

Portion Vaeschanan Deuteronomy - Devarim (3:23-7.11)

Moses is looking at the Promised Land by the banks of the river Jordan. The Israelites are gathered around him listening to his final speech. "As you know God told me that it is my time to die. Joshua will now be your leader. So Israel, listen to the commandments I am teaching you this day and follow them so that you may live well in this promised land. Do not add or subtract anything to these commandments. God's laws are your wisdom before all the other nations. These nations will ask, 'Who is this great nation with such a wise people?' And they will know that we are a nation whose God is available for the people, One that has righteous laws and the teachings of Torah. Be careful so you do not forget what your own eyes have seen of how those who worshipped false idols were killed. Teach your children and your children's children what God has done for us."

"Remember," Moses says to the Children of Israel, "the day at Mount Sinai when God spoke to you and you heard the voice of words but saw no form. God made known to you God's covenant. God commanded you to observe the Ten Commandments and God inscribed them upon two tablets of stone. Do not become corrupt and make yourselves an image of God, not of any form, not the likeness of male or a female, nor any living thing, not sun nor moon nor stars. Do not allow yourself to bow down to idols or serve them. These idols God gave to other people, not to you. God made you O'Israel God's nation."

"Never forget the covenant of God," Moses says. "When you have children and grandchildren and have been in this Promised Land a long time you will do evil in the eyes of God. You will anger God. I appoint this day heaven and earth see how and when your evil actions force you from this land. Then God will scatter you among the nations and you will be left few in number among the other nations and you will serve man-made gods. Then more difficulties of fate will follow until in the end of days, you will return to God, your God, and listen to God's voice. For God, your God, is a merciful God. God will not turn you away nor let you be destroyed. God will not forget the covenant made with your forefathers."

Moses continues, "So when you are tempted by the idols of these other peoples ask yourselves has any other god taken a nation out of slavery with signs and miracles, a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and great terrors, like God, your God, did for you in Egypt before your own eyes? You have seen God alone is God. There is none beside God. Therefore know in your heart that in the heavens above and on earth below, God alone is God. Keep God's commandments which I command you today -- which will do good to you and your children after you-- so you may

live a long time in God's Promised Land. Now remember this is not a covenant with our ancestors, but with us, each of us. God commands:

- I am God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
- You shall not recognize the gods of others in My Presence. Do not make yourself a representation in the form of an image, nor in the form of any other likeness that which is in heaven above or that which is in the water far below the earth. Do not bow down before these idols and do not serve them, for I, your God am a God Who demands exclusive right. I remember the sin of parents for their children and for the third and fourth generations for those who hate Me and I practice loving-kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and those who keep My commandments.
- Do not take upon yourself the Name, your God, in vain, for God will not hold guiltless one who takes God's Name in vain.
- Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as God, your God, has commanded you. Six days you shall serve and do all your creating work and the seventh day is a Sabbath to God, your God. On it, you shall not perform any kind of creating work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your handmaid, nor our ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your livestock, nor your stranger who is within your gates, so that your servers may rest just like you. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt when God, your God, brought you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, did God, your God, command you to observe the Sabbath in practice.
- Honor your father and your mother, as God, your God, has commanded you, so that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you upon the soil that God, your God, is giving you.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit sexual impropriety.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- And you shall not covet the wife of your neighbor and you shall not desire our neighbor's house, his field, his manservant, his handmaid, his ox, his donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

"These are the words God said to the entire Hebrew community from Mt. Sinai. God wrote them upon two stone tablets and gave them to me. Then when you heard the voice out of the darkness and the mountain in flames you worried that you would die. You asked me to hear God for you and promised that you would hear God from me and do what was asked. Do then as God commands. Do not turn to the right or to the left. Walk only the way that God, your God, has commanded you, so that you may live, and it may go well with you, and you will long remain in the land which flows with milk and honey."

"Hear O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is One. You shall love God, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your resources. These words which I command you today shall be upon your heart and teach them diligently upon your children, and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk upon the way; when you lie down, and when you get up. And bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be frontlets between your eyes. And write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates."

“Now,” Moses continues, “when you arrive in this land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, be careful that you do not forget God. Fear God, your God. Do not go after other people’s gods. For God, Your God, is a God Who demands Respect, or else the anger of God will be stirred up against you and God will destroy you from the face of the earth. Do not put God, your God to the test. Just keep the commandments of God, your God and do that which is upright and good in the eyes of God.”

“When God gives this land to you,” Moses adds, “God take other nations from this land and strike down your enemies. Make no covenants with other peoples, nor marry them, for this will cause your children to turn away from following God and serve other gods and make God mad. God will destroy you. Instead, tear down these false idols. You are a holy people to God, your God. It is you whom God has chosen to be God’s people more than all the other peoples that are upon the earth. God did not take delight in you and choose you because you were the largest among the peoples for you are the smallest. It is out of God’s love for you. It is because God kept the oath God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and brought you out of slavery. God is the God Whom you can trust. God is the God Who preserves the covenant for those who Love God and who keep God’s commandments to the one thousandth generation. But for those who hate God, God will get back at them instantly. Therefore keep the commandments I command you today.”

Questions: 1) How many of the Ten Commandments can you list from memory? 2) What does it mean that God has given “other gods to other people”? 3) Do there have to be other gods? Why or why not?

Illustration Ideas: Moses giving his last speech...the river Jordan...the promised land...