

In These Times: Our Great and Terrible God – *Deuteronomy 10:12-22*

Introduction – We live in a world filled with history of God’s mighty hand; we live in a world filled with stories of great plagues and catastrophes. The Bible is full of stories of God bringing great judgments upon His covenant people. But is this latest world-virus a plague from God? Upon whom? Do we see God bringing judgment upon multiple nations even while chastising God’s people (see Jeremiah 46-51). Deuteronomy is a series of sermons by Moses to the next generation. Coming out of 40 years of wandering (a terrible and long chastisement) with promises that they will now go in to take the Promised Land, they are being exhorted to not fall into the sins of their rebellious parents. In Chapter 8 God addressed the sin of forgetfulness: forgetting the goodness of God. In Chapter 9 He addresses the sin of forgetfulness: forgetting our own rebelliousness. They are warned about the temptation of self-congratulatory arrogance that comes with victory and success. Moses preaches in this section a revival sermon in the context of a long trial and this sermon will follow in a similar pattern.

And Now...(v12-13) – God graciously established and renewed his covenant with your fathers, in spite of their covenant breaking (9:1 – 10:11). Turning to the next generation, Moses exhorts, “*So therefore*”, Israel, “*what does the LORD your God require of you...*” Five things are mentioned and they culminate in the center: fear, walk, love, serve, and keep. While the first commandment, stated negatively, is “*you shall have no other gods before me,*” these five express the same in positive and broader terms. What are we to do in these times? Fear, walk, love, serve, and keep. The next verses tell us why.

God Over All Creation (v14-16) – A superlative praise (v14), a surprising revelation (v15), and a charge to respond (v16). The heavens of the heavens belong to Yahweh and the earth and every molecule in it. And yet, Yahweh delighted only and specially in your fathers, including their seed – and this includes you. This is the promise of this marvelous and gracious covenant. Only grace can make sense of this, and only faith can embrace it as true and a delight. God is immeasurably and eternally transcendent over all creation AND God is personally delighting in life in and with you. The charge: circumcise your hearts and no longer be stiff-necked! This is delivered to covenant children. God has never been and never will be interested in simple outward conformity; true Jews are Jews who have been inwardly circumcised and seek the praise of God, not men (Rom 2:29). The charge is to repent, to be born again, and to soften your stiff necks. While it is true that God is speaking to individual hearts, it is also true that He is addressing a nation. Nations are to be addressed and this is seen throughout Scripture: “*Kiss the Son, lest He be angry...*” (Psalm 2).

Our Great and Terrible God (v17-19) – A superlative praise (v17), a surprising revelation (v18), and a charge to respond (v19). Yahweh, your God, is sovereign over everything in His creation. His works are mighty (like His salvation of Israel out of Egypt) and terrible (not simply “awesome,” as when the ground opened up and swallowed thousands of grumbling Israelites). God didn’t need your friendship, your money, your skills or good looks. He has no deficiency in Himself. He metes out judgment for sin (Rom 6:23) and when calamity befalls a city, Yahweh has done it (Amos 3:6). He gives life and He takes it, measuring out the days for each of us (Psalm 139:16, 90:7-12).

And yet, He stoops to care for the weakest and most vulnerable, even those who have become so because of His hard providence. “*He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing*” (v18). In the midst of hard providences, many Christians sound like the foolish women in Job’s day (Job 2:9-10). The fact of destructions, catastrophes, genocide, rape, pillage, and viruses are realities in a world where God’s decretive will is exhaustive in its sovereignty. The world is a mess and our God is the God of it. And in His sovereignty, He is making good from all the sin, all the injustice, all the treachery that man can muster (Acts 4:27-28, Rom 8:28). This can only be understood in the context of worship. Look around you. We are a cursed race but God has stooped to save us. The world should be condemned, but God has sent His Son (John 3:16-17) and so, by faith, we live accordingly. The charge (v19): be like God, “*love the stranger,*” stoop and choose to give mercy and grace to the outcast, the weakest, the most desperate, even the unworthy (James 1:26-2:4).

You Shall...(v20) – This time four things are listed and the reasons follow: fear Yahweh, serve Him, cleave to Him (not simply “hold fast”), and swear by His name. The image of “cleaving” harkens back to Gen 2:24 which is a picture of Christ and the church (Eph 5:31). Are you tempted to stand away (like Israel when Moses was on the mountain)? Are you tempted to only

be found “in the vicinity?” The call of repentance and faith is to love God with all your heart, to be unreasonable in your zealous devotion to Him, for you are joined to Him by His Spirit.

He Is Your Praise (vv21-22) – He is *your* praise and He is *your* God. You find yourself in covenant with Him. You are not ignorant, you know the stories. You know the Story. You know the great things He has done. You know the terrible (again, not simply “awesome”) things He has done. Seventy went down to Egypt and, through mighty and terrible times, a multitude have come forth.

God is not playing games. And we know this is true for we have testimony of His terrible judgment upon His own Son on the cross. This was for you and you are to believe it. In that faith, you are to walk zealously with all your delight upon Him for He is your life and this world is not. And then, in that Life, we go and take the world in the Word of that Life and in the power of that Life’s Spirit. Amid a great cholera outbreak in London, Spurgeon told his people, “*You cannot stop their dying; but, oh, that God might help you to stop their being damned! You cannot stop the breath from going out of their bodies; but, oh, that the gospel might stop their souls from going down to destruction.*” Our present pandemic may be over quickly or run its course for what will seem a long time. It has taken thousands of lives; we do not know if it will take millions. What we do know is that God has brought this to us and to this world for His good reasons and we have gospel life to live and gospel hope to proclaim. O God, do not only remove this virus and spare lives; remove the stony hearts of those who hate You and save souls.

Dave Hatcher – March 15, 2020