

52 STORIES OF THE BIBLE

by

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11. Sold Out to God (Deuteronomy)

Let's pray: Father, on one hand we do not want to see you, we want to believe you. We want the blessing that you pronounced, "Blessed are those who believe and have not yet seen." And we understand, Father, that at the core that's what you ask of us, to believe you, to believe that you are who you say you are and that you will do what you said you will do. But, Father, we want to see you work. We open our hearts and our hands and our mouths to you as willing instruments to be vehicles of grace, of sharing the good news of the God who loves people and wants to bless them, bless them with his presence, bless them with his Son, and bless them with eternity in heaven. Father, may we be those kinds of people. In Jesus name, Amen.

The fourth book in the Old Testament is the book of Numbers. And the book of Numbers picks up the story right after the Israelites have left Mount Sinai. They've received the Ten Commandments, they've received the case law, and they've received the sacrificial instructions in Leviticus. And they take off and they travel north to the border of the Promised Land. They send in twelve spies to check out the land that God has promised to give them (one of the more important words). And they come back and they agree that it is a great land, a land flowing with milk and honey, but ten of the twelve spies do not believe that God is capable of giving them the land. And they convince the people to not believe that God is capable of giving them the land. It's really quite amazing when you see this in context. These are the people who watched the waters of the Red Sea part. These are the people who saw manna every morning on the ground. These are the people who saw God plunder the Egyptians. And yet they do not believe that he is capable of giving them the land that he has been bringing them to. So, God punishes them. He sends them back out into the wilderness and for forty years they wander in the wilderness until every adult male who did not believe is dead. That's the book of Numbers; punishment for unbelief. Deuteronomy is the fifth book in the Old Testament and Deuteronomy picks up the story here. But after these forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the children of Israel are once again standing at the border of the Promised Land. And in Deuteronomy, Moses is summarizing the teaching in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. And as you read through Deuteronomy, you will see that there are two basic assertions, two basic truths that Moses is teaching. If you're not familiar with Deuteronomy, I would encourage you to read Chapters 4-8 and Chapter 11. This is the heart of the book. But as you read these chapters and as you look at the book as a whole, you'll find that there are two basic truths that are being taught all the way through the book of Deuteronomy and are summarized best in Deuteronomy 6:4.

I. Monotheism

The first of those two central affirmations is the belief in monotheism, the belief that there is one God and his name is Yahweh. That's one of the two central affirmations in the book of Deuteronomy, that there is only one God and that one God's name is Yahweh, the name that he revealed himself by to Moses at the burning bush. And again, I've said this before, but in case you're new, whenever you see the word Lord in all caps in your translation, that's the translators' way of telling you that they are translating the

name Yahweh. (Space at end of tape). We tend to forget this, but in the ancient world, the claim that there is only one God is absolutely unique. Every else had a pantheon. Everyone else was polytheistic. They believed in many gods and there may have been a hierarchy, there may have been a chief god, but yet there were many, many gods even down to ancestral worship. And yet Deuteronomy says clearly that there is only one God and his name is Yahweh. Look please at Deuteronomy Chapter 6 and look at verse 4. And I'd like us to read this passage together please, Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

A. The "Shema"

It is known today as the Shema. It's part of the daily prayers of any pious Jew. But it is the central affirmation in the book of Deuteronomy, and in fact, reappears on Jesus' lips, doesn't it, when Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is. It is the central affirmation of Deuteronomy that there's only one God and his name is Yahweh. Yahweh is not some collection of tribal gods. The Canaanites had their Baal and Ashera. The Egyptians had their Cyrus and who knows how many others. But for the children of Israel, for the people of God, there is only one who is God and his name is Yahweh, his name is the Lord. And all other so called gods, Moses teaches are either demons or they are nothing. There are many other places that we can look, but just flip back, please, to Chapter 4. And Moses has been explaining all the unique things that God has done in order to form the nation Israel. And then at verse 35, he starts bringing it to a conclusion. He says, "To you it was shown all the unique things that he has done that you might know that the Lord, Yahweh, is God. There is no other besides him. Out of heaven he lets you hear his voice that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire." (This is the story of the Ten Commandments at Sinai). "And you heard his words out of the midst of the fire and because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance as it is this day. Because of all these unique and wonderful things that God has done, (verse 39), know therefore today and lay it to your heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath. There is no other." There is only one who is God and his name is Yahweh. His name is the Lord.

B. Prohibition Against Idolatry

This is the central affirmation in the book of Deuteronomy and it leads logically and theologically to a prohibition of idolatry. On the one hand, you have a strong affirmation that there's only one God and it's Jesus Christ, and that means on the other hand that it is wrong to worship anything else as an idol, to worship anything else as God. Look at Deuteronomy Chapter 4 again, please, starting as verse 15. Moses says, "Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb (another name for Mt. Sinai) out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps

on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven and when you see the sun and moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them." Because there is only one God, we may not serve other so-called gods, things made in the image of creation. We may not be divided in our loyalty. We may not be divided in our worship. Monotheism and its parallel, prohibition in idolatry.

Deuteronomy is really asking two questions of us at this point. And they are questions that when you first hear them it's easy to give your answer. But I would invite you to think a little deeper about the questions that Deuteronomy is asking. One of the questions that Deuteronomy is asking us is: Are you a monotheist or are you a polytheist? Do you believe in one God who is Yahweh, who is Jesus, or do you believe in a pantheon of gods, a bunch of gods with perhaps Jesus as the chief god, but a pantheon of gods nonetheless? It's a good question to ask in this pluralistic society in which we live.

C. Challenge of the Shema

I would like to suggest a slightly different definition of the word "god" to help us think through this question. My definition of "god" or "gods" is that god is whatever we worship. Our gods are whatever we worship. God is what we take the uttermost delight in. God is what we take the greatest joy in. God is what we value the most. I think at a very practical level you can define god by that which you spend your money and time on. Now, if you're willing to accept that as the definition, we ask the question of Deuteronomy again. Am I a monotheist and is his name Yahweh or am I a polytheist? Heard a story of a man last week. He doesn't live here. Absolute workaholic, absolute workaholic. He is at work at 8:00 in the morning. He doesn't get home until 9:00 at night. He works at least five, sometimes six days a week. He does go to church for an hour and a half on Sunday morning and then every second that's left he and his wife search for just the right house. This goes on week after week, month after month, year after year. 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., hour and a half for God on Sunday morning, and every second of their lives other than that they are out searching for a house with a view of the ocean. Now is he a monotheist? What is the name of his god? I don't know; I'm not the judge. It's not my determination, thankfully. But when you look at that kind of lifestyle you really have to wonder, don't you, if every second is based on the accumulation of wealth and spending it on a house with a view... It's a beautiful house. I saw it last week. You can look out and see the ocean; you can see Catalina on a clear day, if you know southern California. Beautiful house. Small compared to the other ones around it. But what is that man's god? And is he a monotheist or does his life show that in reality he is a polytheist. God is what we take the uttermost delight in. God is what we take the greatest joy in. God is what we value the most. Are you and I monotheists, or are we polytheists?

There's another question that's parallel to this that Deuteronomy is asking and we have to ask it of ourselves. And that is: do we worship idols? Well, for polytheists, the answer is automatically, yes, we are idolaters. But do we worship idols? You know, please don't think that idols are only images carved out of wood and carved out of

stone. I'm sure many of you have heard this ever since you've been little kids. But that's not what an idol is. An idol is anything that takes the place of God. The passage we read in Deuteronomy Chapter 4 is a prohibition against worshipping creation and anything that is part of creation rather than worshipping the Creator. That's the prohibition of idolatry in Deuteronomy 4. And I would suggest that some of our idols, in fact, are made out of wood. Perhaps a cabin at the lake. Some of our idols are made out of fiberglass as perhaps we have a fixation on a bigger and a faster boat. Perhaps our idols are made out of leather. I thought about this as I was watching basketball last night. A friend of mine said that the Canaanites worshipped Baal, but our culture worships the ball. Perhaps some of our idols are made out of flesh and bone as we worship ourselves and give ourselves over to entertainment and relaxation and the almighty god of this world, self-sufficiency. I saw an interesting ad on the television last night as I was watching the slam-dunk contest. I was invited to witness the immortals, wrestlers. Are these things necessarily idols? Of course not, of course not. And I have every intention of taping the All-star game tonight so I can come to the Concert of Prayer at 6:00 and then watch people do things that I can only dream of doing with a basketball. But when we take the uttermost delight in them, when they become our highest value and we are consumed by them, they have become a pantheon of gods and we have become idolaters. And it doesn't matter if we put Jesus at the head of the pantheon, does it? We are still idolaters. Deuteronomy's emphasis on monotheism and its identification of Yahweh is that one God and its prohibition of idolatry is just as necessary today as it was 3500 years ago.

My concern this morning is that kind of conditioned walls pop up in your mind. "Oh, there goes the pastor again. He doesn't like anything." That's not true. I love going to the lake. I was raised in Minnesota. I'm not comfortable unless I'm swimming in the middle of a lake. I love skiing. I could walk before I skied, but I could ski before I could do almost anything else. I love basketball. I gave my body to it and I'm paying the price for it right now. These are things that I enjoy, but they are not the source of my uttermost joy. And I will not be consumed by them. I'm looking at someone who's a basketball coach. I want to make sure I qualify myself. Are we monotheists or polytheists? What are our modern-day idols? I can't answer that question for you, only you can answer that question. But that is the first of the two basic tenants of Deuteronomy, that there is only one God, there is only one object of uttermost delight and joy.

II. Total Devotion – “Fully-Devoted Disciples”

But there's a second basic teaching in the book of Deuteronomy. It comes out of the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4 and many other places. And that is the teaching that we are to be totally devoted to God. That we are to be in the modern-day vernacular, "sold out to God." Go back to Deuteronomy 6, please. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." And again, please read with me out loud verse 5, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." This is the language of being fully devoted to God, of being sold out to him. And as Moses goes on and as Steve read earlier, that's why it's so important to know the precepts of God, the commands of God, so that our love knows how to show itself in day-to-day life.

Because there is only one God, the only logical, the only theological conclusion, is to give him all of our worship, to be sold out to him. If you're wondering what one of my major resources in the sermon series is, it's this book, Paul House, "Old Testament Theology." It's a great book. Paul writes about the Shema on page 172, the teaching side of me coming out. "The primary exhortation of Deuteronomy is the intense and all-absorbing loyalty which Israel owes to Yahweh who alone is good. Nothing less than unshakable commitment to the only God constitutes covenantal obedience." I can't say it as well as Paul said it. Our essence statement says that we are people pursuing God, right? We're not people strolling after God. We're not people who sprint to catch up with him on Sunday so we can get behind him on Monday. But we are people committed to an all-out pursuit of God, enabled by the Holy Spirit, who in turn is pursuing us. Our Mission Statement says that we are to be fully devoted disciples, not part-time observers, but full-time participants. We are committed to be a people who are loving Yahweh, our God, with all of our heart and all of our soul and all of our might.

Please note the flow of theology through this short paragraph. And this is where I'm going to get really far away from your sermon notes. There are at least four truths being taught. One, there is only one God and his name is Yahweh. Two, therefore we are to love him, but with the love that shows itself in obedience. Remember what Jesus said, John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Nothing's changed; it's still the same. If we love Jesus, if we love Yahweh, we will keep his commandments. And please note in both John 14, and in Deuteronomy 6:4, you have the balance of love that starts on the inside and then issues out externally in obedience. It's very easy, and this is my major concern when I preach on this stuff, is that when you hear me talk about holiness and the fact that holiness always matters and obedience and commandments and do's and don'ts and all this kind of stuff, my concern is that you think that's all there is to this. And there are many people that think this, isn't there? People who think that all they really have to do is go through certain religious actions. "I have to do this, I don't do that, and that's really all there is to it." And that's an abomination, you all. It's a perversion of the Old Testament and it's a perversion of the New Testament. It's a strong word, but I believe it with all my heart. That it is love that then issues forth, it spills out into my life as obedience. And without the heart, all I have is cold legalism, all I have is Pharisaism, and that's not what the Law is about, it's not what the Old Testament is about, it's not what the New Testament is about. The entire Bible is unanimous that what God wants is my heart. And then out of a heart of love to him pours forth obedience to his will. Both sides are necessary. But, number three; notice that the obedience must be total. All my heart, all my soul, all my might. This is all the way through the book of Deuteronomy. For example, Deuteronomy Chapter 10, Looking at verse 12 and following. Moses writes, "And now Israel, what does the Lord (small caps) your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and to keep all the commandments and statues of the Lord which I am commanding you today for your good." We hear the same thing in the New Testament, Mark 8:28, "If you want to be my disciples" Jesus says, "If you want to be a Christian, you deny yourself (not part of yourself), you take up your cross. You live every day as one who has been crucified to his own life. And then in that way," Jesus says, "You follow me." The lure of this world is to compartmentalize God, isn't it? It's to say, "Okay God, I will give you this part of my life." This is true in Moses' day and is true in southern

California and is true in Spokane. It is the desire to take a little part of my life and to say, "Okay this is yours God. Okay, now somehow I've got my 'Get out of hell free' card. That's all taken care of. But don't touch the rest of my life, I'll do whatever I want over here." It's the myth of the two kingdoms as it's sometimes called. It's this idea that we can compartmentalize God to Sunday morning or perhaps compartmentalize God in our public life. But the fact that I'm addicted to pornography is irrelevant, some people might say. In my public life, I put on a good show. But there's this idea that we can compartmentalize God, but you all, Jesus is either Lord of all, or he's not Lord at all. It's as simple as that. Jesus is either Lord of all or he's not Lord at all. It's an all or nothing. And we are called to love him with all of our heart, and all of our soul and all of our might. He is worthy of that.

And that leads to point four that God reveals his will. This is what happens in Deuteronomy 6. God reveals his will. Now we call them commandments, statutes, dos and don'ts, whatever you want to call them, it doesn't matter. But God is revealing his will so that our love, our fully devoted love, knows how to pour itself out into the real world. Can you imagine loving someone and not knowing how to express it? Can you imagine being just so in love with your spouse, but not having any way in which to express it or to say it? Does that sound odd? I heard about a couple this week who I'm told dearly love each other and yet probably one of them is going to kill the other one literally. He's already thrown furniture through the window. They keep going apart and coming back together. They have no idea how to express their love, they have no idea how to communicate or talk. See, they don't know what to do. But they feel this love and this passion I'm told. I know, I don't understand except I saw the hole in the window. Can you imagine loving someone and not knowing how to express that love? We call it extreme dysfunction. But God in his grace and God for our good tells us how our love is to spill out into everyday life. We call them commandments; we call them dos and don'ts. But they're God's gracious gift to you and to me so that this love that we have for him knows how to express itself. And so, we are called to give everything we have because there is only one God and because we love him so deeply that we are unconditionally devoted to him and that spills out into every day of our week, not Sunday mornings.

A. God's Desire is to Bless

But you know the amazing thing in all of this? When you look at the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the amazing thing in all this is that God desires to bless. Lest you leave your thinking, "Well that was one of those kind of sermons where I go out feeling six inches shorter than when I came in." Well, that's okay, that's what the passages say. But understand that in all this, God's desire is not to curse. God's desire is to bless. All over Deuteronomy, flip to the end please to Deuteronomy Chapter 30. I'm going to start at Deuteronomy 30, verse 8. Moses has been talking about repentance and God's marvelous grace and gift of repentance. Then verse 8, "And you shall again obey the voice of the Lord and keep all his commandments that I command you today. The Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb, in the fruit of your cattle, in the fruit of your ground, for the Lord will again take delight in prospering you as he took delight in your fathers when you

obey the voice of the Lord your God to keep his commandments." God's desire, is to bless, it's not to curse. And I know the health and wealth gospel has perverted this teaching, the teaching that is all over this country of ours that treats God as a giant Coke machine as I've often said to you. You put in your dollar and then you demand that God give you what you want. That God bless you the way that you demand to be blessed and that God bless you when you demand to be blessed, and that's just disgusting. But nevertheless, it is still true that God's desire is to bless his children, to bless them with his blessings and to bless them in his time. And Deuteronomy asks us, "Do you want God's blessing to rest on you?" Whether you are a high school student or college student, whether you are single or married, do you want God's blessing to rest on you? Do you want God's blessing to rest on your family? Do you want God's blessing to rest on this church? Well the path of blessing is not to compartmentalize God. It's not to dabble in the things of this world, it's not to water down the gospel and turn him into some giant Coke machine.

B. Love and Obedience

The path of blessing both for me as an individual and for us as a church, the path of blessing is to make Yahweh our God, our one and only God. And to love him with all of our heart and all of our soul and all of our might and then to let that love flow into obedience, joyous obedience every hour of every day of every week of every month of every year that God gives us to walk in this earth. And he will pour out his blessings. That's the promise of Deuteronomy. They will be his blessings; they will be given in his way and in his time. He may choose to bless you with suffering; He may choose to bless you with prosperity. I don't know; that's not my job to know. But I do know that the path to blessing is in the Shema, is in Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

And so, in closing, I'd like us to read out loud again a slightly modified version of Deuteronomy. Please read this together, in fact, will you please stand with me? Let's read this together: "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. I will love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my might."

Let us pray: Father, I pray that those in this room who need to be encouraged will be encouraged. For there are surely your children who by the power of your Spirit are striving to work out their salvation, Philippians 2, by loving you with all their heart. And yet I have to assume that there might be some who have compartmentalized you and are loving you or at least are liking you with some of their heart. And Father we confess today and I pray through the power and the conviction of your Spirit that we will have said what is true that it is our desire to love you with all of our heart and all of our soul and all of our might. And Father, may you in your way and in your time, open the floodgates of heaven and give to us beyond what even we can imagine or think, Ephesians 3. You are a great God. You are the only God. Forgive us when we have worshipped others. In Jesus' name, Amen.