

The Keys to the Promised Land

Joe Greer

Text: Dt. 4-6

Introduction:

- The time I was asked, "What is your favorite OT book?"

A) Deuteronomy – the practicality of the book.

- 1) In it we see the love of Moses for his people, the children of Israel – and by extension, we see the love of God for them.
 - a) The lessons learned from this writing are powerful for today's Bible students though sometimes ignored in favor of lessons that might seem to be more relevant to our age.
 - b) We cannot afford to let the practical lessons of Deuteronomy be overlooked.
- 2) **Imagine** Moses as they approach the Promised Land, knowing his time with these people is growing short.
 - a) It may be like when family comes to see us from far away and the time comes for them to leave but we have one more thing to say ... and then just one more, and one more ...
 - b) Moses had a lot to say – a lot to remind them of.
 - c) The words he offered were not new but an emphatic repeat of what they had experienced and heard from Moses and from generations that came before them.
- 3) Getting into the land has been a challenge – not on God's account, but due to the actions of Israel.
 - a) Israel will be called to remember that 40 years earlier they stood at the door of the land that God had said, "***I am giving to the Israelites.***" **Num. 13:1**
 - b) They missed the opportunity to enter the land because of a lack of faith. (**Num. 14:26-35, v. 33**)
 - c) God had not made it difficult for them to go into the land, but in fact, He had cleared the way.
 - d) Lack of faith and obedience on Israel's part brought serious consequences to them.

B) Forty Years Passed

- 1) God's grace is still great and He has not forgotten Israel.
 - a) God continued to lead Israel and sustain them through all of the wilderness wanderings.
 - b) Those events are now a reminder and proof of God's grace, mercy and love ... and His judgment.
 - c) God has once again led Israel to the door of the land He promised to give them and that of itself is a reminder of the faithfulness of His word.
 - d) God is true to His word and His promises ... but what about Israel? What is required of them to enter in and keep the land?
- *(the same thing that was required 40 years previous – faith and obedience driven by a love for God is what He demands)*

C) God offers the Keys

- 1) Israel was at the River Jordan and looking over into the land God promised to their fathers.
- 2) For sure, Israel remembered the offer that was lost 40 years before and surely remembered the fear that consumed their fathers as they cried, '**WE** are not strong enough to conquer the land!'

- a) That sentiment was true ... they were not strong enough, but God's offer was not dependent on their strength, but on their faith.
 - b) God's offer was that of giving them the land.
- *"The Lord said to Moses, "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites." Num. 13:1*
 - c) God never intended that Israel would gain the Promised Land by their own resources and strength, but through the provision of God ... if they had just responded with obedient faith.
- 3) The question of what will happen now rests with Israel who will soon be under Joshua's leadership.
- a) Did the teaching of the 40 years in the wilderness have the desired effect?
 - b) Would Israel make the same mistake again?
 - c) Has Israel learned the needed lessons of faith and obedience?

D) Moses was called on once again to deliver a message from God.

- 1) He delivered a passionate plea to the people he knows so well. He is delivering a key – the magic code, so to speak, that guaranteed not only entrance but containment and prosperity in the land ... and the key was pretty simple.
 - a) The key is found in **Deut. 4:1-2**.
 - b) It required of Israel humble observance of God's decrees or they too would face the wrath of a jealous God. **Deut. 4:24**
 - c) And, the lock can be changed, so to speak ... that is, the key taken away. **Deut. 4:25-26**

Success in the Promise Land –

- Israel's success was dependent on a number of things, including; God's Grace, Obedience, and listening to God and loving Him absolutely.
- *(we might think of many passages throughout scripture that address Grace, Obedience and listening to God's will, but we will work to primarily consider these points from the context of Deuteronomy)*

A) God's Grace –

- 1) Some think of grace as a New Testament matter – that grace is introduced as a blessing from God through His Son, Jesus. It is true that we read the word 'grace' often in the New Testament, but God's grace is demonstrated long before the coming of Christ.
- 2) God's grace has always been great and more than man deserves. The demonstration of God's grace is presented all through the Bible story and no less so in the book of Deuteronomy.
- *(from what we already know about God's grace what conclusions can we draw from De.4?)*
 - a) God's grace is demonstrated to Israel by the fact He was giving them the land. (**Deut. 4:1**)
 - b) Israel found favor with God though it was not because they deserved it.
- *(had Israel received what they deserved they would have been destroyed while in the wilderness)*
 - c) In spite of their past as a nation, God still counted them as His own and is still willing to fulfill His promise.
 - d) It was not by their resources that the Promised Land would be theirs, but through the provision of God.

- e) We do not find the word “grace” in the text but we see the demonstration of God’s favor toward Israel. From chapter 4 –
- *“that you may take the land ... that I am giving you” 4:1*
 - *“what other nation is so great as to have ... the Lord our God near us whenever we pray to Him?” 4:8*
 - *“the Lord took you ... out of Egypt ... to be the people of His inheritance” 4:20*
 - *“for the Lord your God is a merciful God ... will not forget the covenant (with you)” 4:31*
 - God made Himself known to Israel – **4:32-35**
 - Israel heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, saw miraculous signs and wonders demonstrated, was preserved in war by the outstretched hand of God, and by many other great and awesome deeds.
 - *“You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God ...” 4:35*
 - Such favor was not deserved by Israel – but God still called them His own people.
- 3) Many want God’s grace, but not His judgment.
- a) Someone said, ‘I want God’s grace and mercy, not His judgment.’ (*this comment was made in the most serious way that they expected to receive God’s grace but rejected the idea of His judgment*)
 - b) Many are willing to see ‘God’s grace,’ but do not see judgment as a part of His character.
 - Do not forget – this chapter began with a reminder of God’s judgment. **4:3-4**
 - 24,000 died worshipping the Baal of Peor – God’s anger and His judgment demonstrated.
 - God’s grace to those who *“held fast to the Lord”* who are *“still alive today.”* (*that is, still receiving His blessings*)
- 4) God’s grace is abundant, but He still expects obedience.
- a) A serious question needing to be asked; *does obedience nullify grace?*
 - In the middle of a text that demonstrates God’s grace we also see His demand for our obedience. Perhaps the next section will help answer this question.
- 5) An undeniable key to the kingdom is God’s grace and His desire for us to enter the Promised Land.
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B) Obedience –

- 1) Those who can remember back a generation or two saw a different attitude with regard to obedience.
 - a) Whether to parents, teachers, law enforcement, or even an exhortation to obey God’s word, today it seems that any instruction to suggest ‘one should do as they are told’ will receive a challenge, as in, “who are you to tell me what to do?”
 - b) That is not to say man never challenged authority in days of old but there is a growing resistance in society to the need of obedience. (*if you have a strong stomach you can watch the news and see plenty examples of authority being challenged every day*)
 - c) Many are willing to reject the authority of God and are unwilling to obey Him. The world is full of this attitude.

- If we think this worldly attitude does not affect the church I would like to worship where you do, because it must be different there.
- 2) Israel was challenged from all sides to leave the way of the Lord – to not obey His word.
- a) The world can make a compelling case, but God’s instructions are clear and simple.
 - b) Moses recorded what Israel needed to do in order to walk with God. (**chapter 4**)
 - *“the laws and decrees I am about to teach you. Follow them ...” 4:1*
 - *“do not add ... or take away ... but keep the commands ... that I give you.” 4:2*
 - *“I have taught you laws and decrees ... follow them ...” 4:5*
 - *“observe them carefully” 4:6*
 - *“do not forget ... or let them slip from your heart” 4:9*
 - *“hear My words ... learn to revere Me ... teach them to your children.” 4:10*
 - *“He declared to you His covenant, the Ten Commandments ... commanded you to follow them.” 4:13*
 - *“the decrees and laws you are to follow ...” 4:14*
 - *“be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord ...” 4:23*
 - *“if you seek the Lord, you will find Him ...” 4:29*
 - *“your God is merciful ... He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant ...” 4:31*
 - c) Today, generations later ... and man still does not like to be told he must obey; but God still demands it.
- 3) Preachers – we have so many ‘timely issues’ that the world presents us to choose from in preaching, but we have to make sure we do not forget the powerful lessons that teach God’s demand for obedience.
- a) We need to not forget about Nadab and Abihu and their failure to obey God’s instruction on burning incense. (**Lev. 1:7-8; 10:1-2; 16:1, 12**)
 - b) Brethren have to be reminded that King Uzziah tried to take authority in worship into his own hands. (**2 Chron. 26:16-21**)
 - c) King David’s excitement over bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem did not supersede God’s instruction on how it was to be moved. (**2 Sam. 6:3-7**)
 - d) God demands obedience and it doesn’t even matter who we are or if we like that or not. Our opinion has not been solicited on this issue ... God simply demands our full obedience. Our entrance into the Promised Land still requires obedience.
- 4) Does obedience make one a legalist?
- a) The world may view one as a legalist if they seek to adhere carefully to the will of God.
 - b) How the world defines “Legalism.”
 - “Strict adherence, or the principle of strict adherence, to law or prescription, especially to the letter rather than the spirit.” In theology, it is “the doctrine that salvation is gained through good works.” (Dictionary.com)
 - “Strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code—the

institutionalized legalism that restricts free choice” (Merriam-Webster)

- c) Scripture does not rebuke a strict adherence to the law but instead calls for it.
 - In view of our primary text – **Deut. 4:1-2, 6, 5:1-3, 32-33, 6:1-2**
 - God is always serious about those who would be His people accepting and obeying His word.
 - Jesus taught obedience. **Matt. 7:21-23**
 - (He condemned hypocritical keeping of the law, **Mt. 23**, and adding to or neglecting the law for the sake of traditions. **Mk. 7; Matt. 15**)
 - The apostles taught adherence to God’s word. **Col. 3:17; 2 Jn. 9**
- 5) One other serious question that needs to be asked; *does obedience nullify grace?* Or, does obedience minimize God’s grace? ***It doesn’t appear that God thinks so.***
 - a) God’ grace is well established throughout scripture with our primary text adding proof.
 - b) In that day, nothing compared to the grace extended to the Israelites – God’s love for His people is evident – His proofs to them absolutely amazing and undeniable ... ***yet He still demanded obedience.*** **De. 4:23-24, 32-40**
 - c) God gives no indication that being obedient to Him softens the power of His grace.
 - d) A key to the kingdom is our willingness to obey God in view of entering the Promised Land.

C) Shema – Listen and Do

- 1) **Keys to the Promised Land?** Another key is God’s plea for us to Hear the Lord our God and to Love Him with all our heart so that we will enter the Promised Land.
- 2) **Shema ... many of us have not even heard what ‘Shema’ is or what it means.** To a Jew, the Shema is both familiar and important.
 - a) The Shema refers to a couple lines from the book of **Deuteronomy** that became a daily prayer in Ancient Israelite tradition.
 - Jews today still follow the tradition of saying the daily prayer, ***"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."*** **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**
 - b) The Shema – The Daily Declaration of Faith –
 - The Shema is the most important prayer in Judaism and is often recited multiple times a day, reaffirming the Jewish people to Judaism. But still we ask, what is it?
 - Shema Yisrael (שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל) (“Hear, O Israel”) are the first two words of a section of the Torah that is the centerpiece of the morning and evening prayer services, encapsulating the monotheistic essence of Judaism: ***"Hear, O Israel: God is our Lord, God is one."***
 - In its entirety, the Shema consists of three paragraphs: **Deuteronomy 6:4–9, Deuteronomy 11:13–21** and **Numbers 15:37–41**.¹
 - c) The Jews believe that its recitation twice daily (*morning and evening*) is a biblical commandment. It is recited again just before retiring for the night. In fact, the statement has become so central to the Jewish people that it is the climax of the final prayer of Yom Kippur,

¹ (edited and adapted, Chabad.org)

- (*Day of Atonement, is the holiest day of the year in Judaism*) and is traditionally a Jew's last words on earth.² Pious Jews hope to die with the words of the Shema on their lips.³
- "Hear, O Israel" is a Jewish prayer, and is also the first two words of a section of the Torah, and is the title (*better known as The Shema*) of a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services. The first verse encapsulates the monotheistic essence of Judaism: "**Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.**" **De. 6:4**⁴
 - Observant Jews consider the Shema to be the most important part of the prayer service in Judaism, and its twice-daily recitation as a mitzvah (religious commandment).⁵
 - The time for recital was determined by the first two texts: "**when you lie down, and when you rise.**" **De. 6:7** The Shema texts are also chanted at other times during the Jewish liturgy. The biblical verses instill the duty to learn, to study, and to observe the Torah.⁶ (*edited, jg*)
 - Before going to sleep, the first paragraph of the Shema is recited. Many Jews believe that this is not only a commandment directly given in the Bible (in **De. 6:6–7**), but is also alluded to from verses such as "**Commune with your own heart upon your bed**" (**Psalms 4:4**).
- d) These texts and their appropriate prayers are consequently sacred to Jews because they contain a profession of faith, a declaration of allegiance to the kingship and kingdom of God, and a symbolic representation of total devotion to the study of the Torah. Since, however, meditation on the Torah "night and day" was a practical impossibility, the Shema became a substitute for Torah study or, more exactly, the minimum requirement for observing the precept.⁷ (*edited and emphasis added, jg*)
- Also, it is traditional for Jews to say the Shema as their last words, and for parents to teach their children to say it before they go to sleep at night.⁸
 - The Shema appears in the opening section of Deuteronomy, which is a collection of speeches attributed to Moses before the next generation of Israel entered the Promised Land. **Moses challenges them with his wisdom and warning because he doesn't want these Israelites to repeat their parents' mistakes.** (*emp. mine, jg*) Rather, he invites them to respond to God's grace and mercy with love, faithfulness, and obedience.⁹

² (*edited and adapted, Chabad.org*)

³ www.britannica.com/topic/Shema

⁴ Moberly, R. W. L. (1990) "Yahweh is One": The Translation of the Shema

⁵ "Bedtime Shema" MyJewishLearning.com.

⁶ www.britannica.com/topic/Shema

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ "Why Say Shema at Bedtime?" - Chabad.org.

⁹ Adapted from; What is the Shema? Bibleproject.com

- e) Many Jews today believe that the eternal survival of Judaism is dependent on remembering the Shema, or said another way, if Jewish faith can be saved, the Shema has lessons that the Jews must hear.
- They perceive the intended role of the Shema in their lives is to help them appreciate and remember the significance of Moses' speeches to the Children of Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land.
 - Some would say this was the only commitment required (*simply to adhere to and follow the teaching of the Shema*) to ensure the eternal survival of Judaism. This is why the Shema is the watchword and mantra of our faith. It is a covenant and a contract between God and our people and it is the existential basis for our survival. ¹⁰

3) The Meaning of the Shema ¹¹

- a) The precise meaning of the Shema is uncertain, that is, Hebrew scholars debate the exact meaning of what is rendered "**Lord**" (YHVH) in most translations.
- There are three argued meanings to the phrase "*Hear, O Israel: The **LORD** our God, the **LORD** is one! Deut. 6:4*)
 - The presiding thought seems to be of "**YHVH is Our God, YHVH Alone,**" meaning that "the Lord is *our* God."
 - (*definitions of YHVH. noun. a name for the God of the Old Testament as transliterated from the Hebrew consonants YHVH. synonyms: JHVH, Jahvey, Jahweh, Jehovah, Wahvey, YHWH, Yahve, Yahveh, Yahwe, Yahweh. www.vocabulary.com › dictionary › YHVH*)
 - This interpretation, "the Lord is *our* God." **places the primary emphasis on Israel's relationship to God** and not a consideration or question about His nature.
 - This explanation seems to best fit the context of the message Moses that is delivering; that Israel has one God – YHVH (Yahweh) alone.
 - **It is also consistent with Zechariah 14:9 which presupposes this idea and reads:** "*And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord with one name.*" ¹²
 - (*Jehovah's rule over all the earth would be in the Messiah. Jesus claimed this oneness with the Father. (John 10:30) The point being and emphasis is on the relationship of God's people to Him*)
 - In short, the meaning of the Shema seems to be that of Israel's relationship with God, that He is their God and Him alone.
 - (*for more consideration on "**The LORD our God, the LORD is one!**" see Appendix 1*)

¹⁰ Adapted from an article in the Jerusalem Post, "Why the Shema is considered the watchword of our faith." By Hillel Lieberman May 20, 2018

¹¹ (*point 3 is adapted from Jewfaq.org*)

¹² Dr. Jeffrey Tigay Deuteronomy 6:4–The Shema The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy

- b) The Hebrew word **Shema** (pronounced “shmah”) means “hear or listen.” (Strong’s 8035)
 - This word is an excellent example of the difference between Hebrew, which stresses physical action and Greek and Western culture that stresses mental activity.
- Listening, in our culture, is a mental activity, and hearing just means that our ears pick up sounds. But in Hebrew, the word Shema describes hearing and also its effects – such as, taking heed, being obedient, doing what is asked.
- As a parent, if we tell our children to do something and later we find the task undone we may say to them, “Were you listening?” We are not asking if they heard an audible sound in their ears, but confirming that they understand that listening should result in action.
- Almost every place we see the word “obey” in the Bible is translated from the word **Shema**.
- c) **“Listen, O Israel”** (NLT) The word “listen” found in this text means something to the effect of letting the words sink in, provide understanding, and produce a response. In other words, in Hebrew, “hearing” and “doing” have a close relationship.
- There is a connection with ‘listen’ and ‘obedience.’ **“Then he [Moses] took the book of the covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey (shema).” Exodus 24:7**
- d) Mindset for saying the prayer – When the same prayers are said day after day, the prayers could become routine and begin to lose meaning, but this is not the intention of Jewish prayer. ***It is not meant to be a mindless repetition but a thought provoking reminder of the essence of a relationship with God.***
- In Jewish liturgy melodies are often used as an aid to forming the proper mindset. Many prayers and prayer services have traditional melodies associated with them. These are intended to increase focus on what you are doing and block out extraneous thoughts.
- Many also find it useful to move while praying. Traditional Jews routinely sway back and forth during prayer, apparently a reference to **Psalm 35**, which says ***“All my limbs shall declare, ‘O L-rd, who is like You?’”*** Such movement is not required but some claim it helps with concentration and focus.

4) Love the Lord

- a) In making application to Israel; what were they to do in response to hearing that the Lord alone is their God? They were to ***“Love the Lord your God ...”*** What exactly was that to mean?
- Love is not simply the warm, emotional feeling we get when we like someone, but in this context love is an action. You love someone when you act in loyalty and faithfulness.
- The instruction ***“Listen, O Israel”*** to ***“love the Lord”*** meant ***faithful obedience*** to the terms of their covenant relationship. *(those terms are the laws and commands that make up the body of the book of Deuteronomy)*
- b) Obedience to these laws was not supposed to be about trying to earn God’s favor. Obedience in the Old Testament is about love and listening.
- If an Israelite loves God, it will make it easier to listen and absorb His teachings and guidance.
- Think about all of the practical reasons why the words “listen” and “love” are so tightly connected and repeated through these opening speeches of Deuteronomy.
- c) Loving God because He first loved us. (**Deut. 4:35-40**)

d) The love of God's people toward Him must be absolute, complete. (**Deut. 6:5**)

5) Moses places a great emphasis on 'one God.'

- a) Consider the polytheistic threat. The Israelites have been deeply affected by cultures surrounding them.
- b) From Canaan to Egypt and traveling up through the wilderness and back to Canaan the Israelites have been surrounded by people worshipping many different gods. One of the greatest threats to Israel's future was dividing their allegiance between many gods.
- c) The Shema *is a daily reminder* of the monotheistic essence of Judaism and the God Israel serves; "**Hear, O Israel: God is our Lord, God is one.**" **De. 6:4** The essential meaning is clear. The God of heaven was to be the sole object of Israel's worship, allegiance and affection.
- d) Monotheism maintains that God is infinite, existing beyond time and space as an eternal, absolute Being Who is the continuous source of all creation. There is no power outside of Him; He is the transcendent source of morality Who is omniscient and good.
- e) The Shema is a pledge of allegiance to the Lord God of Israel that excludes allegiance to any other gods.

6) Moses understood the power of the text.

- a) Moses demonstrated the value of passing this conviction on to later generations to spare them the tragic results of idolatry to other gods.
 - The power of the text was evident to the Jews of that day but is of equal influence all of these generations later, that is, it benefits God's people today.
- b) The idea of generational teaching was a key component to all that Moses was saying.
 - Moses had already addressed the reason for such emphasis on teaching these things to their children in a previous text.
 - "***Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.***" **Deut. 4:9**
 - These precepts are expanded on chapter 6. "***You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.***" **Deut. 6:7-9**
 - Think about key takeaways from these powerful passages –
 - Take heed ... diligently keep yourself and do not forget or let these things escape your heart.
 - Teach these things to you children ... teach diligently ... at every available moment.
 - Place reminders before your face and on your doorposts.
 - ***Think about the applications that can be made today by those who are follows of Christ.***
- c) Writing these things on their doorposts is something that Jews today still take literally.
 - The Shema instructs Jews to make remembering our relationship with God so central in their lives that they literally put reminders "***on the doorposts of (our) houses.***"
 - For thousands of years Jews have placed copies of the Shema inside mezuzot (me-zu-zah) on their doorways.

- The piece of paper containing the Shema prayer inside a mezuzah is written by hand by a specially trained scribe on fine parchment. Any mistake invalidates a klaf. It's customary to get them checked every seven years to make sure the letters haven't flaked off or faded.
- Parchments containing the Shema are also found in the boxes of Tefillin (te-fil-lin) that Jewish men wear during morning services every day except for holidays and Shabbat. ¹³

7) Shema Usage in the New Testament

- a) The Shema became a twice-daily prayer within Judaism. It was so widely practiced in the second-temple period, Jesus himself grew up praying it. This prayer was formative for Jesus, and he drew upon it in his teachings.
- b) The principles expressed in the Shema are relevant for all times. When Jesus was once asked which command in the Torah was the greatest: Jesus answered, *"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* Mark 12:29-31 (Mt. 22:37-39) ¹⁴
- c) Christians either give their allegiance to the Lord and are influenced by His will, or their allegiance belongs to destructive powers that will govern how we see and what we do in life.
 - One path leads to life, the other to death. These ideas and images come from Moses' words in Deuteronomy, specifically from the Shema.

8) The Shema for Christians (?) ¹⁵

- a) Many would say the Shema is a beautiful prayer and there is reason why God's people have been praying these words for millennia. They are simple words with the capacity to reshape the course of an entire life.
- b) The Shema can keep God's love and loyalty in the forefront of your mind and drive you towards obedience, not out of obligation or duty, but out of love.
- c) The words of Jesus in the Gospel of John have a similar tone to the Shema: *"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."* John 14:21
- d) Remembering the words of "the Shema" is a good way for Christians to be reminded of our place before God, the Maker of all mankind. Absolute and true love for God is the basis for our relationship with Him.

9) Practical Application and Discussion – Deut. 6:7-9

Notes – Write a few bullet points of what we can preach that will encourage brethren, parents in particular, to actively live and teach the precepts of what Moses said to Israel. *(room provided below)*

¹³ (aish.com)

¹⁴ Adapted from; What is the Shema? Bibleproject.com

¹⁵ (Several of comments in point 8 are combined and adapted from Tim Mackie, PhD, Bibleproject.com and Lois Tverberg, engediresourcecenter.com)

Here are some questions as thought starters –

- a) When you think about the essence of **Deut. 6:7-9**, how do you think most Christians are doing today remembering the Lord's will, loving Him and teaching these precepts to our children and grandchildren?

- b) How can Christians best apply the principles of the text?
- c) As preachers – What do we need to do be a greater encouragement to parents in their effort to teach these principles their children?
- d) How are we doing in teaching our children and grandchildren?
- e) The importance of teaching God's word to children and others (**Deut. 4:14; 5:31; 6:1**)
- f) Think about applications to teaching God's will and passing it on to future generations.
- g) Loving God with all our heart ... does God still expect this today? What exactly does loving God with all of our heart mean?
- h) Noah preached for decades and saved no one ... except his children. Does this say anything?

Appendix 1

Deuteronomy 6:4–The Shema

Dr. Jeffrey Tigay

The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy

While the Shema has been seen as a declaration of absolute monotheism, it has other meanings in its biblical and liturgical contexts.

What Do the Words Mean?

The precise meaning of the Shema is uncertain. The four Hebrew words “YHVH eloheinu YHVH ehad” literally mean “YHVH our God YHVH one.” Since Hebrew does not have a present-tense verb meaning “is” to link subject and predicate, the link must be supplied by the listener or reader. Where to do so depends on context and is sometimes uncertain. Grammatically, “YHVH our God YHVH one” could be rendered in several ways, such as (1) “YHVH is our God, YHVH alone”; (2) “the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (lit. “YHVH our God, YHVH is one”); (3) “YHVH our God is one YHVH.”

(1) YHVH is Our God, YHVH Alone

The first possibility, which is followed in the NJPS (new Jewish Publication Society) translation, is based on [the interpretations of medieval commentators] Ibn Ezra and Rashbam. One difficulty with this interpretation is that Hebrew normally expresses “alone” with *levad*, as in “You alone [*levadekha*] are God of all the kingdoms of the earth” (2 Kings 19:15, 19; and Psalm 86:10). A few passages have been found in which *ehad* seems to have this meaning, but the usage is at best rare.

There is also a serious syntactic difficulty with this interpretation: it interprets the words “YHVH our God” (YHVH *eloheinu*) as a subject and a predicate, meaning “YHVH is our God.” Although this usage is grammatically possible (see 2 Chronicles 13:10), it is rare in the Bible and absolutely anomalous in Deuteronomy, where YHVH *eloheinu* occurs nearly two dozen times, consistently as a fixed phrase meaning “YHVH our God.” Still, this interpretation seems to be presupposed by Zechariah 14 [Zechariah 14:9 reads: “And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord with one name.”]. If so, it is the only interpretation that was demonstrably held in biblical times.

(2) YHVH Our God, YHVH is One

The old and familiar translation “the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (2) makes the verse a statement about the nature of God Himself, namely that He is one. This might mean that He is unique (incomparable) or that He is indivisible, that He does not consist of multiple deities (the latter idea is also expressed by translation (3). This translation, however, is problematic because it leaves the second YHVH superfluous; “YHVH our God is one” would have sufficed.

(3) YHVH Our God is One YHVH

The third possibility, “YHVH our God is one YHVH”—and not many YHVHs—is not as tautologous [self-referential] as it sounds. Pagans referred to some gods by their name and place of worship, such as “Ishtar of Arbela,” and in some texts a god’s name appears several times, followed each time by a different place. For example, an Egyptian-Hittite treaty invokes both “the Re the lord of the sky” and “the Re of the town of Arinna”; similarly, it invokes “Seth the lord of the sky,” “Seth of Hatti,” and the Seths of ten other cities.

This manner of speaking, based on the many sanctuaries of a deity, was also used by some Israelites. In some Hebrew inscriptions of the ninth-eighth centuries B.C.E. discovered in the Sinai, one refers to “YHVH of Samaria” and two others refer to “YHVH of Teman.” Some scholars believe that this manner of speech could imply that there were several deities of each name—several Res, Seths, or YHVHs—and that such a danger was developing in Israel. They believe that the Shema meant “YHVH our God is one

YHVH,” not many YHVHs, and was intended to counter this kind of disintegration of YHVH into several deities.

However, there is no other evidence that such a danger was developing in Israel and we do not even know whether non-Israelites really drew such inferences. Re was the sun, and the Egyptians could hardly have believed that there were two suns. An Egyptian inscription describing offerings to Amon-Re lists his name dozens of times, each time followed by one of his epithets, including local manifestations (e.g., “Amon-Re in Thebes ... Amon-Re in Heliopolis”), but includes phrases recognizing that all these references are to a single deity (e.g., “Amon-Re in all the places where he wishes to be,” “Amon-Re in at his funerary temples,” “Amon-Re in all his names”).

While it is possible that recognition of the unity behind all these names was limited to the intelligentsia and that the common folk thought of these as different deities, there is no evidence to that effect. Furthermore, such a danger seems foreign to the context of Deuteronomy 6, which is concerned with Israel’s relationship to God, not with His nature. ***On the basis of present evidence, translation (1) seems the most likely, but it is not certain. (emp. mine, jg)***

The Shema in Jewish Liturgy

The instruction in 6:7, repeated in 11:18-19, to “speak of ... these words ... when you lie down and when you get up” was understood in halakhic [Jewish legal] exegesis to mean recite these words at the times of day when people lie down to sleep and when they arise in the morning. “These words” were identified as 6:4-9 and 11:13-21, the paragraphs in which this instruction is found. The instruction was fulfilled by reciting these two paragraphs, followed by Numbers 15:37-41, as part of the morning and evening prayers. They are called the Keri’at Shema, “recitation of the Shema”), after the first word in verse 4. The practice, known since late Second Temple times, is still followed today.

In the liturgy, the three biblical paragraphs are preceded by blessings praising God for creating light and darkness and bringing on day, and night, and for loving Israel and teaching it the Torah. They are followed by blessings praising Him for redeeming and protecting Israel.

In rabbinic thought, the first paragraph functions preeminently as a declaration of allegiance to God—as the rabbis called it: “accepting the authority of the kingship of God” (lit., “the yoke of the kingship of Heaven,”; Mishnah Berakhot 2:2). In the context of the liturgy, this is expressed by the addition, after verse 4, of the exclamation “Blessed be the glorious name of His kingship forever!” The second paragraph is regarded as “accepting the duty of performing the commandments” (Mishnah Berakhot 2:2).

The Shema as Declaration of Allegiance

The blessing that follows the third paragraph begins with the declaration “True, firm, established, obligatory, proper, lasting, satisfactory, favored, agreeable, pleasing, respected, revered, fit, accepted, good and valid is this word” (i.e., this obligation that we have just recited). Many of the adjectives in this declaration are legal terms used in validating legal agreements. They give the recitation of the Shema the force of an oath, meaning: We solemnly affirm that the obligation we have just recited is valid and binding on us in every way. This makes of the Shema a daily affirmation of allegiance to God and to the covenant obligations that allegiance entails.

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