

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 15

DEUTERONOMY

I. BACKGROUND.

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the “Torah” (Jewish law). The Hebrew Bible names the book *debarim* meaning “words.” This title comes from the start of the book. The English title “Deuteronomy” came from the Greek and Latin titles (*Deuteronomion* – Greek; *Deuteronium* – Latin) words used in Deut. 17:18.

Deuteronomy is a collection of several last addresses from Moses to the Israelites. The speeches were given on the plains of Moab right before the Jews entered the Promise Land.

Luther saw Deuteronomy as a “summary of the whole law and wisdom of the people of Israel, wherein those things which related to the priests and Levites are omitted, and only such things included as the people generally required to know.”

II. OUTLINE.

The book divides into two sections. The first section (Ch 1-30) contains three addresses/speeches of Moses to the people. The second section (Ch 31-34) contains the close of Moses’ life.

The first section with the three addresses can be subdivided as follows:

A. First address (1:6-4:40).

Moses calls to mind certain facts of the wilderness history. He exhorts them to remember the Lord and he sets aside cities of

refuge in the Promise Land.

B. Second address (Ch 5-26).

Moses sets forward the law in general terms (Ch 5-11) and more specific special terms (Ch 12.26).

C. Third address (Ch 27-30).

III. THE “SHEMA” (Dt. 6).

Deuteronomy Chapter 6 contains the “*Shema*.” It is the expression devout Jews to this day cling to as core to their faith. The N.I.V. (New International Version), the *Shema* is translated:

“Hear oh 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.”

Jews were to put these words upon their hearts, to impress them upon their children, to talk about them along the road, morning and night. They were to tie them on their hands and bind them on their foreheads. They were to write them on the door frames of their houses (Dt. 6:6-9).

In fact, the words of Dt. 6:4-9 and Dt. 11:13-20 formed the Jewish custom of Medusah. The words were written on a small piece of parchment which was then enclosed in a wooden box and placed on the top of the doorway of houses. Jews would (and many still do) touch the box with their finger and then kiss the finger upon entering or leaving the house.

What does this mean: “Jehovah our God is one Jehovah?” At its core, it does not mean merely that Jehovah is the only God. It is clearly saying Jehovah is the only “Jehovah.” In other words, the name “Jehovah” rightfully belongs only to “Jehovah.” He alone can claim “I am.” He alone is present tense, current God, divine ruler, absolute God, King over all.

So the phrase precludes several things:

1. Polytheism – In other words there are not multi-Gods. There is only one supreme God.
2. Syncretism – In other words, there are not different geographical Gods. There is one God over all the earth.
3. Idealtheism (made up word) – In other words, there is not a “concept” of divinity which we worship. There is a person of divinity whom we worship. As Paul would say 1500 years later, “I know whom I have believed,” not “I know what I have believed.”

This one Jehovah, then, we are to love with all our “heart.” “Heart” here references the seat of our emotions and love. It is the gut. We are not to divide our love, but to give it wholeheartedly to Jehovah.

This one Jehovah we are also to love with all our soul. The Hebrew here is “*nephesh*.” It is the center of personality in man. Our love for Jehovah is to be the center of who we are, how we think. It is to be the core of our consciousness.

Finally, we are to love the one Jehovah with all our strength.

This commandment precedes the recitation of the law because all our obedience flows from our love. And our love itself, flows from the nature and being of Jehovah our God.

This Lesson is consistent with New Testament teaching. John says we obey because we love Jesus. He also says we love Jesus because Jesus first loved us.

When Christ was asked the greatest commandment of all, he gave the *Shema* (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:27). Interestingly, the Jewish translators of the Septuagint translated “the mind” for “the heart.” Matthew then substitutes “mind” for

“strength” while Mark and Luke add “mind” to “heart, soul, and strength.” The Hebrew contains all ideas expressed by those various translations.

This love of God and his commands should be deep in our hearts and fresh in our minds. We should discuss it, teach it, live it, and grow in it.