

## The Law of Vows and Oaths

- Numbers 30:2 -- If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to put himself under a binding obligation, he shall not break his word; he shall act in accordance with everything that comes out of his mouth.
- There are two different things being described here, Oaths and Vows.
- [PPT] Oath: שְׁבוּעָה *shevu'ah*, is a solemn and formal declaration or promise, typically appealing to a higher source of authority.
  - The person making the oath claims that "God is my witness." The oath might sound something like, "May the Lord deal with me severely if I don't do such and such."
  - An oath is not a bad thing, necessarily, and sometimes a court might even require that a witness take an oath to prove their honesty. The problem comes when the higher source of authority you cite is God. In that case, you are now bringing Him into the conversation as a witness of your oath, which will cause you more problems if you don't fulfill the oath.
  - Hebrews 6:16 -- For people swear an oath by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath *serving* as confirmation is an end of every dispute.
  - There is an entire section (tractate) of the Talmud, *Shevu'ot*, devoted to the topic of Oaths.
- [PPT] Vow: נֶדֶר *neder*, originally was a type of oath whereby someone would bind themselves to bring a sacrifice or dedicate something to the temple service. It was often stated conditionally, "If such and such happens, I will dedicate this thing."
  - A vow is an obligation or prohibition that someone takes upon themselves.
  - "If I don't die from this tornado, I will never drink coffee again."
  - "If my crops succeed this year, I will dedicate an extra 10% of my produce to the Temple service."
  - The Talmud also dedicates an entire section (tractate) to this topic called *Nedarim*.
- A vow can be taken without an oath, but an oath calls on God as a witness, adding more weight to the vow.
- During the time of Yeshua, some people apparently thought that a vow taken without the oath component, or with an oath that used something inferior as a witness, was not really binding. However, both the sages and Yeshua disagree with this idea.
- The sages point out that the commandment here in Numbers 30:2 is stated both in the negative and in the positive: "he **shall not** break his word; he **shall** act in accordance with everything that comes out of his mouth." This means that breaking a vow is actually breaking two separate commandments.

- As a precaution against putting oneself under a vow, traditional Jews will often hedge their statements with "God willing" and even add the words "*bli neder*," which means "without taking a vow." My family are hillbillies from East Tennessee, so they would say, "Good Lord willin' and the crick don't rise."
- **[PPT]** Rabbi Meir is quoted in the Talmud as saying, "Better than both the one who vows and does not pay, and the one who vows and pays, is one who does not take a vow at all." (b. Chullin 2a)
- In another place in the Talmud, "Rabbi Natan says: Anyone who vows, it is as if he has built a high place [an idolatrous altar]." (b. Nedarim 60b)
- The sages also say that saying an oath in God's name, then breaking it, is blasphemy, a misuse of God's holy name.
- Jesus says the same thing about oaths and vows, telling us not to take vows or oaths at all.
- **[PPT]** But I say to you, take no oath at all, neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God, nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, nor by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you take an oath by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. But make sure your statement is, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil origin. (Matthew 5:34–37)
- The first prayer prayed at the onset of Yom Kippur is *Kol Nidrei*, a declaration renouncing any vows or oaths that you took in the previous year but did not fulfill, asking God to nullify those vows and oaths and not count them against you in the judgment of the day of atonement.

## **Destruction of the Midianites**

- **[PPT]** In chapter 31, God tells Moses to take the Israelites into battle with the Midianites and destroy them completely.
- Why? What had the Midianites done? Di talked about that last week.
  - A bit of connection here: The Midianites were descended from Abraham through his second wife Keturah, whom he married after Sarah died. She bore him six sons, one of whom was named Midian. (Genesis 25:2) Meanwhile, the Moabites were descended from Lot, through one of the sons he bore with one of his daughters.
  - The Midianites joined forces with the Moabites, hired Bilam to curse the Israelites, and when that didn't work enticed the Israelites to sin and worship their god, Ba'al Peor.
  - We see in Numbers 25 how bad this situation became. God told Moses to execute the leaders who were letting this sin happen, but Moses told the leaders to take action and kill all the men who were taking part in the idolatry. Before they could do that, God brought a plague on the Israelites.
  - Moses and the leaders of Israel were weeping in the entrance of the tabernacle, crying out to God to stop the plague, and a man waltzed past them in broad

daylight leading along a Midianite prostitute and taking her to his tent to sleep with her. Pinchas the grandson of Aaron took a spear, followed the couple into the tent and pierced them both through with the spear. His zeal for God's righteousness ended the plague and inspired God to make a covenant of peace with him and confirm his priesthood and that of his descendants.

- However, 24,000 Israelites had died in the plague, the Midianites who had led them astray, and Bilam the son of Beor who had suggested the idea of using Idolatry to undermine the Israelites, had not had anything done in response to this evil plot. So, Moses sent an army of 12,000 men, 1,000 from each tribe, led by Pinchas the priest, and they completely destroyed the Midianites, and even found Bilam and put him to death.
  - By the way, 12,000 men putting to death an entire army and killing all of the men is a big deal. That's a miracle in and of itself.
- When they came back with all the women, children, and livestock in tow, Moses got angry and reminded them that it was the women who had led them astray before. So, he commanded them to kill all of the women who had "known a man," along with all the male children.
- Then, when the work of war was complete, he commanded the men to stay outside the camp for 7 days and purify themselves. They were unclean because of the death they had encountered in the war, so they had to become ritually pure again before they could enter the camp.

### ***Kli Midian, the Vessels of Midian and laws of Koshering Vessels***

- Then we get to an interesting commandment in the Torah, a commandment about the holiness and purity of dishes.
- The army had gathered up all of the vessels and utensils that they found in the Midianite city, and they brought them back to the Israelite camp as spoils.
- Moses divided the spoils in half, with half going to the men who went into battle and half going to the rest of the people, and took a portion out of each half for the priests and the Levites.
- "Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to battle, "This is the statute of the Law which the LORD has commanded Moses: only the gold and the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, **everything that goes into the fire**, you shall pass through the fire, and it will be clean, only it shall be purified with water for impurity. But whatever does not go into the fire you shall pass through the water."
- Most translations say "everything that can withstand the fire," but that is not accurate. The Hebrew actually says, "everything that goes into the fire," meaning that only dishes that are used in fire can be made fit for use. This means that any vessel that becomes contaminated under the heat of fire must also be cleansed by fire. Any vessel that does not get contaminated over fire does not have to be purified with fire.
- This is the source of the law of *kashering* vessels, of making them kosher, or fit for use.

- If you have heard that Jews have multiple sets of dishes, that comes, in part, from this commandment, combined as well with other commandments in the Torah that prohibit the mixing of dairy and meat foods.
- The largest section of the Mishnah, the teachings of rabbis who lived from about 100 years before Jesus until about 200 years after, is called Kelim and it discusses the laws related to the purity of dishes.
- When all of the purification process was done, they took a census of the army and found out that not a single man had been lost. So the army brought a special offering to the Lord from their spoils.

## **Gad and Reuben Claim Land East of the Jordan**

- **[MAP from Logos: Tribal Distribution]**
- We are getting close to the end of the journey of the Israelites. By this time, they had reached the eastern side of the Jordan River.
- In Numbers 32, two of the tribes looked at the land they were in now, and decided that they liked that land and that it fit their needs well, so they asked if they could take over that land instead of getting an inheritance in the land on the West side of the Jordan.
- Moses agreed, as long as they would agree to go over the Jordan and help with the conquest, which they agreed to do.

## **Map the Journey**

- **[MAP]**
- In chapter 33, we are given an overview of the travels of the Israelites in the wilderness over the last 40 years.
- As you can see, the journey was long and winding, and even had some double-backs.
- I'll just point out two locations on this map, but the image will be available on the website later if you'd like to look closer at it.
- Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom
  - This is where Aaron the high priest and the brother of Moses died (as we saw in Numbers 20). It happened in the fortieth year after the sons of Israel had come from the land of Egypt, on the first day in the fifth month. That happened six months before the book of Deuteronomy starts, and about 7 months before Moses himself died.
- Finally, they ended their journey in the plains of Moab, by the Jordan opposite Jericho, from Beit Yeshimot as far as Abel-shittim

## **How to Take Possession of the Land**

- The people of Israel are now on the cusp of entering the Promised land. The first generation that had doubted God and tested Him in the wilderness were all dead. The

next generation was ready to make the move, enter the land, and take possession of it as God had promised to Abraham.

- In preparation for that, God gives them some instructions about what they are required to do when they enter the land.
- He tells them, "you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from you, and destroy all their *idolatrous* sculptures, destroy all their cast metal images, and eliminate all their high places; and you shall take possession of the land and live in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it."
- As you can imagine, this message probably hit home for the Israelites who had just seen 24,000 of their own people killed as a result of the idolatrous incident of Ba'al Peor, and the entire Midianite people destroyed for their part in that event.
- Is this instruction of God to the Israelites evil? Does it mean that God is evil?
  - No, it is because of the justice of God, His own righteousness and His own zeal for righteousness that He allowed the Israelites to take the land.
  - He prophesied this to Abraham all the way back in Genesis 15, in their discussion during the Covenant between the parts.
  - He told Abraham about his descendants being taken into slavery, and the exodus, and then says, "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the wrongdoing of the Amorite is not yet complete."
- It was not just that the people in God's Land were wicked, it was that their wickedness had defiled His land, and He wanted Israel to come into the land and clean it out. But he also warned them not to do the same thing:
  - Leviticus 18:25–28 -- For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has vomited out its inhabitants. But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments, and you shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the stranger who resides among you (for the people of the land who were there before you did all these abominations, and the land has become defiled), so that the land will not vomit you out should you defile it, as it has vomited out the nation which was there before you.
- It was not because of the righteousness of the Israelites, either.
  - Deuteronomy 9:4 -- "Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them away from you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to take possession of this land.' Rather, it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to take possession of their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

## Borders of Israel

- **[MAP: borders of the land as described in Numbers 34 and Ezekiel 47]**

- As part of preparing the people for their entry into the Promised Land, God defines the boundaries of the land.
- These boundaries essentially match how Ezekiel 47 later describes Israel's future borders, though those are more extensive. But we'll get there later.

## **Levites Live in the Cities, Among the Nation**

- You might get the impression, based on how the Levites were called out to serve God in the Tabernacle, that that was all they did.
- On the contrary, there were quite a few Levites and priests available to do the day-to-day work in the Tabernacle, so they were divided up into groups and served a few times per year on a rotating basis.
- When they were not working in the Tabernacle, or later the Temple, they went home.
- Home for the Levites was one of six special cities that God set aside within the land of Israel.
- This allowed the priests and the Levites to live in the land among the people of Israel, instead of being centralized in the location of the Tabernacle or Temple. This is because the priests were supposed to be the teachers of Israel, as well, as we'll see in Deuteronomy 17.

## **Cities of Refuge**

- **[MAP from Logos: Levitical Cities and Cities of Refuge]**
- In addition to the cities where the tribe of Levi were supposed to live, HaShem also designated certain cities as cities of refuge.
- Accidental death, flee to the city of refuge to escape the family, but still have to be put on trial. If you are found guilty of murder, it was obligated to remove you even from the Tabernacle and execute you -- there is no safe space.
- However, for manslaughter, you were confined to the city of refuge until the death of the current High Priest.

## **The Daughters of Tzelophekhad**

- Interesting question of how the tribal land would be passed down.
- A man named Tzelophekhad only had daughters, no sons. The tribe of Manasseh brought a legal question before Moses: If these women inherit their father's land, and then marry outside the tribe, and they have sons, then when the Jubilee year comes and the land is passed back along the male lines, then the land their sons inherit will be considered to be part of their fathers' tribes, not their mothers', so you would have land passing from one tribe to another.
- Notice that the text assumes that the women would inherit the land. That is unique in the ancient world.

- The answer to this problem is to have these daughters marry within their tribe, so that the land will stay within the tribe.

[PPT] Numbers 36:13 - These are the commandments and the ordinances which the LORD commanded to the sons of Israel through Moses in the plains of Moab, by the Jordan opposite Jericho.

חֲזַק חֲזַק וְנִתְחַזַּק

*Chazak Chazak v'nitchazeik!*

Be Strong, Be Strong, Let Us Be Strengthened!

## Introduction to *D'varim*

- The last book in the Torah is called *D'varim*, or "Words", which comes from the first few words of the book:
  - אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן
  - "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan..."  
- Deuteronomy 1:1
- This book was originally called Mishneh Torah, which means "Review" or "Repetition of the Torah", which was translated into Greek as "*Deuteros Nomos*" and then through Latin into English as Deuteronomy.
- *D'varim* is Moses' reiteration of the Torah for the people of Israel, spoken to them over the last five weeks of his life.
- It is a series of speeches from Moses to the people of Israel, in his own words. It contains a mix of laws, historical recollections, and prophecies about the future.
- What's interesting about this book, though, is how it follows the standard model of suzerainty treaties used in ancient Hittite culture, the dominant culture of the middle east in the time of the Patriarchs and early Israel.

## Suzerainty Treaties

- A Biblical scholar in the 20th century named George Mendenhall made the connection between some newly discovered Hittite suzerain treaties, specifically those found in the Mari Tablets and in the Amarna texts, and the book of *D'varim*.
- Ancient Hittite treaties often took the form of what is called suzerainty. In this structure, a dominant party called a suzerain enters into a formal agreement with a vassal or tribute. Both sides of the agreement gain benefits from the other party, and take upon themselves obligations.



- The suzerain's main benefit was the fidelity of the vassal and the tribute that the vassal brings, and his main obligation was usually to protect the vassal from outside invaders and provide other assistance in time of need.
- The vassal's main benefit from the covenant was that protection, and his main obligation was the tribute.
- **[PPT]** These suzerain treaties have five standard elements:
  - Preamble: An introduction of the suzerain.
  - Historical Prologue: A statement of previous benevolent acts of the suzerain toward the vassal, as motivation for the vassal's grateful covenant loyalty.
  - Stipulations: General and specific requirements on one or both parties.
  - Deposition and Regular Reading: Stipulations about how often and where the covenant is supposed to be read so that it can be remembered. This is not always present, and it may be considered to be part of the main Stipulations section.
  - List of Witnesses: Often the gods of the two parties are called upon as witnesses of the covenant.
  - Blessings and Curses: What will happen if the vassal breaks the covenant, and what will happen if they keep it.
- **[PPT]** We have actually already seen this structure being used in the covenant HaShem makes with Israel in Exodus 20.
  - Introduction of the Suzerain: Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God..."
  - Historical prologue: "who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."
  - Stipulations: The Ten Words
  - Blessings and curses: Interspersed with the Stipulations (5b-6, 7b, 12b)
- **[PPT]** If you take a step back and look at the book of Deuteronomy you will see all of these elements, though not in the same order as you might see in other suzerainty treaties.
  - Preamble - 1:1-5
  - Historical Prologue - 1:6-4:49 -- Moses retells the history of the Israelites, the Exodus from Egypt, their wanderings in the wilderness, and HaShem's provision over the last 40 years.
  - Stipulations
    - Chapters 5-11 -- This section contains the Shema, the Ten Commandments, and a recapitulation of the events surrounding the making of the covenant at Sinai.
    - Chapters 12-26 - Specific provisions and laws, some new, some repetition, and how they are to be carried out in the Land of Israel.
  - Deposition and Regular Reading: Chapters 27 and 31
    - Torah to be inscribed on Mount Ebal, also written by Moses and placed in the Ark, and is to be read by the king in public at a national assembly every seven years.



- List of Witnesses - Deuteronomy 30:19-32:1 -- This is a bit outside of the standard order but that's not uncommon.
  - The gods of the nations around them cannot be called upon as witnesses, and HaShem himself is part of the covenant
  - So, Moses calls upon the sun and the moon as witnesses. The
  - Rabbeinu Bahya (1255-1340), summarizing the teachings of the sages, says: Moses chose heaven and earth as witnesses was because they endure forever and can always be called upon to testify. Human witnesses, due to their limited life span may no longer be alive when their testimony is required.
    - 30:19 -- I call heaven and earth to witness against you today
    - 32:1 -- Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth!
  - Moses also calls upon the "song" or the Book of Deuteronomy itself as a witness:
    - 31:19 -- Now then, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, so that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel.
- Blessings and Curses - Chapter 28
- Then, chapters 29-30 form a covenant renewal, which follows the same structure, but with an important promise
  - **[Read Deuteronomy 30:1–6]**
  - Even when the Jewish people stray, even when they turn aside, even when they are taken off into captivity, HaShem promises that that will not be the case forever.
  - He promises to gather the Jewish people from their captivity, restore them to their land, and, even more impressive, he promises to circumcise their hearts, and inspire them to love Him with all their hearts and all their souls (which is a reference back to the Shema in Deuteronomy 6).

## God's Covenant with the Jewish People Is Different

- **[PPT]** Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (of blessed memory), former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, points out some unique differences between this covenant and the other covenants in the Ancient Near East, the radical nature of the covenant of God with Israel.
- First, the idea that God would bind himself to human beings was unthinkable in the ancient world. In the Torah He didn't just make a treaty, He made a covenant, an eternally binding agreement.
- Second, every ancient treaty was made between rulers. The kings are named as the partners. But in the Torah every single Jew was to be a partner. This was true not only at Sinai, but every seven years when the treaty was renewed, with all of the men, women,

and children as partners. This is, in a sense, the beginning of a democratic society, where everyone is partnered and politically enfranchised.

- Third, since every Jew is party to the covenant, they are also responsible for studying it, to live it.

With all that in mind, let's take a look at the first six chapters of the book of Deuteronomy.

## The Hidden Admonition

- According to the sages, Moses starts off his Mishneh Torah with a veiled admonition. He doesn't want to call the people out directly, but he reminds them of the sins of their parents, the previous generation, when they angered HaShem in the last 40 years, by calling to mind specific places along their path by name.
- Deuteronomy 1:1 -- These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazereth, and Dizahab.
- **[PPT]** Avot D'Rabbi Natan 34:1 says these refer to:
  - "In the wilderness": When they made the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:8)
  - "On the plain": Because of water (Exodus 17:3)
  - "Facing Suf": When they rebelled at the Sea of Reeds (Yam Suf)
  - "Between Paran": With regard to the spies (as it says in Numbers 13:3), "Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran."
  - "And Tophel": These were the frivolous words (*tiphlot*) they said about the manna.
  - "Lavan": This was Korah's mutiny.
  - "Hazerot": Because of the quails.
  - "Di-zahav": This is when Aaron said to them: Enough (*dai*) of this golden (*zahav*) sin which you have committed with the calf!

## Institute Judges

- **[PPT blank]**
- **[READ Deuteronomy 1:9-18]**
- As part of his recounting of the events of the last 40 years, Moses talks about how important it is for judges and courts to be instituted to teach the Torah and deal with the day-to-day questions and issues that the people encounter.
- He starts off almost complaining, saying, "There are too many of you! God has multiplied you so much you are like the stars in heaven."
- But that's not a bad thing! In verse 11, Moses says, "May the LORD, the God of your fathers increase you a thousand times more than you are, and bless you, just as He has promised you!"

- Then, he recounts how he set up the courts of judgment, *batei din*, to hear cases and judge the correct path.
- Later, in Deuteronomy 17:8–13, Moses returns to this topic, and tells the people how they are to engage with this judicial system.
  - Then you shall act in accordance with the terms of the verdict which they declare to you
  - and you shall be careful to act in accordance with everything that they instruct you
  - In accordance with the terms of the law about which they instruct you, and in accordance with the verdict which they tell you, you shall act
  - you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left
- **[PPT]** What were these judges doing? We see the answer to this in Deuteronomy 17:11:
  - עַל־פִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר יִוְדָּךְ...
    - "According to the Torah which they teach... you shall do."
- They were interpreting the Torah, providing oral instruction, case law, and precedent based on the foundation of the Torah.
- This is the basis for Jewish Law, or *halachah*, "the way we walk," up to today.

## Sidebar on the Torah

- I keep on using the term Torah. What is the Torah?
- Torah does not mean law
  - **[PPT]** Torah == to teach, from the root word יָרָה *yara* == to throw/to cast
  - Why do we call it "the Law"? The Alexandrian Jews who translated the Septuagint used the Greek word *nomos*, meaning standard, norm, doctrine, and later "law". They used it in the context of custom, guidance, or system.
- **[PPT]** Sin == חָטָא *chatat* == missing the target, not following the Torah
  - 1 John 2:3-6 - By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever follows His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says that he remains in Him ought, himself also, walk just as He walked.
- Torah is how unbelievers see God
  - Deuteronomy 4:6-8
- **[PPT]** Let's go back for a moment to Deuteronomy 17:11:
  - עַל־פִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר יִוְדָּךְ...
- Notice the two words here? Both come from the same root word, *yara*.
- "The Teaching they teach you."

## The New Philistines

- **[PPT blank]**
- Moving into chapter 2, Moses recounts their journey around the Edomite territory, reminding the people not to mess with the Edomites, who have been given their own land by HaShem.
- Further down, Deuteronomy 2:20-23 is a parenthetical thought, describing various regions in Canaan. Various commentaries highlight the fact that it was likely added by later editors to provide clarity for people of their day who were unclear on the area being described here in Deuteronomy.
- Deuteronomy 2:23 - And as for the Avvim, who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and lived in their place.
- We don't have time to dig into this now, but what you think you know about the Philistines is likely wrong. In the time of Abraham and Moses the original "Philistine" inhabitants were Canaanite, and were called Philistines because they lived in the land by that name.
- Those Canaanites were later supplanted by migratory waves of foreigners from the Greek isles—specifically from Crete—during the Judges period, around 1180 BCE. These new "Philistines", so called because, again, they lived in the land with that name, hit critical mass around the end of the Judges period and the start of the Israelite monarchy, causing no end of problems for the Israelites and surrounding nations (not least Egypt). And their influence rapidly deteriorated during the time of David.
- Maybe I'll have some more time to cover this in more detail when I teach on 1 Samuel in May, but for now I highly recommend an article from the Armstrong Institute of Archaeology that talks about the Philistines in depth.
  - <https://armstronginstitute.org/663-are-philistines-during-abrahams-time-evidence-against-bible-historicity>

## Ten Words Repeated

- Deuteronomy 5
- There are a few differences between this list of the Ten Words/Ten Commandments and the one in Exodus 20.
- Rabbi Tanchum bar Chanilai says that the Ten Commandments in Exodus are what was written on the first set of tablets, while the formulation in Deuteronomy represents what was written on the second set of tablets. (b. Bava Kama 54b-55a)
- One of the most prominent differences is how the two lists discuss the Sabbath. The reason given for keeping Shabbat is different in each set of commandments. Exodus 20:10 speaks of the creation of the world, while Deuteronomy 5:14 mentions the enslavement and Exodus from Egypt.
- Rambam, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, a prominent rabbi and philosopher in the 1100's, says that the text in Exodus is speaking about the actual sanctity of Shabbat. This

sanctity is derived from the fact that "in six days God made the heavens and the earth... and He rested on the seventh day ... therefore God blessed the Shabbat day and sanctified it." As a result, all of mankind is likewise obligated to sanctify the Shabbat.

- In Sefer Devarim, in contrast, the text relates to the People of Israel and explains why they specifically are required to observe the sanctity of Shabbat: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God took you out of there... therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the Shabbat day." The departure from the slavery of Egypt to rest obliges the People of Israel to commemorate this for all generations.
- **[PPT]** There are also two different words used in these verses: Deuteronomy says the Jewish people are to **keep** (שָׁמַר) the Shabbat, while Exodus says they are to **remember** (זָכַר) the Shabbat.
- Today, it is traditional in Jewish homes to light at least two candles at the outset of the Shabbat, one representing *shamor*, and one representing *zachor*.

## Shema

- In chapter 6 we come to the most important passage in the entire Torah, the Shema.
- **[Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9]**
- This is the central liturgical component of Judaism, containing a series of commandments and a call to obedience.
- Think of the Shema as God's response to us. We pray and speak to Him, but this is how he is responding to us. He implores us to love Him, to internalize His commandments, to teach them to our children, to keep them ever before us. We hear God's heart in the words of the Shema.
- The words "Hear, O Israel" could just as easily be translated "Obey, O Israel"
- Let's break down the Shema into pieces:
- "Hear, Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!"
  - This is a commandment. We are commanded to believe in the oneness of God. Before we accept upon ourselves the Yoke of the King, before we can love Him, we must first believe in His unique oneness.
  - HaShem, the master of the universe, the king who reigns over kings, the Lord of the armies of heaven—He is the only God, the one true God.
- "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."
  - This is a commandment: to love God. Yeshua teaches us that this is the greatest commandment.
  - Matthew 22:37–40 -- And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU

SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' Upon these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets."

- Our love for God should drive everything we do. It should inspire us to obey him more, engage with His kingdom more, burn in us like an unquenchable fire.
- Messianic Jewish luminary Paul Philip Levertoff says, "Fear and love are wings by which the soul is carried to heaven." Just like a bird has two wings, and needs both to fly, we need both love of God and fear of God.
- Fear of God according to the Bible: To believe that He exists, and that He punishes sin and rewards righteousness.
- How do we show our love for God? The Apostle John tells us, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3)
- So, we show our love for God by obeying his commandments, the commandments he has given us in His Torah.
- "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart."
  - What does it mean to have the commandments of God "on your heart"?
  - The Bible uses the word "heart" the way we use the word "mind" in English. The heart is the seat of thought, the will, and motivation.
  - This picture of the Law of God, the Torah, being in our hearts is seen throughout the Scriptures.
  - Psalm 37:31 -- The Law of his God is in his heart; His steps do not slip.
  - Psalm 40:8 -- "I delight to do Your will, my God; Your Law is within my heart."
  - Psalm 119:34 -- "Give me understanding, so that I may comply with Your Law and keep it with all my heart."
  - Isaiah 51:7 -- "Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, a people in whose heart is My Law; do not fear the taunting of people, nor be terrified of their abuses."
  - The promise of the Messianic Era, the time when the Messiah rules and reigns from his throne in Jerusalem, is that in the covenant He will make with Israel at that time, the Torah will be written on the hearts of all those who follow him.
  - Jeremiah 31:31–34 -- "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ... "I will put My Torah within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their wrongdoing, and their sin I will no longer remember."
- "And you shall teach them diligently to your children"
  - This is a straightforward command for us to teach the Torah to our children, to train them in the way they should go.
  - Judaism also interprets this to mean that first we are obligated to study the Torah ourselves because we cannot teach anyone unless first we learn.

- Perkei Avot 1:15 -- Shammai used to say: make your study of the Torah a fixed practice.
- John 5:39 -- "Search the Scriptures ... it is these that testify about Me."
- The study of the scriptures is a valuable practice, whether we are doing it for the purpose of teaching or just doing it for the purpose of doing it.
- "and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up."
  - This is a continuation of the command above, and describes **how** we are to instruct our children.
  - It is also a description of what it means to have the commandments of the Torah on our hearts: We will be thinking about them all the time, considering what God wants in every moment, when we get up, when we sit down, when we go places, when we are just enjoying some down time.
  - Since the time of Jesus this part of the Shema has also been understood to be prescriptive of the time when the Shema should be recited. The rabbis teach that Jewish men are required to recite the Shema twice per day, once when they go to bed at night and once when they arise in the morning.
- "You shall also tie them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as tefillin on your forehead."
  - **[PPT]** Tefillin are small, hollow, black leather boxes that contain several parchments on which are written relevant scripture verses in Hebrew. **[PPT]** The verses written on those parchments all explicitly mention the commandment of tefillin: Exodus 13:1-10, 13:11-16, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21.
  - **[PPT]** Jewish men are obligated to bind these boxes on their arm and forehead by means of black leather straps, thus literally fulfilling the commandment of binding the Torah on their arms and foreheads. They do this every morning during the morning prayer services, except on Shabbat.
  - You may have heard tefillin referred to as "phylacteries" (φυλακτήριον) which is a Greek word that means "amulet". However, tefillin are not some sort of amulet intended to be used in warding off evil spirits or something. They are a literal fulfillment of the commandment in these passages.
  - This commandment is one of the ones in the Torah that is explicitly given only to Jews. It is stated right in the text that tefillin are a sign, **תִּיָּדָה**, *ot*, of the covenant God made with Israel, along with other signs of that covenant such as circumcision and Sabbath observance.
  - **[PPT]** This practice of wearing tefillin goes back to well before the time of Jesus. The earliest tefillin examples we have come from the caves in Qumran and date back to the first or second century BCE.
  - In the first century CE, the tefillin were smaller than they are today. Also, there is some evidence that those who wore tefillin, wore them not only during the morning prayer services but throughout the entire day. One of the great rabbis of



- the first century, Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, is said to have "never walked four cubits without engaging in Torah study and without donning tefillin." (b. Sukkah 28a)
- Yeshua talks about tefillin in Matthew 23:5, denouncing some other Pharisees because, "they do all their deeds to be noticed by other people; for they broaden their tefillin and lengthen their tzitzit."
  - Matthew Henry, in his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, volume 1, page 586-587, regarding Exodus 13:9, pointedly comments on this passage in Mathew, saying, "Christ blames the Pharisees, not for wearing them [tefillin], but for affecting to have them broader than other peoples."
  - As a righteous Jew, and a Pharisee himself, Jesus would have also worn tefillin, though apparently smaller ones than are worn today.
  - "You shall also write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."
    - This passage is a reference to the practice in Judaism of placing a mezuzah on the doorposts of ones' house. The word "mezuzah" (מְזוּזָה) actually means "doorpost."
    - **[PPT]** The mezuzah is a piece of parchment made from the skin of a kosher animal upon which two Biblical passages appear, the passages that speak about the commandment to affix God's words to one's doorposts. The parchment is rolled up and on the back of the parchment is written the Hebrew word *Shaddai* which is a name of G-d as well as an acronym of the Hebrew phrase שׁוֹמֵר דַּלְתוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל (*shomer daltot Yisrael*) which means, "Guardian of the doors of Israel."
    - **[PPT]** The Mezuzah is placed in a case to protect it. Mezuzah cases come in all shapes and sizes. They might be completely clear, so that you can see the scroll and the word *Shaddai* visible through it, or they might be highly decorated and not show the scroll at all.
    - **[PPT]** The earliest examples we have of mezuzah come, again, from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Seven mezuzah parchments were discovered in Cave 4 (4Q149-55) and one in Cave 8 (8QMez). These scrolls have much the same text on them that mezuzot have today.
    - One of the earliest written reports of *mezuzah* and *tefillin* observance is found in the Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* (Book 4, 8:13), written in the late first century. He writes: "They are also to inscribe the principal blessings they have received from God upon their doors, and show the same remembrance of them upon their arms; as also they are to bear on their forehead and their arm those wonders which declare the power of God, and his good-will towards them, that God's readiness to bless them may appear everywhere conspicuous about them."
    - The commandment to put a mezuzah on the doorposts applies to Jews even today, and is a sign of the covenant of God with the Jewish people.

## Why?

- [PPT] At the end of Deuteronomy chapter 6, Moses poses an important hypothetical situation.
- He says, essentially, "Suppose your child asks you in the future, 'What is the meaning of the decrees, statutes, and ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?'"
- How would you answer this question? God has given us all of these commandments to follow, all of these instructions to obey. What would you say is the reason why we obey God?
- [Discuss]
- Moses gives us the answer.
- [PPT] First, he says, "Tell your child the story of redemption." To the Jewish people, the children of Israel, that is the story of how God redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and held true to the covenant he had made with the Patriarchs, to give their descendants the land of Israel forever.
  - For those of us who are not Jewish, we share in the redemption of God's chosen people because, as Paul says in Ephesians 2, we are part of the "commonwealth of Israel."
    - [PPT] And you were dead in your offenses and sins... But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus... Therefore remember that previously you, the Gentiles... remember that you were at that time **separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world.** But now in Christ Jesus you who previously were far away **have been brought near** by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:1-13)
  - Before we were redeemed, we were separate from Messiah and excluded from Israel.
  - However, we have been redeemed from sin and have been given a place with the people of God, adopted as sons and daughters of the Most High. That is our redemption story.
- [PPT] The second reason Moses gives us for obeying the commandments of God is, "The LORD commanded us to follow all these statutes and to fear the LORD our God **for our prosperity always and for our preservation.**"
  - The Torah, the commandments and instructions of God, provide a path to prosperity in our lives and preservation.
  - Maimonides maintained that the Torah has two purposes: 1) The welfare of the body and of the civil infrastructure of Israel, and 2) the welfare of the soul and the intellect.

- In Deuteronomy 30:19-20 Moses puts it this way: "I have placed before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding close to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days..."
- Ahad Ha'am, a Jewish poet and philosopher in the early 20th century (1856-1927) said, "More than Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews." And that's very true. By keeping the Torah, following the commandments, obeying the instructions of God, the Jewish people have been able to maintain a cultural and civil infrastructure for 3400 years.
- As parents, we often worry about preserving our way of life for our kids and grandkids. The Torah provides the infrastructure for that preservation, a foundation on which to build long-term success.
- **[PPT]** The third reason Moses gives us for obeying the commandments of God is, "And it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to follow all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us."
  - What is Righteousness? While sometimes it is easy to get this mixed up, righteousness is not justification.
    - **[PPT]** Righteousness is the quality, state, and characteristic of being in the right. The word in Hebrew is תְּדָאָה *tzedakah*, which comes from the root word that means justice.
    - Justification is the act by which we are declared righteous even when we fail to attain righteousness.
  - Righteousness is supposed to be our goal, we are supposed to strive to be in the right.
  - **[PPT]** Jesus tell us "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied." (Matthew 5:6)
  - **[PPT]** He says, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness..." (Matthew 6:33)
  - **[PPT]** And He says, "Take care not to practice your righteousness in the sight of people, to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 6:1)
  - Notice we are to **practice** righteousness. Righteousness is connected to **action**, it is pursued in the things that we **do**.
  - Paul says that the opposite of righteousness is being without Torah, or "Torah-lessness": **[PPT]** "Do not be mismatched with unbelievers; for what do righteousness and lawlessness [ἀνομία, *anomias*, without Torah] share together, or what does light have in common with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)
  - **[PPT]** John says, "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.... the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous..." (1 John 3:4, 7)

- **[PPT]** And again, back to Moses: "And it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to follow all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us." (Deuteronomy 6:25)
- So, why do we obey God? Because obedience leads to righteousness, and, as Isaiah 26:7 says, the path of righteousness is smooth.
- Will we ever attain perfect righteousness on our own? No. But as Paul says, "Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus."
- I encourage you to pursue the path of righteousness, the path of Torah.