



## Deuteronomy - Chapter Six

### II Deuteronomy 4:44-11:32 - Moses' Second Speech: General Covenant Stipulations (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Six

Israel is commanded to keep all the laws and statutes of God but above all it is the fact that God is to be loved above all things with heart, soul and might. This and the other laws are to be discussed openly with children so that they will grow up with the law of God in their hearts.

The Lord has given the people the free gift of a land that they had not helped to build. Moses warns the people that if they do not obey God when they are in the land, they will not only lose it but they too will perish. Again, they are to teach their children that it was God who, with mighty deeds, brought the people out of Egyptian slavery into the Promised Land.

#### II.d Deuteronomy 6:1-9 - The Great Commandment

These verses contain one of the great commandments, namely, to love God with all of one's power (v.5), which follows the famous statement of the uniqueness of God (v.4). Jesus calls this the greatest commandment and then goes on to qualify it with a second: <<He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself">> (Matthew 22:37-39).

<sup>1</sup> Now this is the commandment – the statutes and the ordinances – that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, <sup>2</sup> so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God all

the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.

### Deuteronomy 6:1-2

Now this is the commandment – the statutes and the ordinances. The Hebrew is emphatic here. Moses called attention to ‘The Commandment’. In the following verses, God reduced the law to one ruling principle, one commandment which encompassed all the other commandments.

So that your days may be long. Israel’s fate rested on their obedience to this one great commandment. If they obeyed this commandment, their life would be long and filled with blessing. If they did not obey they could expect to be cursed by God and removed from their land.

Fear the Lord is a common command in Deuteronomy. It also features in the wisdom texts: <<*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction*>> (Proverbs 1:7).

The reason that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom is that the moral life begins with reverence and humility before the maker and redeemer. The idea of a quest for knowledge sets biblical wisdom in the broad context of the ancient Near Eastern quest for truth, and this Proverb also validates such a quest as legitimate and good. Thus it affirms a kind of creational revelation, the idea that one can find moral and theological truth through observing the world. At the same time, it distinguishes the biblical pursuit of knowledge and wisdom from those of the surrounding cultures, for it asserts that submission to the Lord is foundational to the attainment of real understanding. By using the covenant name ‘the Lord’ in preference to the more generic ‘God,’ this verse makes the point that truth is found through Israel’s God.

<sup>3</sup> Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

### Deuteronomy 6:3

So that you may multiply greatly. God wants the nation to grow and prosper, fulfilling his initial command at the time of creation: <<*God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’*>> (Genesis 1:28).

A land flowing with milk and honey. This description of the land is added incentive to obedience. God was giving his people a land that was fruitful which would sustain all their needs for generations to come: <<*and you gave them this land, which you swore to their ancestors to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey*>> (Jeremiah 32:22).

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.

#### Deuteronomy 6:4

Hear, O Israel. This verse is called the *Shema* from the Hebrew word for ‘hear.’ It is the classic Hebrew confession of faith, describing who God is and what a believer’s duty is towards him.

The Lord is our God, the Lord alone, or the Lord is one. The Lord alone is Israel’s God, ‘the only one.’ It is a statement of exclusivity, not of the internal unity of God. This point arises from the argument of Chapter 4 and the first commandment. While Deuteronomy does not argue theoretically for monotheism, it requires Israel to observe a practical monotheism: <<*To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him*>> (Deuteronomy 4:35). This stands in sharp contrast to the polytheistic Canaanites.

In the mind of many Jewish people, this verse alone disqualified the NT teaching that Jesus is God, and the NT teaching of the Trinity, that there is one God, existing in three Persons. At some times and places, as Jewish synagogues said the *Shema* together, and when the word one, Hebrew *echad*, was said, they loudly and strongly repeated that one word for several minutes, as if it were a rebuke to Christians who believed in the Trinity. Christians must come to a renewed understanding of the unity of God. They must appreciate the fact that the Lord is one, not three, as Paul makes quite clear: <<*yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist*>> (1 Corinthians 8:6).

Yet, the statement the Lord is one certainly does not contradict the truth of the Trinity. In fact, it establishes that truth. The Hebrew word for one is *echad*, which speaks most literally of a compound unity, instead of using the Hebrew word *yacheed*, which speaks of an absolute unity or singularity: <<*He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you’*>> (Genesis 22:2), and: <<*Turn to me and have mercy, for I am alone and in deep distress*>> (Psalm 25:16 NLT).

The very first use of *echad* in the Bible is: <<*God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day*>> (Genesis 1:5). Even here, there is unity, i.e. one day, with the idea

of plurality, made up of evening and morning. Genesis 2:24 uses *echad* in saying the two shall become one flesh. Again, the idea of a unity (one flesh), making a plurality (the two). In Exodus 26:6 and 26:11, the fifty gold clasps are used to hold the curtains together so the tent would be one (*echad*), a unity (one) made up of a plurality, the many parts of the tabernacle. In Ezekiel 37:17 the Lord tells Ezekiel to join together two sticks, prophetically representing Ephraim and Judah, into one (*echad*), speaking again of a unity of one stick made up of a plurality of the two sticks. There is no way that *echad* has the exclusive idea of an absolute singularity; the idea of one God in three persons fits well with the term *echad*.

The Lord is our God. In addition, even the name of God in this line suggests the plurality of God. The Hebrew word is *Elohim* and grammatically it is a plural word used as if it were singular, the verbs and pronouns used with it are generally in the plural.

Rabbi Simeon ben Joachi, commenting on the word *Elohim*: “Come and see the mystery of the word *Elohim*; there are three degrees, and each degree by itself alone, and yet notwithstanding they are all one, and joined together in one, and are not divided from each other.”

<sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

#### Deuteronomy 6:5

Love. Deuteronomy 4:37 indicated the love God has for the patriarchs and indeed for all his people. Their response should be to love him as best they can in return: <<*So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them*>> (1 John 4:16), and: <<*We love because he first loved us*>> (1 John 4:19).

All. That the Lord alone is Israel’s God leads to the demand for Israel’s exclusive and total devotion to him.

Heart, soul, might. All Israelites in their total being are to love the Lord; ‘this is the great and first commandment’ (Matthew 22:38). In Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27 Jesus also includes ‘mind.’ In early Hebrew, ‘heart’ included what today is called the ‘mind’. ‘Might’ indicates strength, energy and ability.

<sup>6</sup> Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

#### Deuteronomy 6:6

Keep these words in your heart. The demand is for a heart that totally loves the Lord. Deuteronomy anticipates the new covenant, when God’s words will be truly

and effectively written on the heart: <<Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. The Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on the adversaries who took advantage of you. Then you shall again obey the Lord, observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today>> (Deuteronomy 30:6-8), and: <<The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more>> (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

<sup>7</sup> Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

<sup>8</sup> Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup> and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

### Deuteronomy 6:7-9

The two pairs of opposites, home/away, and lie down/rise, suggest any and every time, place, and activity.

Bind them, write them. Many Jews have fulfilled these commands literally with phylacteries (v.8) and *mezuzot* (v.9), i.e. boxes bound on the arm and forehead or attached to doorposts containing vv.4-5 and other Scripture verses. This command will be virtually repeated: <<You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates>> (Deuteronomy 11:18-20).

Jesus condemned abuse of the wearing of phylacteries among the Pharisees; they would make their phylactery boxes large and ostentatious as a display of greater spirituality: <<They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long>> (Matthew 23:5).

In the end times, there will be a Satanic imitation of this practice, when the number of the Antichrist will be applied to either the hand or forehead of all who will accept it: *<<Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name>>* (Revelation 13:16-17).

## II.e Deuteronomy 6:10-25 - Caution against Disobedience

The section comprises general exhortations to obey and warnings not to disobey. The people are instructed to tell their children that the land was given to them by the mighty God who had brought them out of Egyptian slavery.

<sup>10</sup> When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you – a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, <sup>11</sup> houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant – and when you have eaten your fill, <sup>12</sup> take care that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

### Deuteronomy 6:10-12

That you did not. This repetition stresses the nature of the land as a good gift of God. All these things took time, effort, or a waiting period before they were finished or bore fruit.

When you have eaten your fill. The land will be bountiful and satisfying. However, such a gift is not without its risks, notably forgetfulness. To forget is less a memory problem than a moral one, a parallel to disobedience: *<<Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today>>* (Deuteronomy 8:11).

This cycle of forgetfulness would be repeated throughout the history of Israel, especially in the time of the Judges. God would bless an obedient Israel, and they would prosper; they would begin to set their heart on the blessings instead of the Lord who blessed them; God would allow chastisement to turn Israel's focus back upon him; Israel would repent and obey again, and God would again bless and obedient Israel and they would prosper.

Many Christians would claim they could never forget the work of Jesus on the Cross, yet they are called to participate in the Lord's Supper as an act of remembrance: *<<For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,*

*and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'* In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, *'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'*>> (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

<sup>13</sup> The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear.

### Deuteronomy 6:13

The Lord your God you shall fear. This continues the theme of v.2. The idea is not of a shrinking fear from an angry God. Instead, the idea of fear is more in the concept of an awe-filled respect, an inner repulsion at the idea of offending such a great, loving God who has done so much for all humankind. This is the first of three Deuteronomy passages that Jesus quotes in his refusal to bow down to Satan or accept his gifts in his wilderness temptations: <<*Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him"'*>> (Luke 4:8), demonstrating that he was God's perfect Son, whereas Israel had failed its wilderness tests. The other two quotes come in v.16 and Deuteronomy 8:3.

By his name alone you shall swear. Although the concept of the oath in God's name can certainly be abused, as Jesus pointed out in Matthew 5:33-37, there certainly is a permissible use of oaths by those who follow God, since God himself uses oaths: <<*When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and multiply you'*>> (Hebrews 6:13-14). Here, Israel is being told "you are to swear an oath only in the name of the Lord, not in the name of any other god."

<sup>14</sup> Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you, <sup>15</sup> because the Lord your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of the Lord your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth.

### Deuteronomy 6:14-15

Do not follow other gods is Deuteronomy's great fear and Israel's potential apostasy and is reiterated; refer to 4:16-19 and 8:11-20.

The Lord your God, is a jealous God. God is not jealous in the human sense but he is jealous for his name and good character, for his people and for their land. He does what is necessary to maintain these, although he does require those who love him to be just as jealous for him and his reputation.

<sup>16</sup> Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. <sup>17</sup> You must diligently keep the commandments of the Lord

your God, and his decrees, and his statutes that he has commanded you. <sup>18</sup> Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may go in and occupy the good land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give you, <sup>19</sup> thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has promised.

### Deuteronomy 6:16-19

Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Testing God is an act of disobedience and a lack of trust in him. Israel's behaviour at Massah recorded in Exodus 17:7 was a constant pattern in the wilderness: <<*none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised me shall see it*>> (Numbers 14:22-23). This is the second of three Deuteronomy passages that Jesus quoted in his wilderness temptations: <<*Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test"'*>> (Luke 4:12). The other two quotes come in v.13 and Deuteronomy 8:3. Jesus knew it was wrong to demand this sort of 'proof' from his Father, since every day was proof of God the Father's love for the Son!

In Exodus 17:1-7, Israel tempted the Lord by doubting his love and concern for them. This was tempting or testing God regarding his love for Israel, something that is not only high-handed against the Lord, because no one has the right to administer a test to the Almighty, but also disregarding his previous, and constant demonstrations of love and care for Israel by demanding that God prove his love for them now by giving them what they want. Anytime anyone denies God's love for them, or demand he do something for them, they are testing him as if he must answer to human standards, tempting him into judgement.

Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, so that it may go well with you. This theme is constantly repeated. Under the Old Covenant, Israel's blessing was based on their obedience. When they obeyed they would be blessed; when they disobeyed they would be cursed.

This is not the source of blessing in the New Covenant. In the New Covenant, Christians are blessed by faith in Jesus, since he fulfils the law in their place: <<*For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*>> (Romans 8:3-4). The watchwords for blessing under the Old Covenant

were earning and deserving; under the New Covenant, blessing comes by believing and receiving, it is purely a matter of faith.

The New Covenant system works because when people receive the New Covenant, God sends with it an inner transformation, where the law of God and the desire to do his will is now written on the hearts of these new believers. Through the New Covenant, God makes Christians 'safe' for his grace by this inner transformation. Under the New Covenant there is no judgement from God for their disobedience, because all the judgement they deserved was put upon Jesus on the Cross. However, there may be correction from the hand of a loving God the Father, not in the sense of making them pay for their sin, However much it may be deserved, but in the sense of training them not to continue in sin, and there are the natural consequences of such disobedience, which God has not promised to shield people from.

Christians who fear the 'freedom' of a New Covenant relationship with God must ask this question: did Israel come to great obedience before God through the Old Covenant? Does the system of earning and deserving blessing make people truly godlier than the system of believing and receiving? Or does it leave people either in total desperation where one can then look to Jesus, or in total pride in their own works before God, as demonstrated by the religious leaders of Jesus' day who had a significant hand in crucifying him?

<sup>20</sup> When your children ask you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?' <sup>21</sup> then you shall say to your children, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. <sup>22</sup> The Lord displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. <sup>23</sup> He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. <sup>24</sup> Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case.

#### Deuteronomy 6:20-24

When your children ask you in time to come. Often, the apostasy which comes from prosperity afflicts the next generation more than the present. They grow up expecting such prosperity and blessing, without understanding the repentance and walk with God which led to the prosperity.

What is the meaning of the decrees? This hypothetical question: <<*What do you mean by this observance?*>> (Exodus 12:26b) elicits an answer that the law is set in the context of salvation from Egypt.

Then you shall say to your children. Therefore, it was essential for Israel to teach and warn their children, so that the blessings given to one generation would not become a curse to the next generation. Key to the teaching was the simple recounting of Israel's testimony, how God had saved them from the bondage of Egypt. Parents need to relate to their children how they came to a personal relationship with Jesus, so the children understand that they must come to that same relationship personally.

<sup>25</sup> If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right.'

#### Deuteronomy 6:25

If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God. If one will obtain true righteousness through the law, it is simple, although not easy: observe all the commandments. However, if a person is lacking in observing any commandment, then they need the atonement of a perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ: <<*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*>> (John 1:29b), and: <<*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God*>> (Hebrews 12:1-2).

We will be in the right. This need not mean 'righteousness as merited legal status,' which would clash with God's gracious initiative. In context, the words mean 'righteousness as the right response of obedience to God's covenant.' One practical example of becoming right in God's sight is when a creditor acts correctly: <<*You shall give the pledge back by sunset, so that your neighbour may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the Lord your God*>> (Deuteronomy 24:13).