

Sermon Notes



Lesson 12 / June 11, 2017

SHEMA

Deuteronomy 6

Key Verse

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Discussion Questions

1. How does Deuteronomy fit within the story of Israel's history?
2. Why do you suppose Moses is so passionate in his last sermon to Israel?
3. If you were in Moses' position, what would you say to Israel?
4. What is the *shema*? Can you memorize Deuteronomy 6:4-5?
5. What is the significance of the words, “The LORD is one”?
6. How do we put our love for the LORD our God into practice?
(Consider Deut 10:12; 11:1; 13:3-4; etc.)
7. How, specifically today, do we pass these truths on to our children?
(Note Deut 6:7-9, 20-25)
8. What is your choice today? Do you choose the life that comes in Christ as we love the LORD our God?

Question 23: Are there more Gods than one?

Short Answer: *There is but one only, the living and true Lord our God.*

Full Answer: *There is but one only, the living and true Lord our God; let us remember him, worship him, and hold fast to him with humility and wholehearted devotion.*

Question 24: What is our obligation toward the one true God?

Short Answer: *We must love the Lord our God with all of our being.*

Full Answer: *We must love the Lord our God with all of our being, walking in gratitude for his grace and in obedience to his commands that we might share in his blessings.*

Summary

The book of Deuteronomy picks up right where Numbers left off. After 40 years of wilderness wandering, the former, rebellious generation of Israelites has died, and the new generation now stands at the brink of the Promised Land prepared to enter. Before they can go in, however, one more Israelite must die: Moses himself. And before he dies, Moses has one last message for the people he has led for so long. We now know his final sermon as the book of Deuteronomy. Yes, indeed, his last breath is long-winded; his sermon is nearly 34 chapters long. And you thought your pastor preaches long sermons!

Moses preaches at such length, and with great passion, because he knows the human heart. He knows the tendency we all have to forget the LORD our God, to reject his commands, and to bring his judgment upon ourselves. Moses foresees that when Israel has entered the Promised Land and settled into comfortable living, they will inevitably forget the God who brought them there and find themselves exiled from the Promised Land. May it not be! Moses pleads with them to make rebellion the thing of *yesterday* and to make *today* the day of remembering God and holding fast to him. And Moses reminds them of the mercy of God whereby God will forgive and restore them if and when they inevitably fail and eventually repent.

We find the fundamental message and overall theme of Deuteronomy encapsulated in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. These verses have become known as the *shema*, based on the first Hebrew word in Deuteronomy 6:4. "Hear (*shema*), O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." These words of the *shema* have been recited daily by devout Jews for many centuries. Indeed, history records many stories of Jews reciting the *shema* with their final breath, including some Jews as they entered the gas chambers of the Holocaust. These are cherished words – sacred words – that express the very essence of God's nature and of our position before him as his people.

The *shema* teaches us that "the LORD is one." The LORD is one in his very being, meaning that he is undivided and consistent in all that he does. And the LORD is absolutely unique, meaning that he *alone* is God and there is no other. When we say with the *shema*, "the LORD is one," we are declaring again the monotheism (= one God) established by Genesis 1:1. And when we say with the *shema*,

"the LORD our God," we are declaring our loyalty to him, for he alone is our God and we worship no other.

Further, the *shema* instructs us to love the LORD our God with the entirety of our being - with all of our heart, soul, and might. We love God because he first loved us and set his favor upon us (Deut 7:6-11). We now reciprocate his love not only by having an emotional attachment to him, but also by wholeheartedly devoting ourselves to honor him by obeying his commandments. And if we obey his commandments, then Deuteronomy promises we will enjoy the fullness and blessing of life that God gives (Deut 5:32-33; 11:26-27; 30:16). We love him by obeying him, and by obeying him we live. No wonder, then, that most of Moses' sermon recites the law from the book of Exodus, and no wonder that we now call his sermon *Deuteronomy*, which means "second law," for these laws instruct Israel in *how* to love the LORD their God.

The words of the *shema*, and indeed the entire book of Deuteronomy, ought to be on both our hearts and our lips (Deut 6:6-9). We write these words on our hearts when we allow them to penetrate deep within our souls where the *shema* shapes our very identity and becomes the center of our being. And these words ought to be on our lips so that we speak of them frequently, on all occasions, and in every situation. Indeed, we have the solemn obligation of teaching these truths to our children that they too might know and love the LORD as *their* God in *tomorrow's* generation.

Moses' sermon (finally!) ends with an impassioned plea to the people of Israel (Deut 30:19-20). They stand at a spiritual fork in the road and their fate lies in their own hands. Will they choose life or death, blessing or curse? Moses pleads with them to choose life – the blessed life that comes with embracing the *shema* and loving the LORD your God by obeying him and holding fast to him.

The same choice stands before us today. Jesus has renewed the *shema* as the most important commandment for us as his disciples (Mark 12:28-30). He calls us to confess anew in faith that the LORD alone is our God and to love him with all of our being, so that as we know the grace of Christ and follow him in obedience, we too might receive the blessing of life. How about you? Will you choose life in Christ that you might live?