

Deuteronomy 4:32-40

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“Indeed, **ask** now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth [look back], and *inquire* from one end of the heavens to the other [look around]. Has *anything* been done like this great thing, or has *anything* been heard like it? ³³ “Has *any* people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire [at Mt. Sinai], as you have heard *it*, and survived? [Those who encountered God knew their lives had been spared; see Gen 32:30; Ex 33:20; Judg 6:22-23; 13:22] ³⁴ “Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within *another* nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? ³⁵ “To you it was shown that you might **know** that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him [God is *sui generis*, unique, in a class by Himself; cf. Isa 45:5-7]. ³⁶ “Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. ³⁷ “Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them [blessing by association]. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, ³⁸ driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you [the Amorites], to bring you in *and* to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today [cf. Jer 32:17-22]. ³⁹ “**Know** therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other [*sui generis*]. ⁴⁰ “So you shall **keep** His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you [blessing passed on], and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time [ongoing blessing was tied to ongoing obedience; cf. Deut 5:16; 6:1-3, 18; 11:8-9; 12:28].”

Summary:

In this pericope it is revealed that Yahweh is unique in all history, having been motivated by love, He chose to deliver His enslaved people from Egyptian bondage and bring them to the Promised Land, and Israel was to take it to heart and obey His commands so it would go well with them. The pericope is presented as a history lesson (Deut 4:32-34), followed by a theological lesson (Deut 4:35), then another history lesson (Deut 4:36-38), a second theological lesson (Deut 4:39), concluding with a practical lesson (Deut 4:40).¹ Moses calls his audience to think back on their history “concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything been done like this great thing, or has

¹ This observation is taken from Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 142.

anything been heard like it?” (Deut 4:32). Moses asks them to consider several things. First, “Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived?” (Deut 4:33). The answer, after consideration, was a resounding “no.” The second question was, “Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?” (Deut 4:34). Again, the clear answer was “no.” In fact, a study of pagan deities shows they operated out of self-interest, attacking other nations merely to expand their territory, not for the interest of their worshippers. But Yahweh is different. He is the only true God; there are no others (see Isa 45:5-6). And, He invaded Egypt, the superpower of the day, demanding His people be set free from their slavery to worship Him, and humbling Egypt when Pharaoh refused, and bringing Israel out to Himself to be a special people. Moses provides a theological lesson from these facts, saying, “To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him” (Deut 4:35). What Israel was “shown” was to lead them to what “they might know”, namely, the Lord is God is unique, with no other like Him (*sui generis*). God’s acts were self-revelatory, for the purpose of making Himself known to a specific group of people, Israel, that they “might know” His special uniqueness in all history, and especially toward them as His chosen people. Moses provides a second history lesson, saying, “Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire” (Deut 4:36). The phrase, “out of the heavens”, means God condescended to the earth to let His people “hear His voice” and to “see His great fire” at Mount Sinai. The “discipline” mentioned here is not punitive, but didactic for training purposes, that they might know and obey Him. And what was God’s motivation for His deliverance and self-disclosure? Moses states, “Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today” (Deut 4:37-38). *Love* and *choice* belong together. “In this brief motive clause occur two of the most covenantally significant words in the Old Testament, ‘love’ and ‘choose.’ As technical terms they are virtually synonymous as a great many scholars have put beyond doubt. In other words, ‘to love’ is to choose, and ‘to choose’ is to love.”² God’s love (אהב *aheb*) is an important theological motif that runs throughout Deuteronomy (See Deut 7:7-8, 13; 10:15, 18; 23:5). Although love has a wide semantic range in the Old Testament, “in Deuteronomy ‘love’ denotes ‘covenant commitment demonstrated in actions that serve the interests of the other person.’ This statement is revolutionary, since the notion of love is virtually absent from the vocabulary of divine-human relationships in the ancient orient.”³ The idea

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 132.

³ Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 144.

of commitment-love carries into the New Testament where Jesus tells His disciples, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Love for Jesus means we are committed to Him above all else, and this commitment is manifest in a life of obedience to Him and service to others. Biblical love is not an emotion; rather, it’s a choice to commit ourselves to another person, a choice to seek God’s best in their lives. Love is manifest by prayer, sharing the Gospel with the lost, sharing biblical truth to edify believers, open handed giving to the needy, and supporting Christian ministries that do God’s work, just to name a few. From God’s past acts of self-revelation and deliverance, Israel was to “Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other” (Deut 4:39). Here, for the second time, Moses drives the point that God is unique, in a class all by Himself (*sui generis*), for there are no other gods that exist. And what was Israel to do with this knowledge? They were to take it to heart and live as God intended. Moses draws a practical lesson, saying, “So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today” (Deut 4:40a). Here is the often-repeated pattern throughout Scripture that knowledge precedes application. We cannot live what we do not know, for learning His Word necessarily precedes living in His will. And what’s the benefit? Moses tells Israel, “that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time” (Deut 4:40b). Not only would God bless His people for their obedience, but would also bless their children. Godliness results in benefits, both to the person who walks with the Lord, and to those connected to her/him.

Moses appeals to his people to obey the will of Yahweh for their own good and for the good of their descendants. If they will keep alive the memory of Yahweh’s gracious actions, if their theology remains pure, and if their response is right, God’s mission for them will be fulfilled. The land has indeed been promised them as an eternal possession, but enjoyment of the promise is conditional. Each generation must commit itself anew to being the people of God in God’s land for God’s glory.⁴

Israel was blessed by God’s loving choice of them as a special people; which love was manifest in His great acts of deliverance in their past. Such a record of God’s greatness was intended to help motivate them to obedience. “The best way to motivate people to obey God is to expound His character and conduct, as Moses did here. Note too that Moses appealed to the self-interest of the Israelites: ‘. . . that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land . . .’ (v. 40; cf. 5:16; 6:3, 18; 12:25, 28; 19:13; 22:7; Prov. 3:1–2, 16; 10:27).”⁵

⁴ Ibid., 144.

⁵ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 4:32.

As the Church, there is similarity between God's deliverance of Israel and us. Like Israel, we were once enslaved in a kingdom, the kingdom of darkness over which Satan rules (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 John 5:19), and we were helpless to liberate ourselves (Rom 5:6). But God reached into Satan's kingdom and disrupted his domain, calling out a people for Himself from among those who were enslaved, and this disruption occurred at the cross, where having "disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him [Christ]" (Col 2:15). Our freedom came when we responded positively to the message of the cross, believing "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). The result was God "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13-14). Our deliverance is complete, "For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7), and we have been redeemed by the precious "blood of Christ" (1 Pet 1:19). And now we are "children of God" (John 1:12), brothers and sisters to the King of kings and Lord of lords, and as such, we are encouraged "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (Eph 4:1). And we look forward to future rewards for our life of faithfulness, knowing we do our work "for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (Col 3:23-24).