

### Israel's Confession of Faith – The “Shema”

#### Deuteronomy 6

**Deuteronomy 6:1-12** - *“Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, <sup>2</sup> that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. <sup>3</sup> Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you—‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’*

*<sup>4</sup> “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! <sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

*<sup>6</sup> “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

*<sup>10</sup> “So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, <sup>11</sup> houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full— <sup>12</sup> then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. “*

#### Background Notes

Do you know what a phylactery is? Phylacteries are small leather boxes that observant Jews strap to their foreheads and left forearms during worship. Some of us just returned from the Holy Land where we saw many observant Jews wearing phylacteries at the holiest place in Judaism, the Western Wall of the Temple Mount. In the leather boxes are strips of paper or parchment containing Hebrew scriptures, in particular the celebrated Jewish statement of faith: the “Shema.” **“Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one”** (v4). “Shema” (pronounced shehm-ah) is the Hebrew word for “hear” - the first word of the Shema.

Do you know what a *mezuzah* is? A *mezuzah* is a small metal or wooden box that's placed on the doorframe of many Jewish homes (*mezuzah* is the Hebrew word for “doorpost.”) These boxes also contain the “Shema.” Every time an observant Jew walks by, he or she touches the box and then their lips. The practices of the phylactery and the mezuzah trace back to Deuteronomy 6:8-9: *“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”* There's nothing wrong with literally

putting Scripture in little boxes, but God's desire and plan behind this command was that His people were to have His Word in their thoughts and actions.

One more background note. Verses 10-11: *"So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant."*

That's exactly what took place at the time of the Conquest. When Israel came into the Land, they removed the pagan peoples and their idolatrous and immoral practices, but they did not destroy the cities - they conquered the cities and moved into them. Jericho, Ai, and Hazor were the only cities that were destroyed. The rest of the towns were taken over, as a gift from God. So archaeologists should not expect to find a lot of destruction in cities that would date to the time of the conquest, about 1400 BC. And that's exactly what the archaeological record shows. It shows a change of culture at the time Israel came into the Land, but destruction is found only at Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. Once again, archaeology supports the accuracy of the Bible!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God's people are to be committed to the truth and love of God's Person.

**Deuteronomy 6:11-19** - *"You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. <sup>14</sup> You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you <sup>15</sup> (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.*

*<sup>16</sup> "You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted Him in Massah. <sup>17</sup> You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. <sup>18</sup> And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the Lord swore to your fathers, <sup>19</sup> to cast out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has spoken."*

The main idea of the "Shema" (v4) is that ***the Lord is the one and only true God***. In the historical backdrop of many gods of the surrounding foreign nations, Israel was unique. They followed the one and only true God. But the Shema also emphasizes the unity and wholeness of the Lord. This is not in opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity, but rather it emphasizes the oneness of the Godhead. Notice how intimately the love of God is associated with the truth about God: *"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."* (v4-5). Believers are to love the Lord our God as He has revealed Himself. We are to love Him with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our might, and – as Jesus said in Mark 12:30 - with all our mind. God promised that He would bless Israel in the land He was giving them if they would love the Lord in full commitment.

Then He would drive out all their enemies (v19), they would be blessed with long life (v2), their land would “flow with milk and honey” - flourishing flocks and herds and abundant harvests (v3). But if Israel did not remain committed to the truth and to love of God’s Person, then they would be removed from the land (v15). And this did take place. But that Scripture predicts the restoration of Israel to the Lord and to the land in the future.

The physical and material blessings that were guaranteed to Israel, if they would believe and love the Lord, are not guaranteed to Christians today. However, all **spiritual** blessings are guaranteed to believers who are committed to the truth and love of the Lord Jesus (Ephesians 1). God’s people are to be committed to the truth and love of God’s Person.

## 2. God’s people are to be committed to the practice and the teaching of God’s Word.

**Deuteronomy 6:20-25** - *“When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?’<sup>21</sup> then you shall say to your son: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand;<sup>22</sup> and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. <sup>23</sup> Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. <sup>24</sup> And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. <sup>25</sup> Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.’”*

Have you noticed the great emphasis in this chapter on not only **practicing** the Law but on **teaching** the Law as well? Verses 1-2: *“You and your son and your grandson...”* And verses 6-7: *“And these words I command you shall be in your heart. 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.”* And verses 20-21: *“When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you? Then you shall say to your son: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.’”*

Some well-meaning Christians have used these verses as “proof texts” that Christian parents should home-school their children, but that might be pushing these texts too far. Homeschooling and Christian schools are good options, but I don’t think these texts demand this for every Christian family. Every situation is different. However, Scripture does emphasize that parents are responsible for the education of their children, and it requires that their education be focused and centered on the Word of God. A biblical worldview is to be passed on from generation to generation - not only by living out the Word of God in practice, but by verbally teaching it to our children and grandchildren as well. **Living and teaching** God’s Word - both are required! God’s people are to be committed to the practice and teaching of God’s Word.

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Don't test the Lord!**

*"You shall not test the LORD your God" (v16).* The Lord Jesus quoted this verse to refute Satan when the devil tested the Lord in the Judean wilderness (Matthew 4:5-7). Satan improperly used a Scripture to tempt the Lord to fling Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple, because He would not be hurt. The Lord showed that Satan had misinterpreted this Scripture, and that leaping from a high place would be testing God. And Deuteronomy 6:16 teaches that testing God is wrong.

God promised to take care of Israel in the wilderness, but Israel tested Him by doubting and complaining about things like having no water (Exodus 17). We too can test God by doubting His promises to care for us and provide for us.

We can also test God by forcing His hand. For example, if you throw caution to the wind by not getting your car's steering mechanism fixed, because the Lord has promised to protect you – that's testing the Lord. I'm sure you can think of many other examples. Don't test the Lord.

### **2. Wear verses, not advertisements!**

The idea behind verses 8-9 is that the Word of God should always be in our thoughts and motivating our activities. Hanging framed Bible verses on our walls at home would be a good application of this principle. Sending greeting cards with Scripture, and wearing tee shirts with biblical texts would be other applications of this principle. We have tee shirts with all kinds of advertisements – so why not a shirt with a biblical text?

Wear verses, not advertisements!