

Deuteronomy 4:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice.

Analysis

God spoke 'out of the midst of the fire'—revelation without visible form. The emphasis 'ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude' establishes the foundation for the second commandment's prohibition of graven images. God reveals Himself through Word, not visual representation. This undergirds the Reformed regulative principle of worship and high view of Scripture. The 'voice' (Hebrew 'qol') signifies authoritative divine speech, the means by which God creates, commands, and covenants. Hearing without seeing cultivates faith that trusts God's Word above sensory experience (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Historical Context

At Sinai, Israel heard God's audible voice proclaiming the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) from the fire, cloud, and darkness. The people heard but saw no visible form—only fire, smoke, and darkness. This formless revelation contrasted sharply with pagan religions' idols and images. By prohibiting visual representation, God protected His people from reducing Him to created forms and emphasized that faith comes by hearing, not seeing (Romans 10:17).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does God's self-revelation through Word rather than image elevate the role of Scripture in knowing God?
2. What does this verse teach about the priority of hearing and obeying God's Word over seeking visual or mystical experiences?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּדְבֹּר	יְהוָה	אֵלֶיךָ	מִתּוֹךְ	הָאֵשׁ	קוֹל:
spake	And the LORD	H413	unto you out of the midst	of the fire	the voice
H1696	H3068		H8432	H784	H6963

דְּבָרִים	אֶתְּ	שָׁמַעְתָּ	וְתִמּוֹן	אֵינְךָ	רָאִיתָ	יְהוָה
of the words	H859	ye heard	no similitude	H369	but saw	only
H1697		H8085	H8544		H7200	H2108

קוֹל:

the voice

H6963

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 4:15 (References Lord): Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire:

Deuteronomy 5:22 (Word): These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.

Deuteronomy 5:4 (References Lord): The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire,

Matthew 3:17 (Parallel theme): And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Deuteronomy 4:33 (Parallel theme): Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?

Deuteronomy 4:36 (Word): Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire.

Isaiah 30:21 (Word): And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

Isaiah 40:3 (References Lord): The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Isaiah 40:6 (Parallel theme): The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:

Isaiah 40:18 (Parallel theme): To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?