

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9 AND ITS EDUCATIONAL/MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The passage of Deuteronomy 6 has long been debated, with approaches centering largely on traditional form criticism. From an exegetical perspective- especially examining such elements as clause, word order, verbal sequence – this study argues that from the context of the Hebrew Bible is better read as an injunction for education (teaching and learning) in its own right.

1. Introduction

While scholarly interest in the Old Testaments has long centered on diachronic source criticism as well as the more recent synchronic criticism.¹ Theological and educational framework and approaches of the OT, and particularly the Book of Deuteronomy, has largely been relegated to the background. Research on the book of Deuteronomy is widespread however most works emphasize source and form critical approaches. Hence, David J.A. Clines calls for a “more holistic approach to the

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), xxxiv; Bruce T. Dahlberg, “Genesis,” *Mercer Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Watson E. Mills and Richard F. Wilson (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 87. See also W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2001); idem, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988).

Pentateuch beyond questions about its (presumed) sources, and enquires about the meaning of the text that now exists.”² A general review of research does not focus specifically on the educational models or approaches in Deuteronomy. Thus the focus of this paper. This study is selective in nature, briefly focusing on the injunction to train and educate in Deut 6. The purpose of which will bring out the significance of the education in the Old Testament and the book of Deuteronomy in particular.

The focus of this research is primarily to investigate Deut 6:4-7 by bringing together the relationship between the text and its injunction to train and educate the young people. This study will give a better understanding of the passages in terms of the commands of God in the book of Deuteronomy to unleash the power of biblical stories for personal and social transformation; and how it relates to each other in the education of the youth today. In so doing, this study seeks to fill the gap in research in the book of Deuteronomy.

2. Historical-Literary Context of Deuteronomy

It is imperative for any study of any book of the Old Testament like the book of Deuteronomy and even the Bible as a whole that the writer should clarify the view regarding some of the book’s introductory issues (i.e., historical context, genre, structure, and literary context). The purpose of this is not to duplicate previous studies on background matters, but rather to set forth with clarity what our reaction to several issues are. In the quest to determine the command in Deut 6:4-7, it is necessary to examine the passage in its historical literary context. This may help shed light on how the readers of these passage may have understood it in their time before applying its meaning to the present.

2.1. Historical Context of Deuteronomy

² David J. A. Clines, *The Themes of the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed., *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 10* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 142.

As indicated in the chapter one of the study the authorship of Moses for the book of Deuteronomy is assumed.³ Where and when was the book written? There is no much debate about the place of writing, however much divergent views emerge on the date of the composition of the book. Most scholars support Egypt as the place of writing.⁴ The date of the composition of the book is less certain. Although most scholars favor several years after the flood, it is generally dated around "1500 years before Christ."⁵ This is during the time while the Hebrews journeyed in the wilderness after bondage in Egypt. Some also support the idea that the book was written while the children of Israel had encamped in Shittim for sometime (months) and were on the cusp of the occupation of Canaan.⁶

The Pentateuch in general narrates a time span from creation to the death of Moses at Mount Nebo in Moab, just prior to the Israelite conquest of Canaan. The Pentateuchal history from Abraham (Gen 12) to the death of Moses (Deut 34) may be assigned to the Middle Bronze and Late Bronze ages of the ANE history.⁷ On a basic chronological continuum this means that the Patriarchal period extended from 2000 – 1600 BC, while Moses and the Exodus date from about 1500 to 1200 BC. The patriarchs emerged from Mesopotamian culture founded by the Sumerians but reshaped by Semitic dynasties of Sargon of Akkad about 2400 BC.⁸

Deuteronomy contains a sketch of the world's history spanning several centuries. The beginning chapters of the book cannot be placed in a

³ Due to complexity of matters regarding Deuteronomy composition and high degree of disagreement in the field the authors of this work will not engage in the discussion. Rather it is assumed Moses is the author of the book. See Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 104. Gleason Archer discusses authorship issues at length. See also Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL: Moody 2007), 228-34. See also "Authorship," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 1:201-203.

⁴ Archer, *Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 94-96.

⁵ *SDABC*, 1:203.

⁶ [Historical Setting], *SDABC*, 1:953. See also Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 26.

⁷ Carlos Elias Mora, class notes for OTST 661 Selected Exegesis of the Pentateuch, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, June 2015.

⁸ *Ibid.*

historical setting. This is due to the fact that there is no history of the antediluvian world, except that which is written by Moses.⁹ Thus, archeologically there are no records to bring to light the evidences of the people, their customs during the period covered in the early chapters of Deuteronomy.

From the narrative it can be seen that, the most immediate recipients of the book of Deuteronomy would likely have been the exodus generation. However, it is clear that the intended audience was to extend to all future generations and especially the descendants of Abraham born under the Mosaic covenant (Deut 29:14-15). This therefore implies that all humanity is viewed as implied audience to the narratives in Deuteronomy.

What is the purpose of the book of Deuteronomy? There are several observations among scholars concerning the purpose of Moses in writing Deuteronomy has received.¹⁰ While some scholars posit that Moses placed "emphasis a holiness code"¹¹ others have maintained that Moses wanted to pen down the history of this world.¹² A careful analysis of the purpose from the content of Deuteronomy reveals two main occasions for the purpose. First, in the account of Deuteronomy is "God's dealing with the faithful few who loved and served Him."¹³ Secondly, it addresses the "depth of depravity into which those who had left God and His precepts fell."¹⁴ Francis Nichol rightly comments that

The book also has doctrinal importance. It records the creation of this world and all its living creatures, the entrance of sin, and God's promise of salvation. It teaches that man is a free moral agent, the possessor of a free will, and that transgression of the law of God is the source of all human woe. It gives instruction concerning the observation of the holy Sabbath as a day of rest and worship, the sanctity of marriage and the establishment of the home, the reward for obedience, and the punishment for sin.¹⁵

⁹ *SDABC*, 1:203.

¹⁰ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1980), 140-148.

¹¹ Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 210; Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 141.

¹² Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 211.

¹³ *SDABC*, 1:204.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

In view of this and the bigger picture, the audience and purpose of writing can be seen to have a greater bearing on the import of the God's command to the people of Israel. Thus Moses' purpose in writing the book was to ensure the nation of Israel was ready for the occupation of Canaan.¹⁶ With this in view, we consider the literary context of the book of Deuteronomy.

2.2. Literary Context of Deuteronomy

In order to establish the import of the Deuteronomy command in Deut 6:4-17, it may be helpful to follow what Moses narrates from the beginning of the book. For the purpose of this section, the entire book of Deuteronomy is considered. With this in view, the literary structure of the book of Deuteronomy is considered.

2.2.1. Genre of Deuteronomy 6:4-9

It must be noted that though scholars have variously understood the genre of the Pentateuch and book of Deuteronomy in particular, some of these views are simply stated or assumed with no supporting evidence from the text. Where supporting evidence is given, the parameters for genre classification do not seem to be clearly provided. Of the many views relating to the genre of Deuteronomy, two seem to be pivotal: poetry and prose/narrative. However upon a critical examination of the biblical text one will come to the realization and conclusion that the genre of Genesis is a biblical narrative. Daniel Kwame Bediako states that Pentateuch is generally a straightforward narrative sequence.¹⁷ Leland Ryken affirms that "the literary genre of the book of Deuteronomy is "both poetry and (Biblical) narrative but . . . is largely a biblical narrative."¹⁸ Redditt states it correctly that Deuteronomy is a narrative piece. It can be attested that the Deuteronomy is a narrative piece and the passage is having all the feature

¹⁶ [Historical Setting], *SDABC*, 1:953.

¹⁷ Daniel Kwame Bediako, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 in the Light of Textlinguistics and Text-Oriented-Literary Studies" (PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, March 2009), 85-94.

¹⁸ Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature: and Get More Out of It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 84. See also Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988) 105-143.

of a narrative which includes a narrator, a scene, a plot, major and minor character.¹⁹

2.2.2. *Larger and Immediate Context of Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

Deuteronomy consists of four orations spoken by Moses emphasizing: keeping of the Law, the covenant between God and his people, blessings and curses, and reminder to keep the law.²⁰ Thus book is viewed as parenetic or homiletical in tone.²¹ The bulk of the book focuses on the importance of keeping the law as manifest token of the existent covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Moses stresses the fact if Israel lives according to the will of God then blessings will ensue, inversely if the will of God is not followed curses will be accrued.²²

The book of Deuteronomy is similar to Hittite treaty texts which describe the relationship between a Suzerein and Vassal.²³ Hittite treaty texts contain: a preamble, historical prologue, general stipulation, specific stipulation, blessings and curses, and witnesses.²⁴ All these aspects can be seen in Deuteronomy though Deuteronomy goes beyond a mere Hittite similarity but emphasizes the covenant with Yahweh.²⁵ Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is contained in the oration/general stipulation.

The section in which 6:4-9 is found presents general principles that must be followed in the covenant. The first general principle Moses reviews is the keeping of the commandments of God (5:1-33). Second, the principle of recognizing who God is at all times and the need to be faithful to him (6:1-25). Third, the principle of not making pacts with foreigners (7:1-26). Fourth, the Lord alone is the source of blessing (8:1-10:11). Fifth, love is a

¹⁹ Eike Mueller, class notes for OTST 614 Seminar in Biblical Interpretation, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, November 2014. See also C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1986), 447.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:954

²¹ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 27.

²² [Historical Setting], *SDABC*, 1:954.

²³ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 28.

²⁴ Merrill outlines the book thoroughly, the reader can see it to see clearly the covenant nature of the book. See *ibid.*, 30.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

principle that must be acted out (10:12-22). And Sixth, the importance of keeping the commandments (11:1-32).²⁶

Deut 6:4-9 is a self-contained unit marked by “Hear O Israel” in v. 4 and a paragraph marker called a *setuma* in v. 9.²⁷ In Jewish thought, the text was important as a fundamental teaching that God is one and thus it was the duty of every parent to know it and to teach their children this truth.²⁸ Thus education seen in the covenant context was for the purposes of propagating a faithful covenant relationship with God. Both teacher and the one taught needed to be in right standing with God.

2.2.3. Translation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9

The passage in the Hebrew is presented and may be translated as follows:

Hebrew Text	Working Translation
שָׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד׃	4. Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one.
וְאַהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדֶךָ׃	5. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.
וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם עֲלֶיךָ׃	6. And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.
וּשְׁנַנְתֶּם לְבָנֵיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשֹׁבְתֶךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִקְוֹתֶיךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֹתֶיךָ׃	7. and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.
וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאָזְנוֹתֶיךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין	8. And you shall bind them as a

²⁶ Ibid., 41.

²⁷ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, vol. 6A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, 1991), 143.

²⁸ Ibid. Peter C. Cragie notes that this truth “was to be the subject of conversation both inside and outside the home, from the beginning of the day to the end of the day.” See Peter C. Cragie, *The Book of Deuteronomy, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 170.

עֲיִנֶיךָ: sign on your hand and they shall
 be as frontals on your forehead.
 וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל־מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ: 9. And you shall write them on
 the doorposts of your house and
 on your gates.

3. Exegesis and Interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9

The passage begins with a verb *שָׁמַע*²⁹ which shows a command for all the people to give their ears and listen to the words of YHWH commanded through Moses.³⁰ At the affirmation of the sovereignty and the monotheistic nature of YHWH, the people are reminded of the covenant they have with YHWH. The reference to YHWH as One and the only true God is made contextually with the message being delivered at that particular time and even beyond. According to the OT, the expression *שָׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל*, indicates the call of God in seeking the audience of man in a given time. Thus the injunction “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” presents an educational focus. The focus here is for teaching: To know God. The knowledge of the Lord leads to the blessings of the Lord who gives: wisdom from His mouth. From the Lord’s message come knowledge and understanding (Prov 2:6).

The v. 5 also begins with an injunction *וְאַהַבְתָּ*. A particle conjunction with a qal verb in the waw consecutive, perfect, second person, masculine, and singular in form which means “you shall love.” Israel is called to love their God as a genuine and kind response to the His loving nature showed towards them. They are to adhere to the commandments He is has given them. The kind of love required here is holistic in nature. It involves all the senses and parts of the body, *בְּכָל־לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֵדְךָ*. The love for God is to help them keep the words spoken *עַל־לִבְבְּךָ* (v. 6). Its ultimate goal for Israel’s adherence to the commandments of God to the next generation is to foster the love of God expressed in loyalty and obedience. To love God is to answer to a unique claim, to be obedient, to

²⁹ a qal imperative masculine singular verb

³⁰ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing Biblical Aramaic*, Based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius, (BDB) (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1952), s.v. “שָׁמַע.”

keep the Laws of God, to heed them and to hear the voice of God, and to serve Him and humanity. The term אָהַב (love) refers to obedience from the heart involving all of the being of a person. In the NT this point is reiterated in John 14:15 where Jesus echoes this relationship between love and obedience: “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” Robert W. Pazmiño points out that

the love of God is expressed in obedience to God’s commandments and in giving oneself wholly (heart, soul, mind, and strength). Teaching is to be incisive in challenging hearers to such a total life response to God characterized by heartfelt devotion. This teaching was the particular responsibility of parents, yet this goal has significance for all forms of education.³¹

Thus, Moses is described as exhorting the people of Israel to remember God’s activities in their history, to teach God’s commands, and, above all, to love, fear, and serve God. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” This presents a unique atmosphere of teaching which entails dynamic Love. The scope presented here can be seen as comprehensive and holistic.

The v.6 is “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.” These emphasize the source from which the education of the people was to be effected. The written Word, illustrated Word, and living Word of God was/is to be employed in teaching. This source of the educated had to be completed with the usage of a special instrument, that is, a committed parent-teacher.

The phrase וְשִׁנַּנְתֶּם לְבָבוֹתֵיכֶם וְדַבַּרְתֶּם בָּם in v. 7 translated as “You shall teach them diligently to your children” can be seen as central in the teaching and learning process. The Hebrew root שָׁנַן connotes continuous or repeated effort in teaching. It should not only suffice for a short period of time. It should be carried out daily and always. With the following phrase confirming and stressing on how the teaching should be done. וּבְקוֹמָתְךָ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְיֵשֶׁבְךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְלִקְחֶיךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ בְּשַׁבְּתֶיךָ “and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” This involves every aspect of the daily life of the individual. Thus, the process of education is to be diligent and excellent and also receptive and active. The word of God is to be assiduously used to bring out the best in the students and the instructors/educators as well. The setting in which these are carried out is the linkage of theory and

³¹ Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 22.

practice through prime moments for learning. When these are done both the educator and the student actualize the purpose of education. This denotes that education demands cognizant design, effecting, and assessing of educational experiences.

How the teaching and learning experience is to be done is what is set in the vv. 8-9. The passage reads "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be on frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." This shows the involvement of the sense and the holistic aspect of man. These are the physical development, intellectual growth, spiritual maturity, and social interaction. When these areas are not fully developed, then education has not achieved its right goal and purpose on the individual. The phrases of the passage in vv. 8-9 show the relations to the areas. וקשרתם לאות על ידך "sign upon the hand"- Physical; והיו לטטפת בין עיניך "frontier between the eyes" – Intellectual; וכתבתם על מזוזות "Writing upon the doorpost" -Spiritual; and ביהך ובשעריך "writing upon the gates" – Social. The task of educating the Israelites was delegated not only to a special class of teachers, the priests and the Levites but to all the people with much emphasis placed on parents.

4. Educational and Missiological Implications in Africa

The implications on education and mission are thus. First education and mission must be centered on God. As shown above education in Israel was for the purpose of maintaining a right relationship with God. Both student and teacher were in a covenant relationship with God. Thus for African Adventist education and Mission must be rooted and based on leading teacher and student to a deeper knowledge of God. Furthermore this knowledge of God is not mere intellectual assent but one that involves loving commitment to him. If this is achieved then it safely be said that one has taught and is a teacher.

Second, the written Word, illustrated Word, and living Word of God was/is to be employed in teaching. As a source of intellectual development the bible is essential. Thus teachers are mandated to know the bible for themselves and must lead students to know the bible and its claims on their lives. Besides being a book about God yet the bible touches on other elements of learning. The bible informs on creation, social sciences, history etc.

Third, education and mission in Africa must be holistic. Thus curriculums and extra curricular activities need to be designed to ensure

holistic development. This can be achieved with involvement of different qualified professionals just as in Israel the education was delegated to the whole society.

Fourth, this passage presents a model for teaching. This model is only suggestive in nature but can be refined by professional educators. The model can be termed the holistic model for teaching. Firstly in this model the student is taught to know and love God supremely and must align's one life to the principles taught in the word of God. The curriculum must be holistic to develop the intellectual, spiritual, physical and social dimensions. The scriptures must be leaned upon to understand what it really means to develop afore mentioned dimensions. And lastly all members of a community must be involved in the teaching process. This includes the school itself, the students, the chaplain or spiritual leader of the school, and the parents.

5. Conclusion

The exegetical approach to Deut 6:4-9 has revealed that the OT concept of education was centered on a covenantal relationship that Israel had with Yahweh. Teaching was for the purpose of promulgating Israel's knowledge and loving service of the creator. Thus to teach was not optional but was essential to the life and praxis of Israel.