

One God Alone

(Highlights from Deuteronomy, Part II)

First Christian Church, Hamilton, Illinois — May 7, 2017

Richard C. Leonard, Ph.D.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ESV

"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."

Deuteronomy 7:6-11 ESV

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today."

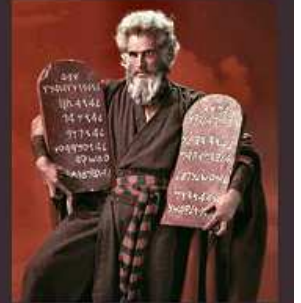
Deuteronomy 9:4-7 ESV

"Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

"Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people. Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD."

Highlights from Deuteronomy Part II

Deuteronomy
6:4-9; 7:6-11;
9:4-7



The English Old Testament

Books of "History"

The Pentateuch

Joshua through Esther

Books of "Poetry and Wisdom"

Job through Song of Solomon

Books of "Prophecy"

Major Prophets (Isaiah, etc.)

Minor Prophets (Hosea thru Malachi)

As we continue our journey through the Book of Deuteronomy, let's pause to remind ourselves where we are in the scope of Holy Scripture. As you know, the Hebrew Bible (what we call the Old Testament) is made up of several parts. If you look at your English Bible, you'll see that the books are arranged in a certain order: books of "history" beginning with Genesis and the rest of the Law, on into Joshua and continuing through Esther; books of "poetry" or "wisdom" beginning with Job and continuing through the Song of Solomon; and, finally, books of "prophecy" beginning with Isaiah and ending with Malachi. In a way, we could say that this organization is a sort of past-present-future order, with the Law and history

representing the past, the poetic and wisdom books reflecting present experience, and the prophetic books pointing to the future.

But this order is actually the order of the Old Testament as translated into Greek, and then into modern languages like German or English. The Hebrew Bible has a different order. Like our Bibles, it starts with the Law (*torah*). But the second section is called the Prophets (*nevi'im*), and it includes many of what we call the "historical" books under the heading of "former prophets," because they record the activities of men like Elijah and Elisha as well as the history of the Israelite tribes and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Then come the "latter prophets" beginning with the largest books like Isaiah, and finally the "minor prophets" (because their books are smaller), beginning with Hosea and ending with Malachi, a collection known as the "Book of the Twelve." Then comes the third division of the Hebrew Bible, which is just called the "Writings" (*ketuvim*). That section includes everything else not found in the first two sections, including the "five scrolls" as they're called (*megillot*) — Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. As you can see, the Writings section includes some books found elsewhere in our Bible, like Daniel which the English Bible puts with the "prophets," or Nehemiah which is in the "history" section of the English Bible. In fact, the very last books of the Hebrew Bible are books of history, 1 and 2 Chronicles.

The Hebrew Bible
Law (*Torah*) – Five Books of Moses
Prophets (*Nevi'im*)
Major Prophets (Isaiah, etc.)
Minor Prophets ("Book of the Twelve")
Writings (*Ketuvim*) – Everything Else
Psalms, Proverbs, Job
The "Five Scrolls" (*Megillot*)
Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles

When Jesus, after his resurrection, told his disciples, "Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44), he was giving the order of the Hebrew Bible, using the Psalms to stand for the Writings division because it's the first, and longest, book in that collection. All of this is simply to remind us where Deuteronomy comes in the scheme of things, as the last of the five books of the Law or Pentateuch. The word we translate "law," *torah*, actually doesn't mean "law" as we understand legislation or legal provisions. *Torah* actually means "teaching" or "instruction," and that's what we find in Deuteronomy because almost the entire book is a long speech by Moses — a sermon or teaching — that he delivers to the people of Israel just as they're about to cross the Jordan into the land the Lord has promised them. In this speech Moses is recapping the story of Israel from the time of their exodus from Egypt, through

their receiving the commandments on Mount Sinai (called Horeb in Deuteronomy), and up to where they find themselves at this point, ready to take possession of the land of Canaan.

Now that is our history lesson for today, but let's get into what Deuteronomy itself has to say. We pick it up here in chapter 6, after Moses has finished rehearsing the Ten Commandments. And here is where we find one of the Bible's most important statements: "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). You'll immediately recognize that the second part of this declaration is what Jesus quoted as the greatest commandment of the Law,

coupled with Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But let's look at that first part: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." This is known as the *Shema'*, from its words in Hebrew: *shema' yisra'el: adonai eloheinu adonai echad*.

The *Shema'*
"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).



The *Shema*' is often called the creed, or statement of faith, of Israel and of Judaism to this day, because it states the central proclamation of biblical faith: that *Yahweh*, the Lord, is the one and only God. Most religious movements have a creed. Perhaps you're familiar with that brief Christian statement known as the Apostles' Creed. Many churches include it in their worship services, and in fact we recited it at the last Lenten service this year at Bethel Presbyterian. Other churches, like the Anglican or Episcopal, use the longer statement called the Nicene Creed that comes from the fourth century.

We have a creed here at First Christian Church, the Statement of Faith in our Constitution that was adopted at the annual meeting in 2011. I think it would be a good reminder to repeat that Statement of Faith today:

We, the membership of First Christian Church, desire to put forth a clear and concise statement of our beliefs.

A. Scripture. We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings. It is the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of mankind, and the final authority for all Christian faith and life.

B. The Godhead. We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

C. Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus Christ is God. From the beginning he was with God; became man; was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. He died on the cross, a sacrifice for the sins of mankind according to the scriptures. He arose bodily from the grave, ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of God the Father as our Intercessor and Advocate.

D. Holy Spirit. We believe the Holy Spirit was with God from the beginning. He was sent to man as the great Comforter. We believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and to convict mankind of sin, strengthen the believing sinner, and indwell, guide, and instruct, and empower the believer for Godly service.

E. Sanctity of Marriage and Life. We believe that marriage should be between one woman and one man. All other forms of marriage or sexual relationships are condemned by God. We believe that life begins at the moment of conception, and that life is a gift and a blessing of God.

F. Forgiveness. We believe the forgiveness of all sin, except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is available to all persons who confess their sin and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

What I want to point out is the difference between Israel's creed, the *Shema*', and our statement of faith or even the Apostles' or Nicene creeds. Typically, Christian statements of faith talk about what we believe God is like; for example, they go into a statement of the Trinity, or of the divine nature of Jesus. The *Shema*' is different; it doesn't go into detail about the Lord, but rather it's a pledge of the worshipers' loyalty to God. It could be translated a little differently: not "The LORD our God, the LORD is one," but "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone": *adonai eloheinu adonai echad*.

Our Statement of Faith

- ❖ The Bible is the final authority for Christian faith and life.
- ❖ There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Jesus was with God from the beginning, and became man; He died on the cross for the sins of mankind according to the Scriptures. He arose bodily from the grave and ascended to the right hand of God the Father as our Intercessor and Advocate.
- ❖ The Holy Spirit is the great Comforter. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus, to convict of sin, and empower the believer for Godly service.
- ❖ Marriage is between one woman and one man. Life begins at conception, a gift and a blessing of God.
- ❖ Forgiveness of sin is available to all who confess their sin and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."




(Philippians 2:9-11)

In other words, in stating our faith biblically we're not so much trying to define God, or splitting theological hairs, as we are affirming that he is our Ruler and Authority. We find much the same in the earliest Christian creeds of the New Testament. The oldest Christian confession is simply "Jesus is Lord," or more completely, "Jesus the Messiah is Lord" (Philippians 2:11). This confession implies that other so-called "lords" aren't really lords at all — certainly not for us. As Paul states in 1 Corinthians 8:6, "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." Paul is actually rewriting the *Shema*' here, and including Jesus in his declaration of loyalty to the one God.

So — Moses in the *Shema*, and Jesus in the “Great Commandment,” and the apostle Paul in his statements, are reminding us that it’s not just *what we believe about God* that’s important. As James states, “Even the demons believe — and tremble!” (James 2:19). But they’re still demons! It’s important to say, “The Lord God is one,” but it’s also important to say, “The Lord is our God, the Lord *alone*,” and to live by that creed as a personal commitment to worship him, take our direction from his Word, walk in his ways, and allow him to transform our behavior. We can make all sorts of impressive statements about what we believe God is like, and what people need to believe about Jesus, but the important statement is the one we make by following him, and him only. That means we need to do what Moses tells Israel to do: get familiar with the Word of God, teach it, talk about it, so that it becomes to us like something we carry around with us at all times, like a wallet or a piece of jewelry. “You shall bind [God’s words] as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deuteronomy 6:8).

"It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers . . ."
 (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)



But why is it that ancient Israel, or we ourselves, would want to make such an affirmation: “The Lord is our God, the Lord alone”? Moses goes into that in the next passage we have selected for reading today, from Deuteronomy 6:

The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (7:6-8).

Israel is to pledge its loyalty to *Yahweh* alone because of what he has done for them in bringing them out of slavery and thereby making them a free people, called to serve and obey him.

But Moses stresses this point: it wasn’t because Israel was anything great, so far as ancient nations were concerned, that he delivered them. It was only because the Lord *loved* Israel that he rescued them from their plight. And why did he love them? Did he find the Hebrews especially attractive and loveable? The record of the Book of Exodus shows us that these Israelites weren’t very loveable; they griped because of the hardships

they faced in the wilderness, where they lacked the familiar conditions of their Egyptian slavery. Even while passing through the Reed Sea they complained, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? (Exodus 14:11). They weren’t even grateful for their newfound freedom, because it wasn’t what they were used to under their Egyptian taskmasters. So why did the Lord deliver them? As Moses explains, it was for one simple reason: It’s because the Lord “is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery” (Deuteronomy 6:8).

Why does God “love” us?

- ❖ Is it because we’re so attractive that he has a warm feeling for us?
- ❖ Or is it God’s commitment to us based on what he has called us to do, and to be?
- ❖ And isn’t it, above all, because of our membership in Jesus?

In other words, the Lord’s love for them was based on his *promise* to their forefathers to make them his special servants in this world. As he promised to Abraham, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3). God’s

love for his people is not based on their merits, or on any qualities that make them deserving of his love. Instead, it's based on his purpose for them: that they are to be his ambassadors in the world, bringing other nations to the knowledge of the truth of God and blessing them with the benefits that flow from walking in his ways. Is God's love for his people, then, a nice squishy feeling of attraction — as our culture defines "love" today? Or is it a commitment to them based on what he is calling them to be: his special agents for goodness, righteousness, and truth in a world darkened by the ignorance and wickedness of sinful mankind? And, the New Testament shows us, when Israel couldn't live up to this high calling Jesus summed it up in himself, and died and rose again to fulfill God's plan for his people.

Can we see ourselves in this picture? Sometimes preacher play off the Old Testament against the New, as though the Hebrew Scriptures teach salvation or deliverance by works but the gospel proclaims that God has chosen us only by his grace. But that's quite mistaken. God's choice of his people has *always* been by grace, whether in the New Testament or the Old. Just as the Lord didn't choose Israel because of how good they were, but because he had made a promise to their fathers in calling them to serve him, so he has chosen you and me to be rescued from a pointless and empty and misdirected life because of our membership in Jesus, his anointed, the Messiah of Israel. As Paul puts it in Ephesians (see 1:4-6), we have been chosen in Jesus, adopted into God's family through him, and not chosen because of anything you or I have done to deserve being the recipients of God's love.

Moses reminds Israel here in Deuteronomy, "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (7:9). It's because *God is faithful* that you and I can also be faithful, keeping his great commandment to love him alone with everything we have, as Jesus said, and then also to seek the well-being of others just as we would seek it for ourselves. When we do this, we begin to witness the reality of what Jesus announced when he proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Now, lastly, I want to look at a third section of Deuteronomy, from chapter 9. Moses is speaking to the people just as they're about to begin infiltrating the land of Canaan, the good land the Lord has promised them. There they are to displace the various groups of Canaanites that live there — all the various "ites" we read about with those hard-to-pronounce names! And Moses warns Israel, "Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you" (Deuteronomy 9:4).

There are people who reject the Bible because of what Israel did upon taking possession of the land of Canaan. In the Book of Joshua we read how, in many cases, they exterminated be people who lived there down to the last man, woman, and child. "This is so barbaric, so cruel," some people claim, "that I can't believe in a God who would order his followers to pursue an 'ethnic cleansing' like that." If we believe in God's justice, how are we to respond to such an objection? I suggest we can say three things in response.

First, if you read the "fine print" of the Bible's historical record you discover that Israel didn't exterminate all the Canaanites; they were still around centuries later, tempting Israel to turn away from the worship of the Lord to serve their many gods, or Ba'als.

Second — and this is the main point — the polytheistic religion of the Canaanites was corrupt and dehumanizing. It included practices like cultic prostitution, in which a worshiper would have relations with a temple priestess in order to induce the gods to imitate this fertility ritual and send the rains and make the

What do we make of the "extermination" of the Canaanites?

- ❖ It was never a complete "ethnic cleansing."
- ❖ The Canaanites' corrupt religion endangered Israel's way of life in the Lord. If they wouldn't give it up, they had to be stamped out.
- ❖ What Israel did to the Canaanites is only an excuse for people who don't want to believe in God anyway.

flocks and crops reproduce. It included child sacrifice, to force the gods to give the worshipers what they wanted from them. If the people in the Canaanite culture refused to give up their twisted and evil religious practices, abandon their false gods, and worship the one God who created heaven and earth, then Israel really had no choice but to wipe them out because that culture posed a serious threat to preserving the worship of *Yahweh*, the Lord God, and the way of life he had given them. Such severe measures strike us as unbelievably cruel today, but we have to put ourselves in the place of the ancient Israelites in order to understand why the Lord told them what they were to do to the land's previous inhabitants. It's only because Jesus came and revealed a better way, the way of his cross, that we now take a dim view of such a severe command. But in the light of what groups like ISIS do to the people who come under their influence, we can see why the Canaanites had to be wiped out.

Thirdly, let's not be deceived. People who refuse to believe in God because of what we read about him in parts of the Hebrew Bible like Deuteronomy or Joshua are really just using that as an excuse, because they *don't want to believe* in the first place. As Gary Habermas found through an extensive study of the phenomenon of unbelief, most refusal to accept God is *volitional*. People reject God not because they've been convinced he isn't real, but because if they really believed they would have to change their life. In becoming a believer, I might have to reconsider some of my harmful habits, my crude behavior, my angry attitudes, my indifference to spiritual and moral issues — and I don't want to! Indeed it all boils down, once again, to the *Shema*: "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone." If you want to be your own "lord," doing whatever feels good or whatever "turns you on" regardless of the consequences in your life and the lives of others, then you don't want another Lord coming into the picture and complicating the situation. He might have other plans for your life.

God does have plans for you and me — not just plans for what happens when we leave our mortal bodies, but plans for what we do with these bodies while we're still in them. And the purpose of whatever we do is spelled out in the teaching of Scripture. Whatever purpose, under God, you discover there for yourself, it will be consistent with what Jesus taught us to pray: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Text ©2017 Richard C. Leonard