

# DEUTERONOMY

## Chapter 6

### *The Greatest Commandment*

**“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, 2 that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 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. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. 10 “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, 11 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, 12 then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 13 It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. 14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— 15 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. 16 “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. 17 You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. 18 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 19 by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has promised. 20 “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?’ 21 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. 22 And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. 23 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. 24 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. 25 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.’**

**6:2** *may your days be long.* By obeying the Lord and keeping his decrees, individual Israelites would enjoy long life in the land, and the people as a whole would enjoy a long national existence in the land. (CSB)

**6:3** *multiply greatly.* God promised to be Israel's God (Ex 6:7) and bless with offspring those who followed His precepts. This promise takes us back to the Garden of Eden, where God blessed Adam and Eve and commanded them to be “fruitful and multiply” (Gn 1:28). God's original desire was for a world

filled with people who love and fear Him. This original love toward God and each other allowed God to commune with them in a very special way. (TLSB)

*land flowing with milk and honey.* The phrase is used 14 times from Exodus through Deuteronomy and 5 times elsewhere in the OT (see especially 32:13–14). (CSB)

**6:4** This verse, known as the *Shema* (“Hear”) for the first word in Hbr, is an early creed of Israel’s faith in God. Observant Jews still say the *Shema* twice daily, during morning and evening prayers. The text includes Dt 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Nu 15:37–41. Ambr: “We must follow the ways of the Lord, and take heed to our own ways, lest they lead us into sin. One can take heed if one is not hasty in speaking.... Be silent therefore first of all, and hearken, that you fail not in your tongue” (NPNF 2 10:2). (TLSB)

*he LORD is one.* A divinely revealed insight, especially important in view of the multiplicity of Baals and other gods of Canaan and elsewhere (see, e.g., Jdg 2:11–13). (CSB)

God is unique (Hbr *'echad*) and singular in His qualities. He alone is God. This is in contrast to the Canaanite Baals that represented various powers of nature. The oneness of God does not militate against the unity of the three persons in the Trinity. (E.g., “one” is also used in Gn 2:24 to describe the “one flesh” relationship of Adam and Eve.) “God is one divine essence who is eternal, without a body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. He is the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible [Nehemiah 9:6]. Yet there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (AC I 2–3). Ambr: “[He is] unchangeable, always abiding in unity of power, always the same, and not altered by any accession or diminution” (NPNF 2 10:150). (TLSB)

Observant Jews still say the Shema twice each day, as a part of their morning and evening prayers, yet is not so much a prayer as a statement of faith. (PBC)

God wanted education in the faith to be a sincere thing, carved into the hearts of His people. God wanted education in the faith to be a family thing. God didn’t want His people confining it to Sabbath days, leaving it to the religious professional to conduct. Transmitting the faith to our children is primarily the responsibility of father and mother. (PBC)

**6:5** *Love the LORD.* Love for God and neighbor (see Lev 19:18) is built on the love that the Lord has for his people (1Jn 4:19–21) and on his identification with them. Such love is to be total, involving one’s whole being. (CSB)

Hbr *'aheb*; common term for affection. God commands His people to love Him above all else. Ter: “The primordial law was given to Adam and Eve in paradise, as a womb of all the precepts of God. In short, if they had loved the Lord their God, they would not have contravened His precept” (ANF 3:152). (TLSB)

*heart ... soul ... might.* God’s desire is that His people love Him with total sincerity, without reservation, and with all their faculties. Ambr: “First stands faith, which is a sign of wisdom.... You should give to God the most precious thing you have, that is, your mind, for you have nothing better than that. When you have paid your debt to your Creator, then you may labor for men, to show them kindness, and to give help” (NPNF 2 10:42). Mel: “The corrupt nature of man in this life cannot produce this perfect obedience. Doubts concerning both the anger and mercy of God cling in his heart. No one fears God as he ought. No one is so on fire with love as he ought to be” (Chem, *LTh* 2:365). “What does it mean to have a god? Or, what is God? Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true. On the other hand, if your trust

is false and wrong, then you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God [Hebrews 11:6]. Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god” (LC I 1–3). (TLSB)

**6:6** *these words*. Some rabbis regarded this as a reference to vv 4–5, but likely refers to the 10 “words,” or Commandments (5:6–21). Here God presents a restatement of the First Tablet of the Law (Ex 20:3–11). (TLSB)

*commandment ... upon your hearts*. A feature that would especially characterize the “new covenant” (see Jer 31:33). (CSB)

Always remembered and inwardly treasured. The Mishnah describes the priests at the Jerusalem temple reciting the Ten Commandments (Dt 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Nu 15:37–41; Tamid 5:1). (TLSB)

**6:7** *teach them diligently* – The Hebrew word *shaman* is a verb for sharpening by repeatedly running the blade over a whetstone. Parents are to teach God’s Word faithfully to their offspring so that God will continually dwell with His people. (TLSB) (Some commentators have said the word means to inoculate.)

*sit...walk..lie...rise*– Daily living presents numerous opportunities to talk to our children about what God has done – even the most mundane events. As Christians, we should take every opportunity to discuss what God has done through Christ, no matter where we are or what we are doing. (TLSB)

**6:8–9** Many Jews take these verses literally and tie phylacteries (see note on Mt 23:5) to their foreheads and left arms. They also attach mezuzot (small wooden or metal containers in which passages of Scripture are placed) to the doorframes of their houses. But a figurative interpretation is supported by 11:18–20; Ex 13:9, 16. (CSB)

Crosses or pictures of Jesus serve a similar purpose in our homes. (PBC)

**6:8** *bind them as a sign ... frontlets*. “It is so we might have our eyes constantly fixed on them. We should have them always in our memory. Then we might do them in all our actions and ways. Then everyone may make them his daily exercise in all cases, in every business and transaction, as though they were written in every place wherever he would look, indeed, wherever he walks or stands” (LC I 331–32). Although God uses the words here to emphasize the importance of remembering His Word continually in everything everything, many Jews later took the command literally and tied phylacteries to their /foreheads and left arms. (TLSB)

**6:9** *write them*. Later, Jews fastened small capsulelike containers called “mezuzoth” to their doorposts. Inside were the words of Dt 6:4–9 and 11:13–21 as a continual reminder of God’s grace toward them. “He knows our danger and need, as well as the constant and furious assaults and temptations of devils. He wants to warn, equip, and preserve us against them, as with a good armor against their fiery darts [Ephesians 6:10–17] and with good medicine against their evil infection and temptation” (LC Longer Preface 14). (TLSB)

**6:10–12** Because the emphasis in Scripture is always on what God does and not on what his people achieve, they are never to forget what he has done for them. (CSB)

We easily forget the many blessings God has provided. Material blessings can even steal our hearts away from God. (TLSB)

**6:13** Quoted in part by Jesus in response to Satan’s temptation (Mt 4:10; Lk 4:8). Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy in response to the devil’s other two temptations as well. (CSB)

*fear.* This command connects with v 5, which addresses a believer’s love for God. An awe-filled reverence for God is in keeping with the First Tablet of the Law (Ex 20:3–11; Dt 5:7–15). (TLSB)

**6:15** *in your midst.* In keeping with the promise He made in Ex 25:8, God dwells among His people. (TLSB)

*jealous God.* In His love, God will not tolerate any unfaithfulness or the worship of a rival god (Jsh 24:19). (TLSB)

**6:16** Quoted in part by Jesus in Mt 4:7; Lk 4:12. (CSB)

The Israelites had tested God by questioning whether or not He was with them. Jesus quoted this verse in response to Satan’s temptation. (TLSB)

**6:20–25** God’s people practiced catechesis. Luther used this same teaching technique in his Large and Small Catechisms by asking, “What does this mean?” (TLSB)

**6:25** The faith God has worked in us causes us to obey God’s commands as an act of love. (TLSB)

*righteousness.* Probably here refers to a true, personal relationship with the covenant Lord that manifests itself in the daily lives of God’s people (see 24:13). (CSB)

Chem: “This is not a statement of Law, but it is speaking of the mercy which God bestows on the godly in this life.... Moses calls it mercy [Vulg.] because it is not given out of merit but out of grace” (*LTh* 2:644). (TLSB)

**Ch 6** God desires to shower His people with blessings, but their hearing and following of His Word is required for Him to dwell among them. He alone is God. There is no other. Thankfully, the Father sent His one and only Son as our atoning sacrifice. God’s Holy Spirit now dwells within all believers. Indeed, we become God’s dwelling place (1Co 3:16). • Lord, we thank You for parents, relatives, friends, and pastors who speak Your Word in purity and truth. Use us now as instruments for the salvation of others. Amen. (TLSB)