

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

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The LORD requires an undivided love and loyalty from the Israelites, because He alone is their God.

This section outlines one of the central themes of Deuteronomy as it interprets the meaning of the first commandment. The basic idea is that Israel must display an undivided love and loyalty to the LORD because He alone is their God. Thus, Moses began with a call to the Israelites saying, “*Hear, O Israel!*” The verb translated as “hear” is *shema* in Hebrew. It describes both the mental activity of hearing as well as its effects. In other words, hearing is always followed by obeying what was said. Then, Moses added, “*The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!*”

This verse ([Deuteronomy 6:4](#)) is an essential declaration of the Jewish faith. It is part of a daily worship called “*Shema*,” taken from the first word of this verse. It is a prayer composed of selected phrases from [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#); [11:13-21](#); and [Numbers 15:37-41](#). This prayer was to be offered every day, regardless of where the Jewish people were and what they were doing. It is often the first section of Scripture that a Jewish child learns.

The statement, “*The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!*” not only emphasizes God’s uniqueness but also describes His covenant relationship with Israel. Though other nations and people groups served and worshiped other gods, the Israelites were to recognize the LORD alone as their Suzerain (Ruler) God.

Throughout Scripture, we see that the LORD is the one true God and is not a plurality of LORDs or gods. He is unique. According to the book of Zechariah, a day will come when the true God “will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered” ([Zechariah 13:2](#)). In that day, “the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be *the only one*, and His name *the only one*” ([Zechariah 14:9](#)).

In addition to telling Israel that *the LORD their God is one*, Moses explained to the people how to love their Suzerain (Ruler) God. He said, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*” As will be shown throughout the commentary, the book of

Deuteronomy speaks of Israel's love for the LORD in the context of the covenant established at Mount Sinai, using terminology common in ancient Near Eastern political treaties. In the ancient Near Eastern cultures, the vassal or servant was required to love the suzerain or ruler with all his heart. Similarly, the Suzerain/Ruler of Israel required loyalty and love from them. Such a love for God is to include an expression of obedience to His precepts (10:12; 11:1; 30:16). This love was to be the appropriate response to the LORD because He alone is God.

That this love was to be completely directed to God alone is further indicated or strengthened by the repetition of the word *"all"* along with the terms *"heart," "soul,"* and *"might"* in the same verse. Moses said, *"with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*

The word *"heart"* describes the seat of intellect, including intent ([Genesis 20:5](#)) and thoughtful consideration ([Deut 4:20,39](#)). The heart is also a seat of values, as in [Leviticus 26:36](#), where courage failed because of faintness in the heart, indicating that the heart contains the inherent value to live rather than die. [Numbers 15:39](#) also indicates the inherent values of self-seeking are housed in the heart. The commands of God are to be chosen over what naturally occurs in the heart. The heart also houses attitudes. In [Leviticus 26:41](#) the heart is the seat of pride or humility. In [Leviticus 19:17](#) the heart can harbor hatred.

The word *"soul"* refers to the invisible, spiritual part of man represented by breath ([Genesis 2:7](#)). It is the spirit of life housed within the body ([Genesis 35:18](#)). In [Genesis 23:8](#), *"nephesh"* is translated *"wish"* or *"desire,"* which would indicate that the soul is the seat of our deepest desires, our search for purpose. In [Genesis 27:19](#), Esau asks his father's soul to bless him, indicating it is a synonym for *"life"* or identity. This is confirmed by [Genesis 32:30](#) where Jacob says his *"nephesh"* has been preserved from death. This also infers the soul is the seat of personality and identity. [Genesis 35:18](#) describes a physical death as the *"nephesh"* *"departing,"* confirming that the soul is the unique person that continues to exist past being housed in a physical body.

Finally, the word translated *"might"* is usually translated as *"very"* *"greatly"* or *"exceeding"* as in [Deuteronomy 6:3](#). It has the idea of *"to a great degree."* The context determines what is exceeding. In [Deut 17:17](#) *"greatly"* applies to accumulation of silver and gold. In [Deuteronomy 4:9](#) the word is translated as *"diligently"* because it applies to effort. That seems to be the case in 6:5 as well. Israel is to apply themselves to follow God's commands to the greatest extent possible.

Taken together the command to love God with all our heart, soul, and might seems clearly to encompass every aspect of our being as well as all of our exertions of energy. All of our lives, all of our identity. And all of our actions. All of who we are, our gifts, our capacities to act. And not just a portion, a slice. All. Every last capacity. No part of our lives is to be segmented apart from full devotion to God, to obey and follow His precepts. This is the path to the greatest blessing.

The command makes clear that the love demanded from Israel was a choice the Israelites were to make. Which means the capacity to choose is outside the scope of the heart and mind. God will not compel their love. True love requires choice. Coerced relationship is abuse. God is love. With the clear direction of what path is in their best interest, God provides freedom. Freedom is the ability to choose. Israel is admonished to focus their will toward doing all God had commanded with all of their being, in every aspect of their lives. But they will choose for themselves. And they will be responsible for their choices.

None of this will affect God's devotion to them. He will be their God no matter their behavior. He is their Redeemer, their Husband even if they are unfaithful ([Ezekiel 16](#)). The Great Suzerain will fulfill His commitments. But this mutual covenant has negative consequences for disobedience, as well as great blessings for obedience.

The same principle applies to current believers. Jesus states in the New Testament that loving God means doing what He asks ([John 14:15](#)). Jesus asked us to love one another. In the law of Moses, God commanded the people to respect one another, and treat others like they wish to be treated. This neighborly treatment of others can be viewed as an expression of the love of God. The New Testament tells believers that they fulfill the law when they walk in the Spirit ([Romans 8:4](#); [Galatians 5:13-15](#)).

When questioned about the greatest commandment, Jesus quoted [Deuteronomy 6:4-5](#): "*Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God is one LORD*" ([Mark 12:29-30](#); see also [Matthew 22:37](#) and [Luke 10:27](#)). This makes it clear that fellowship and its blessings are conditional aspects of life for New Testament believers, just as it was with Israel. Belonging to God as a child is an unconditional gift, just as the grant of the land was an unconditional gift. But enjoying the blessings of the gift requires walking in obedience and in fellowship with God. This was true for Israel, God's chosen, as well as for the chosen of the New Testament period.

The Shema provides a commentary on the first half of the Ten Commandments which sets forth the perspective Israel is to have toward God. The Shema is considered the most essential declaration of the Jewish faith. The fact that Jesus quoted the Shema as the greatest of all the commandments makes it a cornerstone for New Testament believers as well. Commands do not affect a New Testament believer's relationship with God—we are His children solely by faith. We are declared righteous in the sight of God solely by grace through faith, as was Abraham ([Genesis 15:6](#); [Romans 4:3-5](#)). But our fellowship with God, and enjoyment of the blessings of His promises are possessed through obedience to His commands. Submitting to sin brings consequences of death and slavery ([Romans 6:16](#); [8:6-8](#)), while submitting to the Spirit causes us to gain the life-giving fulfill God was trying to accomplish when He gave the law ([Romans 8:4](#)).

Biblical Text:

⁴ Hear, O Israel! The Lord is 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.