

# Can Smart People Believe in God?

Welcome to our new series, titled “Can Smart People Believe in God?” As Steve K shared yesterday, the decision to believe in God is not necessarily related to whether a person has exceptional cognitive abilities or not. The question might better be asked: Can a person be wise, if they do not believe in God? Scripture tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. (Prov 9:10) Hebrews 11:6 tells us “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

**GETTING STARTED:** Each of us has a reason why we believe? What was the most influential thing that brought you to faith? What questions did you have? Who helped you come to that decision?

## READ: DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

🗣️ What did you notice/ what things stood out, as you just read the passage?

🗣️ What things did you take away from the sermon this week?

❗ “The Shema refers to a couple lines from the book of Deuteronomy (6:4-5), that became a daily prayer in Ancient Israelite tradition. It’s the equivalent of the Lord’s prayer (“Our Father in heaven...”) in Christian tradition. The Shema gets its name from the first Hebrew word of the prayer, “Listen, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” The English word “listen” renders the Hebrew word *shema*. In traditional Jewish prayer practice, these lines from Deut 6:4-5 were combined with other passages from the Torah (Deut 11:13-21, Num 15:37-41), and were prayed in the morning and the evening. This prayer has been one of the most influential traditions in Jewish history. The Shema has functioned both as the Jewish pledge of allegiance and a hymn of praise.”<sup>1</sup>

“The *Shema* is one of the most important prayers in the Bible. The *Shema* became something that Jewish people prayed every morning and evening for thousands of years, and it is still relevant to us today. It gets at the heart of all the commands given to the people of Israel. The *Shema* is a call to listen *and* respond to the truth that Yahweh is the one true God, and the appropriate response is to love Yahweh with all of our being. Knowing and loving God is how we can experience the fullness of life. And when we align our hearts with God’s, we will naturally care about the things he cares about and fulfill our roles as his partners in bringing about human flourishing on the earth.”<sup>2</sup>

🗣️ The *Bible Project* has prepared a short video (3:26) titled ‘Shema – Listen’ to explain this concept. Play this Youtube clip, then share what you learned from it. Refer to the word cloud image on the last page, for a reminder of the content.

<https://youtu.be/6KQLOulKaRA>

🗣️ Steve highlighted that, in conversations between work colleagues, there would be a believer, an atheist and a polytheist, together discussing the meaning of life. In this context, we might either agree to disagree on the basis that truth is found only in Jesus Christ, we might acknowledge that all faiths are equally valid or we might take a line, where we see that we need to be tolerant and avoiding talking about faith, is the easiest/ most politically correct way of dealing with the awkward silence. Alternatively, we can try to find common ground and dialogue about issues of faith, over time, and provide some insights from our own perspective, from time to time. How do you negotiate these sort of conversations with unbelieving friends, family members and/ or colleagues?

❗ Steve talked about the Hebrews, being in the wilderness and preparing to enter the Promised Land, which was inhabited by Canaanite tribes who worshipped many different idols. A frequent temptation for the people as they lived in this land, was to conform to the beliefs and behaviours of the people around them. By contrast, they were called to obedience to God’s word, including the worship of one God.

🗣️ What are some of the practices that are part of your workplace or group of friends, that are things that are not consistent with Christian witness? What sort of decision process do you go through, to determine whether you will engage in certain activities or not?

<sup>1</sup> <https://bibleproject.com/blog/what-is-the-shema>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bibleproject.com/church-at-home/week16-shema/>

❗ Moses told the people that there were “commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe”. They were to “listen” and “obey” them. Their obedience was to be motivated by both “fear” of God and “love” for God. Their wellbeing and future in the land was at stake. Their fruitfulness, including having children, was seen to be a blessing for their obedience. But, at the same time, the people were charged with teaching these commands to their children and passing them down from generation to generation. Their love “for” God had to be demonstrated by their obedience, in both their words and actions. Their faith and commitment to God was not passive, but involved intentional decisions on a daily basis.

💬 In Ps 119:11, we read: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Mike Frost and Graham Hill have recently released a book, with a challenge to memorise Scripture.<sup>3</sup> What are some verses that you have committed to memory? Do you have a discipline or regular practice of learning verses of Scripture? How have these verses helped you deal with temptation? How have they sustained you, when you have been fearful, anxious or under stress? How have they equipped you and enabled you with courage, to share the word with others?

❗ In Deut 6:12, we read: “be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” God knows how quickly we forget. The key to many of the practices, rituals, celebrations and traditions that were part of Jewish life, was so that they would not forget their past and that God’s faithfulness had always been shown to be true. The people had to remember their common faith stories, both within their homes and within their places of worship. They needed to remind each other of what God had done. In this chapter, Moses also reminds them that, when they settled and got comfortable in the land, that would be the time when they would most easily forget what God had done.

💬 A quote credited to writer and philosopher George Santayana, in its original form it read, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>4</sup> Steve spoke of the current trend of knocking down statues and getting rid of literature, so that we eliminate certain things out of our memory and rewrite our history books. Why is it important that we also remember the mistakes of the past, as well as the celebrations? Why is it also important that we also acknowledge historical wrongs, as a nation?

❗ “Israel is exhorted to *love* the Lord in return, not in any formal or legalistic manner, even though certain attitudes and actions were expected as evidence of this love (well summed up at 13:3–4), but with *all your heart* (the seat of mind and will, including a range of emotions and affections) *and all your soul* (the principle of life itself; cf. Gen. 2:7b; inner self and being) *and with all your strength* (resolve and strong commitment) (cf. 2 Kgs 23:25).”<sup>5</sup>

“When any (person) loves God in a total way (they) gladly obeys his ‘words’ which are inscribed on the heart. The demand of love towards God implies all other demands, and the disposition to love God implies the disposition both to obey his commandments and to impart these to the children of the following generations, so as to maintain an attitude of love and obedience among the people of God from age to age.”<sup>6</sup>

💬 In 1 John 4:7 & 19, we read: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ... We love because he first loved us.” God’s love compels us to love him and others. Love should involve all of our faculties. How do you primarily express love to God? How do you primarily express love to others? Is it through words? Actions? Service?

**REFLECTION:** In Deut 6:18, we read “Do what is right and good in the LORD’s sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors.” The reminder is given, that we are to obey, knowing that God will honour that obedience. This does not mean that our lives will be free of trouble. It does mean that God is looking to our ultimate wellbeing. In Heb 11, we read that Abraham did not see the city that was promised to him, but he eagerly awaited that. He did not see it in his lifetime, but that hope sustained his faith and obedience. What keeps you motivated to obey, even during the tough times?

<sup>3</sup> <https://books.thedisciplemaker.org/hidethisinyourheart/#resources>  
<https://grahamjosephhill.com/hidethisinyourheart-resources/>  
<https://youtu.be/nLHqgYs5fA0>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bigthink.com/the-proverbial-skeptic/those-who-do-not-learn-history-doomed-to-repeat-it-really>

<sup>5</sup> Woods, E. J. (2011). *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*. (D. G. Firth, Ed.) (Vol. 5, p. 136). Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press. p136.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, J. A. (1974). *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 5). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p139.