

The *Shema* in the New Testament

Curtis Gospel Chapel, 7 Feb 2016

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Introduction to the *Shema*

Its Importance in Judaism

To a Jew, Deut 6:4,5 is perhaps the most sacred verse in the Bible:

Deu 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

It is called the *Shema*, after its first word in Hebrew: שמע, “Hear.” Moses tells the people to keep this instruction continually in mind, and to this day, it dominates their devotion.

Deu 6:6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Thus every observant Jew recites this passage at least twice a day, in the evening (“when thou liest down”) and in the morning (“when thou risest up”).

Moses continues:

Deut 6:8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

Thus every observant Jew wears tefillin (“prayers”), leather boxes containing these verses, on his forehead and on his arm when he prays (Figure 1, chart).

Finally, Moses instructs them,

Deut 6:9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Thus every observant Jewish home has a mezuzah (“doorpost”), a small scroll with these verses attached to the door (Figure 2). Each time a Jew passes through the door, he touches the mezuzah and then kisses his fingers.

These verses are the first thing that Jews are instructed to teach a child when it begins to speak (m. *Suk.* 42a) and are the final confession of Jews before their death (m. *Ber.* 61a).

Given the importance of these verses in Judaism, we should not be surprised that our Lord places great importance on them. In our studies in Matthew’s



Figure 1: Tefillin (Deut 6:8), https://ncsy.org/assets/IMG_6094.jpg



Figure 2: Mezuzah (Deut 6:9), <http://www.beingjewish.com/images/mez1.jpg>

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gospel, we've found that they are the key to understanding several passages. This morning I will explain the meaning of these verses, and trace their echoes in the NT. This evening, Lord willing, we will see how they lie behind one of our Lord's most famous teachings.

Exposition of the verses

Hear

We could say much about the importance of this repeated command, but for now it suffices to emphasize two points.

First, our relation with God is to be based on his revelation. Our first responsibility is to listen to what he has said. Scripture is central to our faith.

Second, hearing is more than just registering sounds. Otherwise the command would make no sense—if you hear it, you don't need to be commanded to hear. It must refer to paying attention and understanding.

The Lord is One

There are many interpretations of this phrase, which boil down to two options. Is this a statement about God absolutely (there exists no other God), or about his relation to Israel (he is the only one they are to recognize)?¹ The latter fits best with the context:²

- The previous chapter gave the ten commandments, and these verses are widely recognized as summarizing the first commandment, “Thou shalt have none other gods before me” (5:7).
- The next verse exhorts us to love the Lord with all, leaving nothing for any other god.

Thou shalt love...

People often caricature the OT revelation as legalistic. But at its heart, it is founded on the same relationship of reciprocal love that marks our faith. God declares his love to Israel, and the response he desires from them is first of all their love:

Deu 7:8 But **because the LORD loved you**, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he *is* God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with **them that love him** and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;

The center of our relationship with God, the first thing he commands, is not to believe in him, or to obey him, but to love him. You have heard that God sent his son to die in the place of guilty sinners, bearing the punishment for their sin so that we could be forgiven. You may believe that this is a fact, but so do hell's demons (James 2:19). You may admire the ethical beauty of God's law, and strive with

1 For full discussion, see Nathan MacDonald, *One God or One Lord?* Ph.D. Dissertation, Univ of Durham, 2001.

2 This sense is reinforced by the use of “one” in Sol 6:8f. “There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. 9 My dove, my undefiled is *but* one...” The bridegroom recognizes that there are many women in the world, but his entire focus is on his dove.

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all your might to obey it, but if you take pride in your achievements, God views your righteous deeds as polluted rags (Isa 64:6). What God desires is that you respond in love to his gracious gift of salvation.

The Three Channels of Love

Next Moses describes three channels through which we are to love the Lord our God: the heart, the soul, and what our version translates as our “might” (a translation that we can improve).

Heart

The heart לבב in Hebrew thought is closely related to our western sense of “mind.” One tradition of the LXX translates it by διανοια “mind,” which is the origin of the word “mind” in the Gospel quotations of the verse (chart).

The heart is the locus of *psychology*. It is where we feel emotion, such as joy and sorrow.

1Sa 2:1 And Hannah prayed, and said, **My heart rejoiceth** in the LORD,

Neh 2:2 Wherefore the king said unto me, Why *is* thy countenance sad, seeing thou *art* not sick? this *is* nothing *else* but **sorrow of heart**.

It is the seat of the *intellect*, the home of thoughts and wisdom and the target of deceit.

Gen 6:5 and *that* every imagination of **the thoughts of his heart** *was* only evil continually.

2Ch 9:23 And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, **to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart**.

Isa 44:20 He feedeth on ashes: a **deceived heart** hath turned him aside,

It is the organ of *will*, with which we make decisions:

Jdg 9:3 And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their **hearts inclined to follow** Abimelech; for they said, He *is* our brother.

The heart is often the organ involved in *pride* in the OT. We often read of a “proud heart.”

Psa 101:5 him that hath an high look and a **proud heart** will not I suffer.

Pro 16:5 Every one that is **proud in heart** is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.

Pro 21:4 An high look, and a **proud heart**, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.

So the heart describes our inner life, our sense of self, our person. The heart comes before the soul and the “might” because it controls them. Sometimes the OT talks about loving God with all three. If it names only two of them, they are the heart and soul, and if it names only one, it is always the heart.

Soul

Man is first of all heart, but we are also a body. Where the heart refers to our psychology, the soul נפש refers to the physical life force, and commonly means “physical life.” Its domain is physiology.

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The first four uses of the word are in Gen 1:20 21, 24, 30, in the phrase “living creature” נפש חיה, which also appears at the creation of man:

Gen 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a **living soul**.

After the flood, when God forbids murder, he uses this word to describe human life:

Gen 9:4 But flesh with the **life** thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. 5 And surely your blood of your **lives** will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the **life** of man.

Our lives, our bodies, are not our own. All of our life force, every function of our body, all of our physical comfort, is to be dedicated to the service of the Lord.

“*Might*”

The word translated “might” is not the usual word for “might”; that would be חיל. Instead, it is the word מאד, which is overwhelmingly used as an adverb meaning “very” or “bright.” The only two places in the OT where it appears as a noun are Deut 6:5 and 2 Kings 23:25, which is an allusion to Deut 6:5. But there is a Rabbinic tradition that the word refers to wealth rather than to physical strength,³ and the word appears twice as a noun in the Damascus Document (a pre-Christian Hebrew text found at Qumran) with the meaning of “property.” So it is likely that as a noun, it means “abundance, wealth,” and is not primarily a reference to physical might.

The heart and soul are interior to us. The abundance is external. It is what we gather around us, by the strength of the soul and under the guidance of the heart. If the heart is psychology and the soul is physiology, the “muchness” is economy. We can envision these as concentric circles: the heart at the center, controlling our body, which in turn acts upon the things we gather around us (Figure 3, chart). All three are channels through which we can love things, and God commands that all three be devoted entirely to him, leaving nothing for any other god.

At this point, let’s pause before the Lord and ask ourselves, “Do I love God this way? He gave his only Son for me. Am I holding back any part of my heart, my physical strength, my wealth, from him?” The Bible has no notion of “full time” vs. “part time” service to the Lord. The Lord expects every believer to love him completely, without reserve.

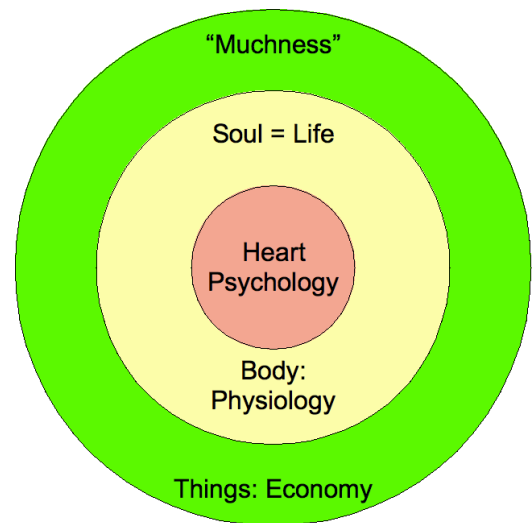


Figure 3: *The Three Channels of Love* (after Block, *JETS* 47:2 (2004) p. 203)

Approved in the NT

Our Lord said that he came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them (Matt 5:17). So we should not be surprised to find that the *Shema* permeates the NT.

3 Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot* 61b

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By the Lord Jesus

Twice, our Lord quotes this verse as a summary of the entire law. When the Pharisees challenged his orthodoxy by asking him which was the greatest commandment, he responded with the *Shema* (chart):

Mat 22:35 Then one of them, *which was a lawyer*, asked *him a question*, tempting him, and saying, 36 Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

On another occasion, a lawyer asked him about eternal life, and the Lord elicited this statement from him as the answer to his question:

Luk 10:25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how reatest thou? 27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. 28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

Our Savior endorses the *Shema*, the command to love God with everything that we are and have.

By the apostles

The NT repeatedly describes believers as those who “love God,” a clear allusion to this command (Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 2:9; 2 Thes 3:5; 1 John 4:19). One passage is particularly clear (chart).

1Co 8:1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. 2 And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. 3 But **if any man love God**, the same is known of him. 4 As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* none other God but one. 5 For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) 6 **But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.**

Note v. 6. Moses insisted that “the Lord our God, the Lord is one,” because we are to love him alone, leaving no devotion for other gods. Paul adapts this confession of one God and one Lord, but in doing so, understands “God” in Deut 6:4 of the Father, and “Lord” of our Savior. This is a striking claim to the deity of our Lord framed in Israel’s most sacred confession.

Alignment with 1 John 2:16

In our studies on the kingdom of God, we saw a striking similarity between the three areas in which both our first parents, and our Lord, were tempted by Satan. We also saw that John, in his first epistle, summarizes these three as the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life. These are the three great drivers of human activity. Man is unable to subdue the earth, because he cannot subdue these three great forces in his own life. He can only control them when he is indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit, as our Lord was, and as he demonstrated in his temptation.

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Consider the *Shema* in this light (Table 1, chart). Moses describes three great channels with which we can love, and requires that we devote each of them entirely to God. Anything less is idolatry.

If we love the Lord with all of our heart, the organ of pride, we will not fall to the Pride of Life. Our emotion, our intellect, our will, all will be subject to glorifying the Lord, not ourselves. Anything less is idolatry.

If we love the Lord with all of our soul, our physical life, and the body he has given us, we will not fall to the Lust of the Flesh. Our appetites will do their God-given task of keeping our bodies running, but we will use our energy and strength to serve the Lord. Anything less is idolatry.

If we love the Lord with all of our abundance, we will not fall to the Lust of the Eyes. We will be able to appreciate the beauty of the world in which God has placed us without demanding that we possess and control it. Anything less is idolatry.

Beloved, let us worship only one God the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ. Let us put away all the idols that our fathers served, and love the Lord our God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our abundance.

1 John 2:15-16	Gen 3:4-6	Matt 3-4	Deut 6:5
16 For all that is in the world ,	4 And the Serpent said ... 6 And when the woman saw	4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil .	5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God
the lust of the flesh ,	that the tree was good for food	2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred .	b) and with all thy soul
and the lust of the eyes ,	and that it was pleasant to the eyes	8 ... sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, ... 9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee , if thou wilt fall down and worship me.	c) and with all thy might (abundance)
and the pride of life,	and a tree to be desired to make one wise	6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God , cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: ...	a) with all thine heart

Table 1: Deut 6:5 and 1 John 2:15-16

The Parable of the Sower

Setting

Matthew 13 records eight parables by our Lord. Six of these parables begin with the words, “the kingdom of heaven is like . . .” But the first and the last do not. These two parables describe the work of those, like the disciples, who labor for the sake of the kingdom. They correspond to two forms of verbal ministry that the NT everywhere carefully distinguishes.

- The first parable, the parable of the sower, describes the evangelist, who is reaching out to bring the gospel to those who have never heard. This is the believer as “a city set on a hill.”
- The last parable, the generous householder, describes the teacher, a “scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven,” who instructs those who have come into the fellowship. This is the believer as “a lamp giving light to all who are in the house.”

This evening, we consider the first of these parables, the parable of the sower. I feel a burden to share it with you because of the crucial ministry of outreach that the Lord has given in this neighborhood. I believe it will offer you encouragement to persevere in this ministry, as well as insight into what is happening in the hearts of those to whom you bear witness.

This morning we studied Israel’s central confession in some detail:

Deu 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy abundance.

This saying is called the *Shema*, which is the Hebrew command with which it begins: שמע, “Hear!” We saw that the threefold command to love the Lord with all the heart, soul, and abundance corresponds to the warning in 1 John 2:16 against the pride of life, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, when we do not devote our heart, soul, and abundance completely to the Lord. This triplet, grounded in the *Shema*, gives us special insight into the lessons of the parable of the sower.

The Lord gave the parable publicly, but he only explained it, later, to the disciples. Following his example, let’s first study the image itself, then consider the interpretation.

3b-9, Presentation of the Parable

Behold, a sower—Some call this parable the parable of the soils. But our Lord names it in v. 18. It is “the parable of the sower.” It explains to those who sow how they should minister, and what they should expect.⁴

went forth to sow;--Sowing refers to scattering seed broadly over the field. We plant some plants (trees, for instance) more precisely, selecting the spot, digging a hole, putting in the seed, and covering it back up. But for grains, the usual manner is to scatter the seed, and the farmer doesn’t control exactly where the seed falls. He is not careless; the threats to the seed are natural, even unavoidable.

4 In Greek, the noun also has the article in v. 3. There is no specific sower in view in the context; this is a use of the Greek article called “generic.” The Lord is discussing sowers as a class. The statement applies to anyone who sows seed.

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The seed may fall in four places, ordered from least productive to most productive. In each case, the Lord describes (chart, Table 2)

1. the *location* where the seed falls,
2. the *threat* to which it is exposed there (except in the last case),
3. its subsequent *growth* (except in the first case).

	4	5-6	7	8
Location	Beside the road	Stony places	Among thorns	Good ground
Threat	Birds	Sun	Thorns	(none)
Growth	(none)	Withered	Choked	Bear fruit

Table 2: Characteristics of the Four Soils

4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way

side--The “way” is the path. The seed falls, not in the center of the road (the sower is not that careless), but along the edge, literally “beside the path,” where the soil was compacted by an occasional footstep, so that the seed cannot settle into the earth. If the farmer wants to be sure the entire field is sowed, some seed will inevitably fall close to the road.

and the fowls came and devoured them up

--The threat to this seed is that the birds peck it up. There is no discussion of subsequent growth. The seed has no chance even to germinate.

5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: 6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

--The farmer does not sow upon bare rock. This is a place where the soil is shallow over the underlying bedrock, as we are told three times (“not much earth,” “no deepness of earth” “no root”). Many fields in the Middle East are hillside terraces where soil has been laboriously placed over the rock ledges, and where the soil is too thin, the crop is in danger. Soil and rock are never far apart. Figure 4 (chart) shows how close the fields are to rocky areas.



Figure 4: Wheat fields in rocky terrain

The threat is the hot sun. But any farmer will recognize that the seed in the good ground needs the same sun to grow! The problem is not the sun, but the shallowness of the soil. The seed germinates, but the tender plant is scorched and dies before it brings forth fruit.

The threat is the hot sun. But any farmer will recognize that the seed in the good ground needs the same sun to grow! The problem is not the sun, but the shallowness of the soil. The seed germinates, but the tender plant is scorched and dies before it brings forth fruit.

7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

--The third kind of ground contains thorn seeds, which grow up after the grain has been sown. Figure 5 (chart) shows one particularly impressive species of thorn⁵ in Israel. It grows very densely, choking out other plants.

Again, the sower is not wasting seed by casting it into the brambles, but the soil is contaminated with a rival species that grows faster and shades out the grain. The seed germinates, but never bears fruit.

⁵ Probably the thorny burnet (*Sarcopoterium spinosum* (L.) Spach, Zohary p. 156

8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.--This ground is free from the characteristics of the other three.

Unlike the wayside, it is plowed up, so the seed can sink in, safe from the birds.

Unlike the stony ground, it is deep, so the roots can reach down to moisture.

Unlike the thorny ground, it does not favor weeds, so the seed has no competition.

Good ground doesn't come in big chunks in the land of Israel. Figure 6 (chart) shows how close it is to rocks and thorns. But in the good soil, no threat is able to compromise the growth of the seed, and as a result, it not only germinates, but matures to bear fruit that is abundant, though varying in degree.

In sum, much of the seed is unproductive. Yet had the farmer tried to avoid the three bad soils, he would have missed some good soil as well. The bountiful harvest from the good seed more than makes up for what is lost.



9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.-- *Figure 6: Rocks, thorns, and good soil close together*

The Lord concludes his parable with this saying. This single verse merits more attention than we have time to give it tonight, but it is where the parable first makes contact with the *Shema*. In both, Israel is commanded to “hear,” which involves something more than just registering the sound of words.

18-23, Interpretation of the Parable

The interpretation of the parable was not obvious, even to the disciples. They asked him to explain it, and in vv. 18-19, he does. This explanation repeatedly brings our attention to the *Shema*. Note how often the interpretation uses the word “hear” (chart), in vv. 18, 19, 20, 22, and 23.

18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. 19 ... the word of the kingdom,--People sometimes call the parable “the parable of the soils,” but the Lord gives it its proper name, “the parable of the sower.” He focuses our attention on the sower, who is sowing “the word of the kingdom.”

The emphasis is on preaching, not teaching—on broadcasting the word broadly to those who have not heard, not giving in-depth instruction to those who are already committed. (He will turn to that ministry

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in the last parable, of the householder.) In fact, long before the days of radio and television, the word “broadcast” referred to the sowing of seed. The Lord intends that his servants should sow his word broadly, not just present it in a focused way to a selected few.

The purpose of the parable, revealed in the interpretation, is telling those who sow what to expect in their ministry. We are not to be discouraged because of lack of response. The field in which we labor is beset by birds, stones, and thorns, and we are to expect this full range of responses. Each of these responses describes a different kind of hearing, a different level of response to the *Shema* (Table 3, chart). And because 1 John 2:16 reflects the same dynamics as the *Shema*, each of the responses reflects that triad as well.

Deut 6:5	1 John 2:16	Matt 13:18-21
Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with	All that is in the world	
All thine heart	Pride of life	Wayside: 19 that which was sown in his heart
All thy soul / life	Lust of the flesh	Stony: 21 offended by tribulation or persecution
All thy strength / abundance	Lust of the eyes	Thorns: 22 care of this world, deceitfulness of riches

Table 3: The Shema, the World, and the Soils

19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.--The seed that landed by the side of the road was eaten by birds. Our Lord explains that the birds correspond to “the wicked one,” who seeks to snatch away “the word of the kingdom” from those who hear.⁶

The location from which the seed is snatched is “his heart.” The person represented by the wayside is somebody to whose heart “the wicked one” has access. The *Shema* commands us to love the Lord our God with all of our heart. If we love God with all of our heart, there is no room for the wicked one. The spiritual disaster experienced by those by the wayside results from the waywardness of their heart.

The Lord says that the wicked one snatches away the seed, but the parable spoke of “birds” in the plural. Throughout the gospels, the Pharisees try to dissuade one another from believing on Jesus. In 12:24, they rationalize his success in casting out demons by suggesting he is doing it by the power of Satan. In John 7:42-46, they criticize first the temple guard, then Nicodemus, for hints of sympathy with him. Satan often uses mockery to try to dissuade us, and in John’s terms, we are hindered by “the pride of life,” the desire to have others think well of us. As we have seen, the heart is the seat of pride, and we fall into this sin when we do not love the Lord with all our heart.

20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; 21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.--The seed in the stony place sprang up, but was withered by the sun. The Lord explains the sun as corresponding to “tribulation or persecution.”

Our Savior warns of the effect of persecution later, in the Olivet Discourse (chart):

Mat 24:9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated

⁶ The plurality of the birds may reflect the Pharisees, who repeatedly try to turn one another away from the truth: 12:24; John 7:46-52.

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of all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. 11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. 12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. 13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.⁷

Believers will suffer tribulation and persecution. If a person loves worldly comfort more than he loves the Lord, he will succumb. We see an example of this in Paul's history, in 2 Timothy, written during his second imprisonment, which ended in his execution.

2Ti 4:16 At my first answer no man stood with me, but all *men* forsook me: *I pray God* that it may not be laid to their charge. 17 Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

There was a time when Paul could invoke his Roman citizenship for protection against persecution. But later Rome turned hostile to Paul. When that happened, many believers feared for their own well-being, and refused to be associated with him.⁸

While the sun withers the seed on rocky soil, it is necessary for the growth and fruitfulness of the seed on good soil. Suffering in the life of the true believer brings strength and additional fruit. Our Lord "learned obedience by the things which he suffered," Heb 5:8, and so may we.

Someone who fails because of "tribulation and persecution" values physical comfort above serving the Lord. This morning we learned that the Hebrew word for our physical life is נפש, translated "soul" in Deut 6:5. If we love the Lord with all of our soul, physical discomfort will not turn us aside. If God owns my entire life, I trust him to bring me joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain, as he sees fit, and serve him regardless. But if I do not love him with all of my soul, physical discomfort can turn me aside.⁹

Again, we can understand the dynamic in terms of 1 John 2:16. This time, it is the lust of the flesh, the desire for personal comfort, that gets in the way of the free growth of the seed.

22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.--On the third soil, the seed must compete with other, more vigorous plants that crowd it out. The Lord interprets these of worldly cares and the desire for riches. The result is that the plant never produces fruit. We have an example of this behavior in Demas, of whom Paul says,

2Ti 4:10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world,

The first two kinds of bad soil correspond to failure to obey the *Shema*. How about the third? The last part of the *Shema* commands us to love the Lord our God with all of our abundance. The person who is like the thorny soil is led astray by "the deceitfulness of riches." Or in terms of 1 John 2:16, he has fallen victim to "the lust of the eyes." He values things more than he loves the Lord.

7 People may debate the timing of "the great tribulation," but both our Lord (John 16:33) and his apostles (Acts 14:22) leave no question that believers now must be prepared to endure tribulation for the sake of the kingdom.

8 Phygellus and Hermogenes in 1:15 may be specific examples of this tendency, though they are in Asia and not in Rome.

9 The link with the soul may be involved in the expression, "he hath not root in himself." If the Lord originally gave the parable and its interpretation in Hebrew, the idiom for "in himself" that he would have used is the expression בנפשו, literally "in his soul." The KJV in fact translates בנפשו as "by himself" in Jer 51:14 and Amos 6:8.

The *Shema* in the New Testament

23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that **heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.--**

But there is good soil, in which the seed is neither caught away by the birds, nor stunted by rocks, nor choked by thorns. Like our Lord in the wilderness, and unlike Eve in the garden, they do not succumb to the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life. They follow Moses' exhortation: they truly hear the Word of God, and love him with all of their heart, and all of their soul, and all of their abundance. The result is that the Word of the Kingdom takes firm root and, watered by the Spirit, brings forth a prolific harvest.

There are three lessons in this parable for you in the strategic ministry that God has given you in this neighborhood (chart).

1. *Sow thoroughly, not selectively.* There is a temptation sometimes to try not to waste our seed near the road, or where we think there may be rocks, or in areas where we suspect there may be thorns. But our Lord commands us to be thorough:

Mar 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

2. *Realize that some will turn aside.* Not all who hear will profess to receive Christ; some will prove to be the wayside. Not all who pray the sinner's prayer will show the true life of Christ in them: some will prove to be stony ground, or succumb to thorns.

Mat 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

3. *Seek fruit, not just professions.* God has high expectations for those who take up his name. He is a jealous God, and demands that we love him with all the heart, all the soul, all of our abundance. Anything less is idolatry. We must be cautious not to tolerate mediocrity—in ourselves, and in those entrusted to our care. The objective of the farmer is not wilted, choked sprouts, but an abundant harvest. Our Lord enjoins us, as we go, to “teach them all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” Matt 28. Paul was not seeking just converts, but mature believers:

Col 1:28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

Let us be satisfied with nothing less as we serve our Lord.

Notes

Context

Second of three instances of שמע ישראל in early Deut: 5:1; 6:4; 9:1.

Other Instances of Heart, Soul, Abundance

Often with prefixes: but always in this order. Never get “with all the soul” without “with all the heart.”

Complete series

2Ki 23:25 And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there *any* like him.

Heart + Soul

Deu 10:12 And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,

Cf. 11:13; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10

1Ki 2:4 That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel.

1Ki 8:48 And *so* return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, = 2 Chr 6:38

2Ki 23:3 And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all *their* heart and all *their* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book.

Heart alone

1Ki 8:23 And he said, LORD God of Israel, *there is* no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart: = 2Ch 6:14

Psa 9:1 I will praise *thee*, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. cf. 119:2, 10, 34, 58, 69, 145; 138:1

Pro 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

Jer 24:7 And I will give them an heart to know me, that I *am* the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.