

Deuteronomy 6: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Deuteronomy chapter 6 As the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you In a land flowing with milk and honey 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 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart You shall teach them diligently to your children And shall talk of them when you sit in your house And when you walk by the way And when you lie down and when you rise 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 And when the Lord your God brings you into the land That he swore to your fathers To Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob to give you With great and good cities that you did not build And houses full of all good things that you did not fill And cisterns that you did not dig And vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant And when you eat and are full Then take care lest you forget the Lord Who brought you out of the land of Egypt Out of the house of slavery It is the Lord your God you shall fear Him you shall serve And by his name you shall swear You shall not go out after other gods The gods of the peoples who are around you For the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God Lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you And he destroy you from off the face of the earth You shall not put the Lord your God to the test As you tested him at Massa You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God And his testimonies and his statutes

Which he has commanded you And you shall do what is right and good In the sight of the Lord That it may go well with you And that you may go in and take possession of the good land That the Lord swore to give to your fathers By thrusting out all your enemies from before you As the Lord has promised When your son asks you in time to come What is the meaning of the testimonies And the statutes and the rules That the Lord our God has commanded you Then you shall say to your son We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand And the Lord showed signs and wonders Great and grievous Against Egypt and against Pharaoh And all his household before our eyes And he brought us out from there That he might bring us in And give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes To fear the Lord our God For our good always That he might preserve us alive as we are this day And it will be righteousness for us If we are careful to do all this commandment

Before the Lord our God As he has commanded us Deuteronomy chapter 5 Recounts the Ten Commandments But from chapter 6 to 26 The Ten Commandments are expounded Part of the purpose of this Is to develop literacy in the law Literacy can be thought of as condensing and expounding To condense is to put things in a nutshell To express the deeper principle of something In a single statement for instance And to expound is to be able to unpack that single statement Or the basic principles And to show how they play out in practice To refract the white light of the law Into all these different applications Chapters 6 to 11 Unpack the first commandment What it means to have no other gods Besides the Lord The focus is upon The importance of a loyalty to the Lord And the first commandment Sums up the meaning of the covenant Israel's exclusive loyalty to the Lord

Is the fundamental principle of the covenant That which lies beneath everything else Their observance of the commandments and statutes That the Lord has given them Is their way in which they will express The loyalty that they have to the Lord their God If we want to understand Why the first commandment Is given so much attention Within the book of Deuteronomy It is because of this Unless the first commandment Is grasped and observed Everything else is in vain Everything builds upon the foundation Of this first commandment And as they observe this commandment They will find that things go well for them They will be brought into the land That flows with milk and honey These symbols of fruitfulness And they will experience God's blessing upon them At the heart of this chapter Is the Shema Which is that great statement Beginning Hear O Israel This statement is at the very heart Of Israel's life Having a sort of creedal significance There are various ways In which this statement Has been interpreted

[5 : 03] And translated Some see it as The Lord is our God The Lord alone That's a statement Of the exclusivity of God As the Lord of his people There are no other gods That they will have besides him While this is arguably Not the most natural way To translate it It's in this way That Zechariah chapter 14 Verse 9 Expresses the principle And the Lord will be king Over all the earth On that day The Lord will be one And his name one The point being That there are no other gods Besides the Lord Another way to take it Is that the Lord our God The Lord is one That being a statement About God's nature That God is unique There is no other being Like the Lord Or that God is simple That there is no division In God There is no separation There is no distinction Between action and potential In God Or between genus and species It could also be interpreted As the Lord our God Is one Lord The claim there Would be that the Lord Is not many

A Lord of this location And a Lord of that location But the Lord of all the earth The Lord of all things My inclination is to go With the first interpretation That it's a statement Of the Lord's exclusive claim Upon the loyalties Of his people Yet to see in this Statement of loyalty Also an implicit statement Of theology And the being of God Does not seem inappropriate to me Although that move Needs to be made carefully Moses charges people To love the Lord their God With all their heart And soul And might Love is the fulfilment Of the law The law is not A matter of observing A set of commandments Just an external action It's not just a matter Of legalistic Dotting I's And crossing T's It's about something That rises from the heart It's not just about feeling As we would understand it though When we hear the word love We tend to think In terms of emotions But this is more than emotions It's a total commitment

Expressed in actions One's heart Is one's seat of thought Of will And of feeling And one's soul Is one's emotions Passions And desires And Moses stresses That it's to be All of these things It's not to be Half-hearted Or divided There's no wavering To and fro There's no compartmentalisation Of loyalties This is something That requires The entirety Of your being And to do so With all your might Is to throw Your entire weight Into it You're doing this Without reserve This statement As Jesus expresses it Is the greatest Commandment of the law It's the statement In which The whole of the law Is summed up It's a summation Of the first commandment To have no other gods Besides the Lord But it unpacks What that actually means And the sort of loyalty That is required Of the people of God Not just an external loyalty But a complete devotion Of themselves And this great commandment Also expresses How important The heart is

In all of this The heart has to be Ordered towards the Lord Not just The external practice And from this Fundamental statement Of the first commandment And the love And the loyalty That is required Of God's people Moses moves To the words That he's about To teach them That those words Must be in their heart This is the shape That loyalty And love Towards the Lord Takes Taking his words Into us And making them Part of us The taking of words Into the heart Might imply Among other things Memory That we memorise Scripture That we chew it over That it is something That is within us I have stored up Your word in my heart That I might not Sin against you The memorisation Of scripture Really does seem To be part Of what's in view Here Having the words Of God In your heart Is also having Those words As matters Of delight Words in your heart Are things That you rejoice in That you take pleasure in That you return to Again and again And again It's also a matter

Of meditation Meditation In that you Chew over these words You ruminate Upon them And the psalms Seem to be part Of the fulfilment Of this Not just in the way That you memorise The psalms But also in the way That the psalms Conscript the emotions And the desires So that when you sing The psalms Your desires Are made part Of your expression Of the word of God This is part Of what is meant I believe In having the word of God In our heart This also anticipates The new covenant In Jeremiah chapter 31 Verses 31 to 34 God declares Behold the days are coming Declares the Lord When I will make A new covenant With the house of Israel And the house of Judah Not like the covenant That I made with their fathers On the day when I took them By the hand To bring them out Of the land of Egypt My covenant that they broke Though I was their husband Declares the Lord For this is the covenant That I will make With the house of Israel After those days Declares the Lord I will put my law Within them And I will write it

[10:07] On their hearts And I will be their God And they shall be my people And no longer Shall each one Teach his neighbour And each his brother Saying know the Lord For they shall all know me From the least of them To the greatest Declares the Lord For I will forgive Their iniquity And I will remember Their sin no more Writing the law In the heart Is a matter of Knowing the Lord Within It's not just An external word It's a word That has become Part of us It's also a sign Of divine ownership As God writes His word In the hearts Of his people His people Are marked out As his people We can see something Of this movement In scripture itself As law starts Off being an External commandment And then as we go Through scripture It's increasingly Taken within I've already mentioned The Psalms Which are an Internalisation Of the word of God In the expression Of delight And song The stirring up And conscription Of the emotions And in memorisation It's also in the work Of wisdom As the law Is taken in So that the person

Can perceive In terms of the law Of God And then it goes Further in the work Of the prophets The prophets Are those who Actually eat the word As in the case Of Ezekiel For instance And as he eats The word That word Is taken into himself In an even deeper way So he is an embodied Expression Of God's message To his people 2 Corinthians Chapter 3 Speaks of the Corinthians As epistles Of Christ Written not with ink But with the spirit Of the living God Not on tablets Of stone But on tablets Of heart Moses goes on To emphasise That the law Is to be taught To children As a pattern of life This is something That you don't Just keep for yourself It's not just something That you meditate upon In your own heart It's something you speak about To your offspring And to your family It should be constantly A matter of your conversation You're always Chewing this over Ruminating upon it Muttering it As you're walking around As you're sitting down As you're lying down And then as you're getting up The words of the law

Should be bound to your body From at least The second century BC Israel took this literally Binding leather containers Containing passages From the Torah To their foreheads And also to their hands Like the tassels On the Israelite garments These phylacteries Serve to memorialise The law of God To provide a constant Objective spur To memory And to reflection Writing them On the forehead And on the hand Is associated with action And with thought This is something That you're supposed To meditate upon It's something That's supposed to Guide the action Of your hand It is also To be written Upon the doorposts Of houses And on gates Those places of entry Those liminal realms That mark out The difference Between what's inside And what's outside What's inside Is distinguished By the fact That it comes Under this sign Under the sign Of the law The law Is the banner As it were That is upon Israel's houses Upon their cities Marking out Their loyalties And expressing

Their core commitments We have a very Narrow conception Of words We can think of Words merely As conveying Information But words Written upon things Express ownership They express A connection Between the thing And the words That are written Upon them Within this passage There is a rich And deep emphasis Upon a multifaceted Relationship With the word of God The word of God Is not just Some information That God gives to us It's something That is expressed In material form We write it Upon things So that our houses Come under its sign So that its ownership Of our bodies Is expressed We seek to write it Upon our hearts Through memorization Through singing And through these Various other means By which it becomes Part of us And not just An external set Of words upon pages In Deuteronomy Chapter 17 Verses 18 to 20 The king is instructed To write a book Of the law For himself And to meditate Upon it Throughout his life We might consider

Doing the same Sort of thing To express the bond That exists Between us And the law of God That he has given To us And by which We are to be formed The importance Of teaching children Is foregrounded In both verses 4 to 9 And in verses 20 to 21 The sections In between Focus upon Not forgetting The Lord Or the lessons Of the exodus In the wilderness The Lord Is a jealous God And those who Reject or forget Him will suffer Severe consequences There is a real Danger of forgetting The Lord In the prosperity Of the land That he will give To the people They have the Seductive pull Of false gods As well To experience They are told That they should Not test the Lord As they did At Massa This is a reference Back to Exodus Chapter 17 Verse 7 And he called The name of the place Massa and Meribah Because of the quarrelling Of the people of Israel And because they tested The Lord Saying Is the Lord Among us or not Later on in Psalm 95 Verses 7 to 9

[15:11] This event is recalled Today if you hear His voice Do not harden your hearts As at Meribah As on the day At Massa In the wilderness Where your fathers Put me to the test And put me to the proof Though they had seen My work There was an implicit Threat of disobedience Within the statement Of the people at Massa Is the Lord Among us or not Is he going to act On our behalf If he doesn't Well we might just Reject him Even though they had Seen all of the things That God had done For them in the wilderness And then before that In the events Of the Exodus itself They must teach All of these things To their children They need to know The rationale For obedience They're not just being told You must obey They're being told Why they must obey And as they understand That they'll grow In wisdom And a deepening Acquaintance with the law The law will not Just be something That's laid upon them From outside It'll be something That they can take Into themselves Parents To do this Are to retell The story of the Exodus Their former state

In slavery The deliverance That God accomplished For them God's judgments! Upon Egypt His good purpose For them In bringing them Into the land His gift of the law At Sinai And his requirement Of obedience For their good Moses ends with The statement That such obedience Will be righteousness For us As people express Their loyalty to God In observing the commandments It will be to their credit They will be in right standing With the Lord It is imperative That we see What is at the heart Of the faith of Israel At the heart of Israel's faith Is not a set of Legalistic requirements It's the calling To love God To be loyal to him It's a calling to faith This is ultimately What will be righteousness For the people of God This loyalty The steadfast commitment To the Lord their God Looking to God For provision For care Trusting him And his character To look after them And to bless them And expressing that In obedience And faithfulness

In the things that they do Delighting in his word Taking that word Into them Meditating upon that word Singing about that word Making that word Their constant reflection And teaching that word To their children After them This is what it will look like To be the people of God A question to consider Where can we find New Testament allusions To the Shema■■■■