

THERE IS ONLY ONE LIVING GOD!

Series: Awesome Father, Precious Son

by Ron Ritchie

It was Monday, June 26, 1995. Anne Marie and I were having breakfast in one of our favorite restaurants in Half Moon Bay. I picked up the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle and saw this headline: "Religions of World Celebrate with Prayers to Dozen Deities." This celebration took place in San Francisco in honor of the fiftieth birthday of the United Nations, which had its beginnings in this city. The article began, "Political and spiritual leaders filled Grace Cathedral yesterday...to challenge the religions of the world to end violence and oppression in the name of God. Bright sunlight illuminated the magnificent stained-glass windows of the cool, cavernous cathedral on San Francisco's Nob Hill as prayers, chants and incantations were offered to a dozen deities."

Reporter Don Lattin went on to say that the room was filled with Anglicans, Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Mormons, Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Costumed children from around the world participated in the interfaith worship service by bringing flowers to the altar and co-mingling holy water from the Ganges, the Amazon, the Red Sea, the Jordan River, and other sacred streams, and pouring them into a "bowl of unity," according to a parallel article in the San Jose Mercury News. The whole worship service was directed toward bringing peace to the world by reversing the use of religion to justify war, hate, violence, aggression, and intolerance. We can see in this celebration well-intended but deceived religious leaders and followers hungering for a variety of gods and goddesses to become active in the affairs of mankind as they offered up their prayers, chants, and incantations.

However, in the midst of this united religious celebration, the worshippers were challenged by a small group of Christians who stood across the street holding up a sign that read in part, "...No king but Jesus." In a world that hungers for one world religion and that is open to joining together in worshipping dozens of deities, the followers of Jesus Christ are challenged to proclaim more clearly than ever to all who are willing to listen: There is only one living God in this world, and his names are Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace-King Jesus. He is the only one who is powerful enough to lovingly deliver us from the kingdom of darkness; place us into the kingdom of light; wash away our sin and guilt; and then give us the gifts of eternal life, the Holy Spirit, and the wholesomeness, peace, and joy we have been looking for all our lives.

As I was preparing for this series in the book of Deuteronomy, I was reminded once again of the awesomeness of our heavenly Father and the preciousness of our Savior Jesus, which can be so clearly seen in their relationships with the nation of Israel and with the church. I was also reminded that during his ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ quoted from Deuteronomy extensively. This was only to be expected of a king of Israel. For in Deuteronomy we find that each new king of Israel was instructed by God to write for himself a copy of this document, read it daily, revere God, and walk in obedience to its holy truth (see Deuteronomy 17:18-19). But I also believe that Jesus often quoted from this book because he wanted his disciples to come to know his Father in heaven. In his prayer to his heavenly Father in the garden on the evening before his death on the cross, he said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God [*italics mine*], and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent...O righteous Father, although the world has not known Thee, yet I have known Thee...." (John 17:3, 25).

In the next seven messages we will study some selected passages that show the awesomeness of the heavenly Father and the preciousness of the Son. In Deuteronomy 4:32-40 we will find Moses reminding the second generation of Jews after the Exodus that there is only one living God, as their parents witnessed in Egypt and as they would witness in their own generation in the idolatrous land of Canaan.

He has revealed himself to Israel

Deuteronomy 4:32-34:

Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous 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?

Let's look at the overall context for a moment. In 1401 B.C. the Lord led his children to the eastern bank of the Jordan River. The forty years of wandering in the wilderness were over for the second generation of Israelites, some two million strong, as they arrived under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. As they stood on the plains of Moab and looked westward, they could see the land that God had promised Abraham 685 years earlier (see Genesis 17). They could also see the mighty Canaanite city of Jericho seven miles away in the foothills.

Then on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses, the great shepherd, prophet, and mediator, called together all the people and reviewed the Law of God given to him on Mount Sinai. This review became known as Deuteronomy, which in Hebrew means "These are the Words" (of the Law of God). (The Septuagint translates it, "The Second Law.") This review was designed to show this new generation the holy and loving character of the one and only living God as well as the just demands of his holy Law. Israel would never be able to keep God's holy Law in their own strength. But their hearts would be greatly encouraged when Moses told them the good news that when they reached out to God in faith, he in turn would circumcise their hearts so that they would desire to keep his Law out of love and appreciation (see Deuteronomy 30:1-10).

In the book of Deuteronomy as a whole, Moses presents three major messages to remind God's people about, respectively, (1) their history with God (1:1-4:49), (2) the Lord's covenant (5:1-11:32), and (3) the specific terms of the covenant (12:1-30:20). He finishes up with his own last will and testament (31:1-34:12). Deuteronomy ends with the account of how God led him into the hills of Moab (western Jordan) to die as consequence of his own sin (see Numbers 20:1-13; Deuteronomy 1:37; 34:1-6).

In the immediate context of chapter 4, Moses reviews for the people that the Law of life (verses 1-5) revealed the character of God to the nations (verses 6-8), and then that this awesome one and only living God personally revealed himself to them and their children (verses 9-14). So they are not to go back to the spiritual enslavement of idolatry. However, he continues, if they do sin against him in this area, but are willing to confess that sin to him, they will find his heart filled with mercy (verses 15-31).

Now in verses 32-40, in order to drive this truth home Moses asks three mind-blowing questions about their history with Elohim, and in so doing provides them with a witness of his nature and personality.

"Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of?" Moses wants to really arrest the hearts of this people by the Spirit of God: "Let me have your ear for a moment: Suppose you had the opportunity to ask someone about the former days, the days before you were born, perhaps someone as far back as the days of Adam and Eve, or even some created being like an angel in the heavens above you. Ask them if they have ever heard of anything greater than what the one and only living God, Elohim, has done for you as a people. Go ahead and ask! The answer will be, "No, a thousand times no!" For our God, Elohim, the Creator of mankind and then of all the nations, has become personally involved with us. He calls us his people, and he revealed himself to us as the awesome Lord of our history at Mount Sinai and in the Exodus."

"Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived?"

Moses is reminding this people of his history with God on Mount Sinai when he was given the Law. At that time God told Moses he wanted to meet with his people, and after they cleansed themselves, he appeared to them. Exodus 19:16-19 tells us, "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him." So Moses is saying here in Deuteronomy, "The key to your relationship with God is that not only did you meet him at Mount Sinai when he spoke to us, but in spite of the fire, lightning, thunder, and awesome power, you are still alive! Your relationship with Elohim is real."

"Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings [of Pharaoh by God], by miraculous signs and wonders [the plagues; see Exodus 7:3], by war [with the Egyptian army at the Red sea; see Exodus 14:30], by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm [redemption from Egypt; see Exodus 6:6], or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?" Moses will also tell these people in Deuteronomy 7:7-8, "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you [*italics mine*] and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt." (See Psalm 136:10-26.)

Having seen the nature and personality of God the Father in these verses, look at how Hebrews 1:1-4 reveals the precious Son of God: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

The United Nations has committed itself to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights...to establish conditions for international law and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom." ("The U. N. at 50: Contract with America," San Francisco Chronicle, p. A18.) But in that noble statement King Jesus is obviously absent, as the Christians across the street quietly tried to remind the religious and political communities assembled in Grace Cathedral on June 26.

There is only one living God, and he has revealed himself to Israel...

So that they might know that there is no other god

Deuteronomy 4:35-38:

You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides him there is no other. 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. Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, 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.

These people were surrounded by all the gods of Egypt for four hundred years. Many of them had been brainwashed to believe that the gods of the frog, insects, locust, cattle, jackal, and the Nile river would provide for them and bring them protection as well as hope for eternity. Yet Moses reminds these people that God, Elohim, personally moved in among them and demonstrated that he was the one and only living God. This mighty God was the only one who could defeat the false gods, serve up death or life as witnessed in the Passover, open up the Red Sea for them to cross, and then use that same sea to drown the army of Pharaoh

(see Exodus 3-14). Then this mighty God spoke to them both out of the heavens and out of the fire on Mount Sinai, that majestic experience in which he gave them his holy Law to discipline them.

"Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, 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." This is the first time in the Old Testament that we read that God loved Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The Jews were instructed to love the Lord God, but now we find that he loved (the Hebrew word *ahab*) them. This is followed by the announcement of his sovereign choice of this nation because they came out of the seed of Abraham. All the promises in his covenant with Abraham were being passed on to Abraham's descendants. At the same time there are spiritual blessings that are passed on to all those of "the seed of Abraham" who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, who is the Seed of Abraham (see Galatians 3:16).

Christians are also the recipients of God's love, for the apostle John wrote some 1530 years later (1 John 4:7-10), "...Love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God....This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." How awesome our Father, and how precious his Son Jesus!

The San Jose Mercury News article on the same United Nations event had this kicker above the headline (p. 8A): "Leaders of 43 spiritual traditions, dignitaries of distant lands unite to sing friendship's 'cosmic song.'" The words of the song were included:

We with arms embracing millions,
Kiss this earthly paradise.
Bless the stars in all their billions!
Bless the rhythm of our lives.
Friendship is our greatest treasure.
Joyfully its strains prolong.
Born of stars in pain and pleasure,
Friendship is the cosmic song.

Meanwhile, across the street stood the fundamentalist Christians holding up a sign that read in part, "...No king but Jesus." In the midst of all this "cosmic friendship" we need to thank God, Elohim, that he revealed himself in love and grace as the one and only living God not only to the Jews, but also to the church in his Son Jesus. And this same loving God has the power to deliver Israel as well as the church from worshipping the nongods of Egypt, Canaan, and this modern world. It is now only a matter of choice....

Choose this day whom you will serve

Deuteronomy 4:39-40:

Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. 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.

Moses is saying, "How much more evidence do you need to be convinced that the gods of Egypt, including the golden calf, are nongods? Your fathers and now you have had so much evidence that Jehovah is the one and only living God who not only loves you and has chosen you, but has also provided for you all these years [since Abraham]. Now this same God will lead you into the land of Canaan, the promised land. Then you are going to become a new generation under Joshua and Caleb, and you are going to be given a new possession-the land of Canaan. You are going to have a new experience-no longer wandering but settling, exchanging tents for houses. It doesn't get any better! Take all this to heart and be thankful to God, for the one and only living God who saved you from the nongods of Egypt will be with you when you face the temptations to worship the nongods of Canaan."

"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." God is saying, "If you choose by my power within you to walk in my revealed ways, there are blessings not only to you personally but also to your children, as you begin to live long in the land that I have chosen to give you and your generation for as long as there is time."

As the precious Son Jesus would say to his disciples (Matthew 7:13-14), "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The San Jose Mercury News headlined its article, "Interfaith assembly brings dove [of peace] to life" (p. 1A). Here is a classic illustration of the foolishness of religions that bow their hearts, heads, and knees to a dozen deities and believe that they can bring back to life the dead dove of peace, rather than bow their hearts to Jesus who really could bring them a life of peace, social justice, and the equality for which their souls and spirits hunger. That peace today can be found only in Jesus, the King of kings. He is King because he is the only one who has ever been able to say, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies...." (John 11:25). And then he died for our sins, was buried, then rose again and was declared by his heavenly Father to be the King of kings.

On June 26, 1995, that group of well-meaning but deceived political and religious leaders gathered together with some of their followers in Grace Cathedral and offered prayers, chants, and incantations to a dozen deities on behalf of a wounded world, while across the street a small group of Christians held up a sign that read in part, "...No king but Jesus." How should we respond to this fast-changing religious community that hungers for one world religion? Allow me to make a few suggestions based on this passage in Deuteronomy:

First of all, we need to check our own hearts to make sure that we really believe that there is only one living God, whose name is Jesus.

Second, we need to rejoice in the spiritual reality that he has revealed himself to us, his church, the same way he revealed himself to Israel: with love, grace, and mercy, and with the good news that in him is salvation—the forgiveness of sins, the gift of eternal life, and the Holy Spirit who will enable us to live a life that pleases him and brings joy to our hearts.

Third, we need to review our history with Jesus so that we can be assured that there is no other god from the past that we are clinging to and no gods in the present that we are being tempted to turn to in times of crisis or need.

Fourth, we need to choose by the power of the Holy Spirit to walk in obedience to his laws that he has placed in our hearts, with the personal benefits that it will go well not only with us but with our children.

Finally, if we are the kind of people who are willing to carry a sign outside of Grace Cathedral that reads, "No king but Jesus," then we also need to be the kind of people who by the power of the Holy Spirit are willing to walk across the street and into the crowd of well-intended but deceived political and religious leaders and their followers. And as we mingle with them we need to share, without judgment or self-righteousness, the good news of Jesus Christ in deed and word: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. For it is our sin-filled lives that are at the root of all the injustice, wars, hatred, violence, and intolerance. To choose Jesus as King is to choose life, resulting in wholesomeness, peace, and joy.

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