

**The Bible in One Year Week 13: Deuteronomy (Pt. 1)**  
(Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Matthew 16:24-27; Matthew 22:34-40)

- **Promised Land Pep Talk**

- Imagine: *you're lying on your deathbed with all the most important people in your life gathered round, and you have the chance to give them one last message. One last word to your spouse, your children, your loved ones. To your church, your community, the world you're leaving behind. What would you say? What would be the most important things for them to hear from you?*
- In Deuteronomy, the last book of the Torah, Moses isn't exactly on his *deathbed*, but he knows he's coming to the end of his journey: he's transitioning his leadership to Joshua and he's getting the next generation of Israelites ready to *finally* enter the land God has promised.
  - He's gathered *all of Israel* in the plains of Moab at the edge of the Promised Land and he's giving them a series of messages that recap where they've been, where they're going, what God's been doing, and what they need to remember to continue being faithful to Lord's Covenant plan. *It is the longest sermon in the Bible*—longer than Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, longer than even *my sermons!*
  - After Moses finishes preaching, he's going to walk away from his "pulpit," climb up a mountain, get a view of the Promised Land he won't be able to enter, and then die. It's a very significant time in the Story, a critical junction. And it contains messages to God's people that will be relevant throughout the *rest of the Bible*. So, let's listen in and see if we can find a Word for us.
- We're going to focus one very important part of this sermon today, but first let's watch a video from the Bible Project to get an overview: "The Book of Deuteronomy" <https://youtu.be/NMhmDPWefw>

- **All In**

- So, as you can see, there are *a lot* of things going on in this book, but if I could boil it down into one key message, it would be this: *We've got to be **all in***. ALL IN. This thing God is doing with his people, this *With-God Way* of Life will only work the way it's meant to *if you're all in*. It's not an optional add-on to your life. It's not one slice of the pie. It's not something you can do partially, pick-and-choose, half-way, half-hearted. It will only work if you're *all in*.
  - Think about the things in life that *don't work* unless you're fully committed. Here's a trivial example: when I was a kid, I thought I wanted to be a skater punk. I thought it was going to be *so cool*, but the first time I went to a skate park, I learned how hard it is. The toughest thing is learning to "drop in." That's when you stand on the edge of a bowl or a half-pipe (you know, those big raps you ride down into that have like a sheer drop before rounding off). When you try to drop-in, you can't do it unless you're totally committed: if there's any part of you that tries to hold back, your board will fly out from under your feet. You have to fully surrender to gravity and just *drop in*: and I could never do it, because I could never bring myself to just give up control when standing at the top of this 8, 10, or 12-foot drop! And so I never did.
  - How about some more practical stuff: would you want a pilot to fly you cross-country who wasn't fully committed to your journey? Would you want a guide to lead you up Mount Everest who wasn't fully committed to your safe passage? Would you want a surgeon to operate on you who wasn't fully committed to your healing?
  - And then there's the weightier things of life: you can't do marriage unless you're *all in*; if you're not *fully committed*, it won't work the way it's supposed to. Imagine me saying to Emily, "Honey, I've been really working on it, and I think after ten years, I now love 85% of you with 98% of my heart. Isn't that great, babe?...*Babe, where ya goin'?*" You can't do parenting unless you're *all in*; it won't work out the way it's supposed to if you're not all in. Think of all the blessings when these relationships are *fully committed*—and all the heart-ache when they aren't. The most important relationships are *all-in* kinds of things. You get the point, right?
  - There are plenty of things in life that you can do with as much or little commitment as you want and you'll be just fine: you can take up the hobby of painting or racket ball or playing an instrument with any amount of dedication and it'll be ok. You can read a book or watch a movie with as much or as little focus as you wish, and you'll be fine. But (as much as we sometimes try

to treat it this way) life with God *is not one of those things* that we can do half-heartedly. Don't misunderstand me: it's not that this depends on *our effort and work*, that's not the Gospel, of course, but it is about our *full surrender* to what God wants to do in our lives. God want's *all of me*. God want's *all of your heart*.

- Moses' message to God's Covenant people is: Our God is *all in*, totally committed; we've got to be *all in*, we've got to be fully committed to him.
- **The Shema**
  - So, to understand this, we're going to quickly unpack one of the most important verses of Deuteronomy, of the Torah, and really, of the *whole Bible*. Can you guess which verse it is?
    - "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,*" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).
    - In Jewish tradition it's called "the Shema," because that's the Hebrew word for "hear." For *thousands* of years, every morning and evening, Jewish people have prayed Deuteronomy 6:4 as a way of expressing their devotion to God. In fact, there are these beautiful rituals of prayer practiced still by many devout Jews throughout the world, where they literally act out the words of Deuteronomy 6: they take "tefillin" (also called "phylacteries") which are these little boxes that have tiny scrolls of Scripture and prayer inside; they use leather cords to literally "bind" the Word of God to their left hand and to their forehead. And as they say this prayer, they wrap the cord around their arm, down to their forearm, and to their fingers in a particular pattern that represents their covenant and their *betrothal* to God. So, it's this tangible action that's meant to daily form the heart in devotion to God. It's beautiful, isn't it?
  - Now, the Shema is straightforward enough when you read it, but to understand what it's really saying, you've got to break down some of the key words and their original meaning. Quickly, let's look at these five key words: *Listen, Love, Heart, Soul, and Strength*. (If you want a really great break down of this, check out our study notes, look up the Bible Project "Shema Playlist".)
    - Listen: the Hebrew word is, *Shema*. Listen in Hebrew can be used in the Scriptures to mean the literal process of taking in soundwaves through your ear canal. But it also means *more* than just hearing: in Deuteronomy 6:4 "Shema" means exactly what I mean when I say to my boys *every single day* that I drop them off at preschool: "*Be good listeners to your teachers, boys!*" And every day when they get picked up, especially Gideon, our highly-energetic-three-year-old, will say to me, if he had a good day, "*Daddy, I listened to my teachers!*" Because...he wants to get his lollypop from Ms. Tammy (and provide job security for our wonderful dentists out there). "Listen" means more than just "hear." It means *obey*. The call of the Covenant is to *listen and obey*. There is no separate word for "obey," shema means *listen and keep the Covenant*.
    - Love: the Hebrew word *Ahava*. Ahava is a broad term of love that can be used to describe the affection and deep commitment of lovers, friends, family, leaders, and God. It describes love and loyalty in a relationship. And in the Bible, Love is not just a *feeling* but even more importantly and *action*. It's about *affection* and *commitment*. Or it's not really love. Tim Mackie at the Bible Project says, "God's Love is everlasting...God's love just *is*, an eternal fact of the universe. And God's love is not duty, it's a genuine feeling and affection that God experiences." We are called to respond to that love by loving God back, not just in *feeling*, but in action. So, going back to the first word *shema*, if I'm not *listening*, if I'm not seeking to follow and obey God's ways, to discover what pleases him, *I don't really love him*.
    - Heart, Soul, and Strength: love the LORD your God with all your *heart*, with all your *soul*, and with all your *strength*. The Hebrew for heart is *Lev*. They knew the heart was an organ inside your chest that kept you alive, but for them the heart also represented the *center* of all your thoughts and feelings. When the Bible talks about the "heart," it's about the center of your *physical life, your emotions, your thoughts, and your actions or will*. The core, the central processing unit. The engine of your hardware *and* software, that's the heart—love God with *all that*. Then there's all your "Soul," or the Hebrew *Nephesh*. Now, for the Hebrews this did not refer so much to the idea of like a disembodied spirit that lives on after your body dies. For the Biblical writers, *nephesh* refers to humans as living, breathing, physical beings. Nephesh

literally means “throat,” in the sense that your whole life depends on what comes in through your throat (breathing, eating, drinking). The Bible Project again says, “To love God with all of your nephesh means to devote your whole physical existence to your creator. It’s about offering your entire being, with all of its capabilities and limitations, in the effort to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself.” Finally, “Strength,” or in Hebrew *Me’od*. This is another one where our translations can be deceiving: In Hebrew *me’od* is actually just an adjective that means “very” or “much.” And if they wanted to really describe the *maximum* amount that something can be, they would repeat *me’od me’od*. So, in Genesis 1 when God finished creating everything it wasn’t just “good” it was *me’od me’od* good. So, the *Shema* finishes with *love the LORD your God will all your...muchness*. Which is kind of weird, but it also makes sense, doesn’t it? Love God with the maximum capacity, with all that you are, all that you’ve got.

- Do you see what I mean, then, with the idea that Moses’ message to God’s people here, in the clearest, strongest of terms, *you’ve got to be all in!* Love the Lord, follow the Lord, serve the Lord *with all of your being, mind, body, and spirit, with all that you are!* Like, there’s not a greater degree that we could describe here, there aren’t any words you could add to make this devotion any more complete.
  - Jesus said the same thing as Moses: we have to be all in. He said that this, the *Shema*, was the greatest commandment, right alongside the command to love your neighbor as yourself (because, again, you can’t say you love God if you don’t follow his commands and his command is to love your neighbor). And Jesus said that if we want to follow him, we have to deny ourselves and take up our cross, if we want to find our lives, we have to lay them down. All in. Full surrender. And that’s how you find the life that really life.
  - All of this love and devotion is to be in response to one thing: *the fact that this is how God loves us*. When you look at the full story of Scripture, up to the culmination of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it’s *totally clear* that *God* loves us with all of his heart, soul, and strength. He could not love us any more than he has! And our response is to love him back.
- **The Problem**
  - There’s one problem. Our hearts are broken. All of us. I’ve got this busted heart, and no matter how much I try, *I can’t seem to hold up my end of the deal*. I can see it in my life, you can see it in your life, and all through the Torah and the rest of the Old Testament you can see it in Israel. They can’t seem to love God wholeheartedly for any length of time, if at all.
    - Moses acknowledged this later in his sermon in Deuteronomy. He said the Israelites had hard hearts and they would break the covenant and be sent into Exile. A time would come when God would give them *new hearts* and *write his law on their hearts*—but not yet.
    - So, as we finish the Torah, the foundation of the Bible that sets the stage for the *whole big Story of God*, we’re left with this big cliffhanger, this big question mark: how is this plan of God to restore the world going to work if the people he wants to do it through can’t be faithful to the covenant? When and how is God going to change their hearts of stone to hearts of flesh that naturally respond to God’s love by loving him back, completely? Well, that’s the problem that Jesus solves, that’s the question that Jesus answers. That’s what the New Testament is about and that’s what we’re going to see next week on Resurrection Sunday.
  - Until then: ask yourself today, *Do I want to be all in with Jesus? Am I willing to surrender and devote all that I am to loving him?* You can’t do it on your own strength, you can’t do it with just you and your broken heart; but thanks to Jesus, you *can* do it by the grace of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit. That’s the invitation of the Gospel: God loves you completely, and he wants to give you a new heart to love him back.
  - God is *all in*. God loves you like that. Are you ready to respond?