

**Deuteronomy**  
**September 21 2008**  
**“Love the Lord Your God”**  
**Deuteronomy 6-7**

**I. Background to the Great Command**

**Deut 6:1-3**

**6:1** These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, **2** so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. **3** Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

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- ❖ “Commands” is singular, but decrees and laws are plural. Chances are that it might mean the command or legislation composed of these decrees and laws.
- ❖ Fearing the LORD has the sense of fear, and even great fear, but it is also used to include the meaning of total and absolute devotion to the LORD.
- ❖ “Hear” is basically synonymous with “hear and obey.”
- ❖ “Milk and honey” is to be taken as hyperbole, and clearly the land was not running with them in a literal sense. The obvious reason to mention them is to point out that they are entering a very bountiful land.

Why is it important to obey the Lord?

**II. The Great Command**

**Deut 6:4-9**

**4** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. **5** Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. **6** These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. **7** Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. **8** Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. **9** Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

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“Hear, O’ Israel” is the famous Shema Israel (usually including only 6:4-5, but sometimes expanded to include all of Deut. 6:4-9 and sometimes additionally Deut. 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:37–41). Verse 6:4 can be translated differently, but all translations have the fundamental meaning:

1. The LORD our God is one LORD
2. The LORD (Yahweh) our God (Elohim or gods), the LORD (Yahweh) is one
3. The LORD is our God, the LORD is one.

It has been described as “the fundamental truth or Israel’s religion” and “the fundamental duty founded upon it.” The truth is that God is one; the duty is a response of love that is required in return. Post-biblical rabbinic exegesis understood the role of the Shema to be the heart of the law.

- Verse 6      People need to reflect on God’s commands. This will make sure that they are considering them in decision-making and routine behavior. Also, as unique situations arise they will have a better chance of properly applying the commandments without being overwhelmed by the situation.
- Verse 7      Basically these commandments are to be talked about all the time in all situations. “Impress them” is “sharpen” in Hebrew; therefore, this is literally “Sharpen on them (i.e. your children).”
- Verse 8      See Exodus 13 for more on the Phylacteries. Verses 8 and 9 are on one way to express the centrality of the covenant to everyday life.
- Verse 9      These are called Mezuzahs.

In Deuteronomy, Moses is telling the Israelites what they must do to live and be successful in the Promise Land. A common theme is to teach the younger generation so that they will serve the Lord. This admonition is given 10-20 times, directly or indirectly, in the book.

Why is teaching the next generation so important? Is this admonition important for us today?

### **III. Caution against Disobedience (Deut. 6:10-23)**

Moses returns to the need for complete obedience on the part of the Israelites. He offers the follow three “do not” commands:

1. Do not forget the true God
2. Do not follow false gods
3. Do not test the true God.

Then, he relates one of the many rebellions in the wilderness to the Lord, as recorded in Ex. 17:1-7, where the Israelites broke “1” and “2” and probably also “3.”

- Verse 18      God has promised the land already to the Patriarchs and His promises are irrevocable. Yet, the people must obey Him to have possession of it. Usually in these kinds of conflicts, it is hard to see how God will reconcile them. In this one, however, it is a little easier since the Lord has told us. Basically, if they obey, they will maintain or regain possession; if they do not, they will

not have possession. In the end, the Promised Land belongs to the Jews.

Verse 23 Obviously, the Jews will be unable to achieve all that is commanded them. However, the attempt to do right will put them in a right relationship with God. Unfortunately, based on this verse and other passages, later Judaism wrongly concluded that covenant keeping was the basis for righteousness rather than an expression of faithful devotion.

#### IV. A Chosen People (Deut. 7)

From Christopher Wright:

A Destruction of Canaanites and their gods; Israel to be holy (1-6)

B God's love for the forefathers as reason for the exodus (7-8)

C Yahweh as the faithful God of covenant love (9-10)

B' God will fulfill the promise to forefathers, so remember the exodus (17-19)

A' Destruction of Canaanites and their gods, lest Israel become detestable (20-26)

This is a chiastic (or palindromic) structure, where the center component is the one being emphasized.

Verse 3 Marriage is included in the indictment. Marriage certainly leads to be unequally yoked. It is also a kind of treaty or covenant. There is tension with this and Deut 21:10-13. How do we resolve this tension?

Verse 6 The verse points out that the Israelites are special to the LORD and should therefore conform to Him, becoming non-conformist in the world. Likewise, the Christian community should not conform to the pattern of this world. Note also Ex. 19:5-6 and 1 Peter 2:9.

Verse 8 Why does the LORD love the Israelites? The Pentateuch does not provide a direct answer. The obvious answer is that it is a part of God's nature, not something that the Israelites have done.

Verse 9 Love is *hesed*, sometimes translated as steadfast love. This verse is a great verse representing God's steadfast love over centuries for all those who love him, including people today. It is obviously referencing the Shema given last chapter.

Verse 11 Loving God is inexorably intertwined with obeying his commands. We cannot love God unless we obey:

**1 John 5:3-4**

**3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, 4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.**

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- Verse 15 The Israelites would also have been familiar with the Egyptian plagues and other awful diseases that affected the people of Egypt and perhaps themselves. The specific diseases are not identified.
- Verse 16 Many see the destruction of the Canaanites as too horrible to be related to the Lord; many cite the destruction of the Canaanites as a reason not to believe in God. The problem is that all human life belongs to the Lord. He can take it when He wants. This question and the similar question of “Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?” is actually a subset of an overall question dealing with God’s sovereignty, total power, long suffering, compassion, infinite understanding, and His inherent goodness.
- Verse 17 This statement is exactly what the people said in Numbers 13-14.
- Verse 18 Remembering what the LORD has done for you in the past is an antidote to fear. Even when a task seems insurmountable, one should persevere if it is of the LORD.
- Verse 22 “Little by little” implies that the people will have to be patient and trust for a long period in the LORD to prevail. If they doubt and do not continue to trust in the LORD, then things will get rough such that “the wild animals will multiply around you.”
- Verse 24 None of the Canaanites continue to exist today, at least not in the form that they were when the Israelites arrived in the Promised Land. Of course, because of the lack of belief of the Israelites, some of the Canaanites are eventually merged into the Israelite community.

#### **V. Why is Obeying Important?**

Why does Moses seem to beat this point totally into the ground?

How would you compare your strengths and weaknesses to the non-believers around you? Why?

When you “know” that you cannot do a task, what do you do? (Hint: Does it matter to you if accomplishing the task matters to the Lord?)

How are you more than a conqueror (per Romans 8:37)? What does it mean to be “more than conqueror”?