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart, changed water into blood, made the day into night, killed Pharaoh's son, parted the waters, and destroyed the Egyptians in the Sea. "By great deeds of terror" he delivered Israel from the hands of their oppressors (4:34)—all this that they might know that Yahweh alone is God, without an equal (4:35).

Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, is our God today—causer of all, creator of all, judge of all, and redeemer of his own. Turn now to the back of the book—Deuteronomy 32. I call us here because our verse focuses twice on Yahweh's name, and in Deuteronomy 32:3, Moses declares what he is about to say is all about proclaiming "the name Yahweh" (Deut. 32:3). Follow along with me in Deuteronomy 32, as I survey some of the facets of Yahweh's character disclosed to the reader.

He begins in 32:3, "For I will proclaim *the name of Yahweh*; ascribe greatness to our God!"

- The Rock, whose work is perfect (v. 4)
- Faithful, sinless, and just (v. 4)
- Israel's Father-creator (v. 6; cf. vv. 18–19)
- The overseer of nations and people groups, yet with special affection for Israel (vv. 8–9)
- Israel's guide and protector (vv. 12–14)
- The Rock, Israel's savior (v. 15)
- Rightfully jealous (vv. 16, 21), for nothing else and no one else deserves worship (v. 17)
- The remover of both provision and protection from Israel due to her sin (vv. 22–25)

- Concerned with his reputation (vv. 26–27)
- The controller of Israel’s future (v. 29)
- Israel’s protector (v. 30)
- A unique source of pure life, not poisoned death (vv. 32–33)
- Vengeful against his people’s enemies (v. 35)
- Compassionate toward the humble (v. 36)

Deuteronomy 32:39 – “See now that I, even, I am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver our of my hand.”

- This God moves the world to joy and is worthy of the worship of all (v. 43)

Yahweh is *One*

Yahweh alone is God; Yahweh is one! In the Bible, the number “one” can refer to both quantity and quality, and the Shema is applied in the Bible in both ways. Think of it this way. I have one woman. By this I can mean two things: (1) I am not a polygamist; I have one wife—that is, my woman is one is quantity. (2) To say I have one woman should also mean something else—namely, that while there are many girls in this world, there is one that captures my heart, captures my affections; one girl with whom I stand and to whom I have committed my life, uniquely. Look at Deuteronomy 10:17: “Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God.” In one breath Moses tells us Yahweh is one in quantity—he is *the* great, *the* mighty, *the* awesome God, the only truly King of the Universe. But he is also one in quality. The reality of Yahweh does not deny that other powers exist—whether spiritual or earthly—that can vie for our allegiance, but for us Yahweh is to be *God* of gods and *Lord* of lords. Let me unpack this a little more.

Unique in Quantity

To say that Yahweh is one in quantity means that he is the only King of the universe (4:35, 39; 32:39). There is only one throne in the pantheon of heaven—not two! Far too often we can exist with a “Star Wars” mentality, where the dark side and the side of light appear as eternally opposing realities that have equal power. When life gets hard, Satan caused it; when life gets good, God caused it. But hear me: In a world where Satan and Yahweh are equals, you and I can have no hope, for if Satan thwarted God’s purposes once by bringing the bad, what is to say that he can’t thwart them again tomorrow when we need God’s help. You and I can have no real hope, if God is not sovereign, even over the bad. But this is not the biblical picture.

Remember Deuteronomy 32:39: “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.” Yahweh will not let us give Satan *ultimate* credit for car accidents and cancer. Yahweh alone is the causer of all. Satan is real, but he is like a dog on leash, active but submissive. (Read Job 1–2!) But now look at Deuteronomy 32:4: “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and *without iniquity*, just and upright is he.” Moses had no problem saying that God was all good and yet in charge of death and life, sickness and healing. We must, therefore, with Moses affirm both.

Don’t make the God we believe in small. Satan is *not* his equal. I know that pain is hard; this room is filled with it. Some of your dads are out of work and struggling to get by; some of you have close friends who are suicidal, and you don’t know what to do; some of your bodies are chemically not in balance, and life is so hard. But the presence of pain does not mean that God is not in control. He was on the throne before the pain, and he still is on the throne today. And he wants you to look to him, not run from him. Remember Deuteronomy 32:36—God has compassion on the humble, but he opposes the proud (cf. 1 Sam. 2:30; 1 Pet. 5:5). If you find yourself being humbled, take courage! There is one King in the universe that controls all things; he is Yahweh, and he stands not only able but also willing to help us in our time of need. As Moses said to those who feared the giants in the Promised Land: “You shall not be in dread of them, for Yahweh your God is in you midst, a great and awesome God” (Deut. 7:21). Israel, “there is none like God, . . . who rises through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty” (Deut. 33:26). The same confidence that Moses had for Israel is the confidence we can have today, for Yahweh, who causes all things to be, is for us, not against us (Rom. 8:31), and he is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). There is only one God in the universe; his name is Yahweh, *Yahweh our God*.

Unique in Quality

But Yahweh is also one with respect to quality. By this I mean that nothing can ultimately compare to him. Yahweh is unique, and I want to focus on one specific way today. *Yahweh is uniquely satisfying*.

In Matthew 13:44 we are told: “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” How valuable is God to you? When it’s movie night and your wing mates pull out a video you don’t believe would be healthy for you to watch, in that moment do you fear them or fear God more? Or say it’s the night before your test; you’ve got to get an A, but you have procrastinated in studying before now. You come back to your room and find out the girl down the hall just got

news that her Mom has cancer. In that moment, is the grade or loving your wing-mate more important? Are you willing to compromise your faith in order to get ahead? You're deciding on a major. What motivations control your soul—money, prestige, power, or the pleasures of God?

Similarly, Jesus, who said, “I and the Father are *one*” (John 10:30) and “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9), declared in John 6:35, “*I am* [that’s how God talks about himself—*I am*] the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” Have you tasted and seen that God is good so much so that you put away maliciousness, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander (1 Pet. 2:1–3)? God doesn’t call us to follow him and to flee from sin because he hates us or wants to burden us. No! Hear the Psalmist: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11). Full joy for the longest amount of time!

You know what sin does. It promises a better tomorrow or a better tonight. A midnight look at sites on the internet when all your peers are sleeping; a glancing eye at your neighbor’s test, compromising integrity to get a higher grade; caring little about how you dress—tight clothes, low cut shirts, even if it causes a brother to stumble. Is this love? Is God controlling your heart today, or is self or sin in control of your heart? “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the *one* and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and things of the world” (Matt. 6:24). God’s ways are good: purity, modesty, integrity, honesty. God’s ways are right, and in them there is no guilt.

Conclusion

There is only one God, both in quantity and in quality. You may believe the first but if you are not living in accordance with the second, your heart is divided, and he is not one in your life. In a world filled with forces attempting to master your soul, I call you Northwestern, live for God alone. Seek his applause. Find pleasure in doing what is right, thinking what is right, even when it is the hard way. There you will find the highest joy for the longest amount of time.

Closing Prayer

Father, you alone are God. Satisfy us this morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Help us trust you daily, even when life is hard, reminding ourselves that you are for us and that you are King. Help us make choices that display that you master our hearts. Help us to love in ways that display that we have one God, and his name is Jesus.