

OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD!

Series: Awesome Father, Precious Son

by Ron Ritchie

Never in the history of the world have we had so much high-tech capability at our fingertips, which now enables us to communicate with each other at any given moment regardless of where we are in the world. In a society filling up with cellular phones, E-mail, the Internet, fax machines, and TV, we are becoming a world community. At the same time, however, people are discovering that in this maze of communication technologies there is a shallowness of content in communications that affects their minds, emotions, and spirits. Without realizing what is going on, people are being driven by invisible forces that will eventually lead them to believe that they are "masters of the universe," or even gods.

But even though people in their shallowness of mind and heart continue to rebel against their Creator, before the one and only living and loving, awesome God laid the foundation of the world, he was laying out a plan of redemption, which in time would be communicated to the whole world via his precious Son Jesus. In order to help you understand how much our awesome God really loves us and wants to communicate with us about his plan of redemption, let me share with you a quote by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great English preacher of the last century:

We go back to years gone by, when worlds were made and systems fashioned, but we have not even approached the beginning yet. Until we go to the time when all the universe slept in the mind of God as yet unborn, until we enter the eternity where God the Creator lived alone, everything sleeping within him, all creation resting in his mighty gigantic thought, we have not guessed the beginning. We may go back, back, back, ages upon ages. We may go back, if we might use such strange words, whole eternities, and yet never arrive at the beginning. Our wing might be tired, our imagination would die away; could it outstrip the lightning flashing in majesty, power and rapidity, it would soon weary itself ere it could get to the beginning. But God from the beginning chose his people; when the un navigated ether was yet unfanned by the wing of a single angel, when space was shoreless, or else unborn, when universal silence reigned, and not a voice or whisper shocked the solemnity of silence, when there was no being and no motion, no time, and naught but God himself, alone in his eternity; when without the song of an angel, without the attendance of even the cherubim, long ere the living creatures were born, or the wheels of the chariot of Jehovah were fashioned, even then, "in the beginning was the Word," and "in the beginning God's people were one with the Word," and "in the beginning he chose them into eternal life."

What a picture of our awesome God Elohim-Yahweh and his precious Son Jesus!

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses seeks to remind the Israelites that it is this awesome God who is their God as they stand two million strong on the eastern bank of the Jordan River looking westward into the promised land. In 10:12-22 we find the aged shepherd giving instructions concerning how they are to live out their lives according to the will of their awesome God once they arrive in Canaan.

Fear him

Deuteronomy 10:12-13:

And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

In this immediate context there are five basic steps the Lord asks his children to take day by day as they depend on his power. These five steps were relevant to believers in past generations and they remain spiritually relevant to us today. These five steps can be taken over and over again to his glory and to our joy and abundant life: (1) Fear the Lord, (2) walk in his ways, (3) love him, (4) serve him, and (5) keep his commands.

Step 1: "...To fear the LORD...." This second generation of Jews after the Exodus is being called to understand the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the one and only living God above the universe, who chose to bless their fathers and them as well. He is the eternal God who keeps showing up each generation to bring blessings because he both makes promises and keeps them. This God is the one who showed up to their fathers and revealed his name to them: The Lord God, Elohim, the creator, preserver, and transcendent and mighty God. He also revealed himself to them as Yahweh, which is the covenant name of God, "I am," the self-existing One. It is before this God that the Jewish nation stands---the God who not only loved them but who gave them the very breath to worship him. They are to fear him in terms of respect, honor, love, and appreciation; for he made a promise to Abraham and is about to fulfill it by giving them that promised land. He is the one who delivered them out of the land of slavery and then took them through the wilderness, providing for them every single day for forty years.

Step 2: "...To walk in all his ways...." In order to walk in the manner or lifestyle of someone else, you have to not only develop a close personal relationship with that person but to trust that they themselves are walking in a way that will not lead you to destruction. In the immediate context, for the Israelites that means trusting God's promise to drive out their enemies from the land of Canaan (see 11:22-23) so that they can not only possess the land but live in peace. The joy of living in a close relationship with Elohim is that he doesn't have a hidden agenda; everything is clear, out in the open, and up-front. So just as a little child loves to step in the footprints of their father or mother at the beach, so we should love to walk in the footprints of our loving heavenly Father as revealed to us by his precious son Jesus.

The precious Son Jesus instructed his disciples using a similar metaphor: "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" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Step 3: "...To love him...." By reviewing the history of God's relationship with the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 4:32-40), Moses has sought to demonstrate the love God has for them in such a way that the only natural response is for them to love him in return, body, soul, and spirit. It is a love of gratitude and appreciation.

The precious Son Jesus said to his disciples in the upper room, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him" (John 14:21). Then as he walked through the vineyards shortly before his betrayal by Judas, he said to them, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:9-12).

The apostle John who was beloved of Jesus wrote to the Christians of his day in the city of Ephesus, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 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. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:7-12).

Step 4: "...To serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul...." There is a need to respond to this love of God in a very practical way: Choose to give him your heart and your soul (which is the mind, will, and intellect), and demonstrate that commitment by choosing to allow his life to flow out of you as you participate in acts of righteousness.

The parents of these people standing before Moses rebelled against God in the wilderness right after they came out of Egypt. Moses had sent twelve spies into the land of Canaan, and when they came back, ten of them told the people that there were giants in the land, and they would be destroyed if they went across the Jordan river and tried to settle the land. The other two spies, Joshua and Caleb, sought to convince the people that God had given them the land and they should enter it and place their faith in him to deliver their enemies into their hands. These two godly men would have been stoned to death had God not appeared before them. As a result of that disobedience, that whole generation was sentenced to die in the wilderness except for Joshua and Caleb. But God in speaking of Caleb said, "But because my servant Caleb had a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it" (Numbers 14:24). Just before his death, Moses was asked by God to "take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the [Spirit], and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence" (Numbers 27:18-19).

The apostle Paul understood this spiritual principle when he wrote to the Romans some fifteen hundred years later, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God---this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is---his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2).

Step 5: "...To observe the LORD's commands and decrees...for your own good." Again, we must keep in mind that God's commandments are not a burden to be borne, but God's gracious provision for Israel's good. To live well means to obey God's Law, and to obey presupposes a reverent love for him who gave the Law.

Several months ago I had the privilege of introducing Jesus Christ to a single mother of two children. In the course of our conversation, the truth of Moses' words came home to me. She was reflecting back over the pain of her life and how it was all caused by her trying to live her life without God. She said, in so many words, "I wonder what my life would have been like if I had asked Jesus to become my Lord ten years ago!" Again, the laws of God are designed by him for our good and not to restrict us in an evil world. Our God is an awesome God! Fear him and...

Circumcise your hearts

Deuteronomy 10:14-16:

To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.

Moses is reminding the Jews once again that the God of whom he is speaking is nothing like the gods of Egypt from which they were delivered, or the gods of the Canaanites which they will be tempted to worship in the days ahead. Elohim-Yahweh is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and everything in it. He is not held captive by them; he is above and beyond all his creation even while he is involved with all of it.

Yet this amazing one and only living and creative God willingly elected to love Israel. He inhabits eternity (see Isaiah 57:15) and owns the cattle on a thousand hills (see Psalm 50:10), and before him the nations of this world are but a drop of water in a bucket (see Isaiah 40:15); and he loved Israel above all others. First he loved Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and now he has chosen them and their children and children yet unborn, and placed them above all the other nations to express his love through them to the world. It doesn't make any sense, but it is reality.

Paul told those within the body of Christ that this same God willingly set his affections on us who placed our faith in his Son Jesus Christ: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given

us in the One he loves" (Ephesians 1:3-6). This all remains a mystery hidden in the divine mind and heart of our heavenly Father.

"Circumcise your hearts...." The metaphor of circumcision in this context seems to be prompted by the reference to the patriarchs in verse 15. The election of the patriarchs and God's covenant with them was marked by the sign of circumcision (see Genesis 17:11-12). In the renewal of the covenant, however, it was not the outward sign of the covenant that was important, but the inward attitude of those who were renewing their allegiance to the God of the covenant. The metaphor thus aptly employs an act symbolizing the covenant relationship, but applies it to the present moment in a spiritual sense. God's requirement was that his people love him in verse 12, but to do this they required a particular attitude of heart and mind, which, like circumcision, involved the cutting off of the flesh around the heart so that it was open with nothing hidden. Thus to circumcise the heart is to take an attitude to God which is the opposite of being stubborn (or stiff-necked).¹ Paul wrote to the Philippians (3:3), "For it is we who are the [true] circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh...." Without the circumcision of the heart, true love and worship of God is impossible.

Our God is an awesome God! Fear him, circumcise your hearts, and...

Worship him

Deuteronomy 10:17-22:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and LORD of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.

The one and only living God, Elohim-Yahweh, is above his creatures who aspire to be gods in heaven. Satan as a created being is totally submissive to God (see Job 1-2) as well as to the Son of God (see Mark 5:1-13; Ephesians 6:10f).

At the same time Jesus called Satan the god of this world in that he seeks to lead mankind into worshipping him as well as waste their lives worshipping idols or nongods. To worship idols in reality is to worship demons (see Deuteronomy 32:16-17). But believers in Jesus Christ have nothing to fear from their foe, because in the resurrection our Lord has conquered death and Satan. Elohim-Yahweh is the supreme God and the absolutely sovereign Lord. He is the great God, the mighty God, the warrior God who fought in a holy war against Pharaoh and his army (see Isaiah 9:6). He is the awesome God who causes unbelievers to become terrified and believers to stand in awe, speechless at his power.

"...Who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes." He is the God who looks at the heart of man rather than the face of man and renders perfect judgment and justice. He is the God of sincerity in contrast to the Jews who sought to walk before him with an outward appearance of righteousness when their hearts were far from loving him (see Numbers 16). The modern equivalent is saying, "I hope God will take into account my good works, which should outweigh and thus erase my bad deeds." At the same time the God who lives and rules above his creation revealed himself to Israel so that the whole world in every generation would come to know him. To come to know him is equal to eternal life now and forever. "God requires of man a wholehearted commitment in love, from which all other proper behavior stemmed; God saw what was in the heart and could not be persuaded or bribed into reducing his requirements of man."²

"He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt." This amazing God who rules above his creation wants his people to love and care for all the people he loves and cares for. The fatherless are

the children being raised by a single mother with the hardships they face. The redeemed community is to become part of their pain and then their joy, as it is for the widows, those who have no husband to care for them. The New Testament states that the church is to care for "widows indeed," those who have no family, material goods, or money. God is concerned that the fatherless child and the widow receive just and proper care from his people because it reflects his character of love. Finally, God loves the resident aliens who live among and work alongside the Israelites but are not privileged to share in the civil and religious rights of Judaism (see Deuteronomy 24:17-22). The deeper motivation for loving the aliens is the fact that the Israelites themselves were once aliens in Egypt. And as God showed his love for Israel when they were aliens, so they in turn are to take God's love to them as their example and show his love and care to all the aliens among them.

"Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name." Moses reminds the people of God that they are required to respond to God's love in four ways: (1) Fear him: Show respect, honor, and awe as they live out their lives in his invisible and visible presence. (2) Serve him: Their life is no longer their own, so they are to serve him out of a heart of gratitude and appreciation. (3) Hold fast to him in the same kind of love relationship as that between a man and his wife. (4) Take their oaths in his name, or include him in everything they do.

"He is your praise; he is your God...." The fact that the God who created the universe is also determined to become your personal God should move your heart out of deep appreciation to praise him in worship. For in worship we can give outward expression to a heart that is overflowing with love and appreciation. The object of worship is Elohim-Yahweh, who made a covenant with the fathers of Israel. He preserved their lives by taking seventy members of Jacob's family down into Egypt under Joseph during a great famine, then four hundred years later taking them out of Egypt and protecting them in the wilderness for forty years. So at this moment they are standing on the eastern shores of the Jordan river, and they are as numerous as the stars of the sky.

Our God is an awesome God who has revealed himself to Israel and to the church. Our response out of a heart of joy, appreciation, and love should be one in which we genuinely (1) fear him, (2) by the power of the Holy Spirit choose to circumcise our hearts, and (3) fall down before him and worship him.

So often we have an inadequate concept of our awesome God. Dr. S. M.. Lockridge, from Southern California, gave us this realistic and unique picture of him:

The Bible says my King is a seven-way king.

He's the King of the Jews (that's a racial king).

He's the King of Israel (that's a national king).

He's the King of righteousness.

He's the King of the ages.

He's the King of heaven.

He's the King of glory.

He's the King of kings, and he's the Lord of lords.

That's MY King!

Well, I wonder, do you know him?

David said the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork. My King is a sovereign king. No means of measure can define his limitlessness. No far-seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline of his shoreless supply. No barrier can hinder him from pouring out his blessings.

He's enduringly strong.

He's entirely sincere.

He's eternally steadfast.

He's immortally graceful.

He's imperially powerful.

He's impartially merciful.

Do you know him?

He's the greatest phenomenon that has ever crossed the horizon of this world.

He's God's Son.

He's the sinner's Savior.

He's the centerpiece of civilization.

He stands in the solitude of himself.

He's august and he's unique.

He's unparalleled, and he's unprecedented.

He's the loftiest idea in literature.

He's the highest personality in philosophy.

He's the supreme problem in higher criticism.

He's the fundamental doctrine of true theology.

He's the necessity for spiritual religion.

He's the miracle of the age---YES, he is!

He's the superlative of everything good that you choose to call him.

He's the only one qualified to be an all-sufficient Savior.

I wonder if you know him today?

He supplies strength for the weak.

He's available for the tempted and the tried.

He sympathizes and he saves.

He strengthens and he sustains.

He guards and he guides.

He heals the sick, he cleansed the lepers.

He forgives sinners.

He discharges debtors.

He delivers the captives.

He defends the feeble.

He blesses the young.

He serves the unfortunate.

He regards the aged.

He rewards the diligent.

He beautifies the meager.

I wonder if you know him? Well, my King---

He's the key to knowledge.

He's the wellspring of wisdom.

He's the doorway of deliverance.

He's the pathway of peace.

He's the roadway of righteousness.

He's the highway of holiness.

He's the gateway of glory.

Do you know him? Well---

His office is manifold.

His promise is sure.

His light is matchless.

His goodness is limitless.

His mercy is everlasting.

His love never changes.

His word is enough.

His grace is sufficient.

His reign is righteous.

His yoke is easy and his burden is light.

I wish I could describe him to you...but---

He's indescribable!

He's incomprehensible.

He's invincible.

He's irresistible.

You can't get him out of your mind,

You can't get him out of your heart.

You can't outlive him, and you can't live without him.

The Pharisees couldn't stand him,

But they found out they couldn't stop him.

Pilate couldn't find any fault in him.

The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree.

Herod couldn't kill him, death couldn't handle him, and the grave couldn't hold him!

That's my King....

And thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever and ever and ever---how long is that?---and ever and ever....and when you get through with all of the forevers, then AMEN! Good God Almighty, Amen!

1, 2. P.C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (The New International Commentary of the Old Testament Series).

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