

A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-19

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A very important concept in New Testament theology is man's response to God's love. John states, "We love because He first loved us" (1 Jno. 4:19). God manifested His love by working in history for our benefit, and he calls us to love Him through the life, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus the Christ. Yet, to understand and to perform our responsibilities are two very difficult tasks. They become clearer when we consider previous situations wherein God called His people to love him. Since God has not changed the basic foundation for covenant relationships, the demands he makes upon us are similar to the commands he gave to Israel in order that they might remain faithful to him.

The prosperity of the nation Israel was conditioned by her faithfulness to the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances of God. It was important that Israel be reminded of her covenant duties so that her days would be prolonged, that she would multiply, that it would go well with her, and that she could possess the land of milk and honey (Deut. 6:1-3).

To remind Israel of her covenant responsibilities the author of Deuteronomy recounts the historical setting of the covenant and its meaning (1:11-11:32). This parenetic material (containing exhortation and admonition) comprises two speeches (1:11-4:49 and 5:1-11:32). The second speech contains a narrative of the giving of the law at Horeb (5:1-33) and a commentary on that decalogue (6:1-11:32). The commentary forms a bridge which connects the Decalogue with the legal enactments which follow chapter 11. Furthermore, this second part begins with a description of love and obedience as the motivations

for keeping the laws and maintaining a correct relationship with Yahweh.

The author of Deuteronomy desires that the people never forget the gracious God who gave them the land nor their responsibilities to worship him with the correct attitude. Israel's way of life depended on the character of the God whom they worshiped. Israel's possession of the land depended on the character of her people. Thus the speaker encourages his kinsmen to exhort and educate one another in the significance of their relationship to Yahweh, the God of their history (6:4-19).

The date of this recorded exhortation is difficult to determine but essential to understand the events which prompted its creation. There are three main theories. First, it is traditionally stated that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch and thus the setting for the speech is during the life of Moses, shortly before the Israelites entered the land of Canaan. In contrast, the Wellhausen school argued that the religion exhibited in the book is too well developed for the early period of Moses. In addition, the death of Moses is recorded in chapter 34, presenting a problem if Moses is the author. Yet, it seems quite possible that much of the material could be Mosaic, although the final form of the book appears later. Monotheism, at least in the sense that Yahweh is the only God of Israel--He works in her history and demands her obedience--is prevalent in the early history of the founders of the Israelite nation. And the indication in 6:1-3 is that Israel has not yet possessed the land or even crossed over the Jordan. Thus although this book was compiled later, certainly its foundation is composed of ancient tradition passed down from generation to generation.

Second, the interest in old cultic material, the language of the Holy War, and the hortatory purpose lead one to consider the period of the Judges, Samuel, or the early monarchy as the time during which the Deuteronomic exhortations were proclaimed. The Deuteronomic proclamations of cultic purity and rejections of polytheism would easily suit this period of Israelite history.¹

The final theory is that Deuteronomy originated during the Josiah reform, about 621 B.C. The evidence for such a theory lies in the

¹ In this argument Deuteronomy is often linked to the Covenant Festival of Yahweh amphictyony (tribal league) at Shechem in the period of the Judges.

closeness between the Deuteronomic language and the theology of the prophets of the later monarchy, the finding of the law, and the interpretation that 12:1-14 refers to the centralization and unification of the cult of Yahweh (2 Kings 22, 23).

In conclusion, whether 6:4-19 was proclaimed by Moses to remind the Israelites that their possession of the land lies in Yahweh and their keeping of the Horeb covenant, by a zealous Levite who desired to take strong measures against existing pagan cults or Yahwehized pagan cults, or by a man of God who desired to unify the cult because God is one, "the Deuteronomist called for right worship at the right time in the right place."² This is the message of Deuteronomy 6:4-19.

The literary form of this passage is also disputed. Mendenhall proposed that the covenant form of 6:4-19 and similar passages parallels the Hittite suzerainty treaties (treaties between the Hittite king, "Suzerain," and his subject, "vassal") of 1450-1200 B.C.³ Suzerainty treaties are international covenants wherein the vassal is bound to the king. These treaties contain six elements commonly found in the Deuteronomic covenant material: 1. Preamble (begins with the formula, "thus says. ..") 2. Historical prologue (6:10-12, 20-25) 3. Stipulations (6:13-18) 4. Provision for the deposit in the temple and public reading (16:10-16) 5. List of the gods as witnesses (chapter 32) 6. Curses and blessings (11:26, 28).⁴

The similarities between the Hittite treaties and Deuteronomy indicates that the relationship between Israel and Yahweh is couched in covenant language. Love is manifested in reverential fear, loyalty, and obedience, as a vassal to his king. Love is commanded by God.⁵

Similarly, this type of love is also present in the father-son relationship. Yahweh demands of Israel his son reverential fear, loyalty, and obedience as a father (1:31; 8:5). This relationship even occurs in treaty passages of the Old Testament (14:1; Jer. 31:9; Isa. 30; 2 Kings 16:7). The father is tender, a merciful king, but the focus is on the attitude of the son. Although the father-son relationship

² Jacob M. Myers, "The Requisites for Response," *Interpretation*, 15 (1961), 21.

³ George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Religion," *Biblical Archaeologist*, 17 (1954), 55.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 58-60.

⁵ Others find similarities to Assyrian treaties. See William L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 25 (1963), 77-87.

is not often mentioned in Deuteronomy and is not connected with ahebh, it is still an old tradition that certainly influences the interpretation of chapter 6.⁶

In addition to these two bases of interpretation, Buss argues that the literary form of chapter 6 is not treaty but covenant and moral wisdom.⁷ He looks to Proverbs for help in understanding these passages.

In conclusion, an understanding of all these literary forms can aid in interpreting chapter 6. In all probability, the author had a variety of motifs to express the relationships of God to Israel--king to vassal, father to son, teacher to pupil--and he employs them all to illustrate the requisites for Israel's response to Yahweh.

Election was not an automatic guarantee of the continued prosperity of Israel. It required an unremitting worship of Yahweh and a loyalty to his covenant offer (6:1-3). After promulgating the commandments to be obeyed (ch. 5) and explaining to the people the conditional nature of God's gift of the land of Canaan, Moses begins a series of citations and allusions to the Decalogue (6:4-19). The author begins to record the speech with the phrase in verse 4, "Hear, O Israel."

This phrase is a stereotyped formula which occurs regularly in Deuteronomy (4:1; 5:1; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9; 33:7). In earlier Israelite history it was used as a means of summoning the gahal of the tribes for worship.⁸ The verb, shama', denotes a strong intention and sense of urgency in the speaker's attitude and not only represents the physical act of hearing but also a special plea to obedience. It is used in the direct pronouncements from the heavenly court of Yahweh (1 Kings 22:19; Jer. 34:4; Amos 7:16), and also as a rhetorical device in the wisdom literature for beginning a practical unit (Prov. 1:8; 4:1; 8:32).⁹ It was likewise a key word in the Egyptian instructional

⁶ Dennis J. McCarthy, "Notes on the Love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-Son Relationship Between Yahweh and Israel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 27 (1965), 147.

⁷ Martin J. Buss, "The Covenant Theme in Historical Perspective," *Vetus Testamentum*, 16 (1966), 502-504.

⁸ Gerhard Yon Rad, *Deuteronomy. The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 63.

⁹ Dean S. McBride, Jr., "The Yoke of the Kingdom; An Exposition of Deuteronomy 6:4-5," *Interpretation*, 27 (1973), 290.

literature.¹⁰ God, the king and teacher, calls his subjects to hear his word and introduces verses 4 and 5 which are a syntactical and semantical whole ("hear. . . and love"). These verses introduce the theme of heartfelt obedience to Yahweh, the God of Israel, and have become the basis for one of the most important rituals in Judaism, the reading of the Shema.

To the Jews, verses 4-9 were the primary confession of faith, supplemented by Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41. It was recited twice daily at morning and at night (6:7), and was the crux of the Israelite faith (Matt. 22:36-40; Mark 12:29-34; Luke 10:27, 28). The absolute and incomparable unity of God is derived from the Shema, which forms the center of the Jewish faith.

In verse 4, according to Synagogue tradition, the last letters of shama' and 'echadh are written larger than the others to prohibit confusing' for a ' and dh for a r, which would make it read, "perhaps is Yahweh, our God, another Yahweh."¹¹

Rabbinic tradition based on a radical monotheism, the interpretation of Maimonides (12th century), and the Jewish response to the Christian theology of the Trinity, translate Yhwh 'Elohenu Yhwh 'echadh, "The Lord our God, the Lord is One." It is a statement of the oneness and unity of God.

Although the rabbinic tradition consistently proposes that the passage affirms the universal oneness of God, there are grammatical and theological complications. The grammatical problems are threefold. First, are the four words a series of two nominal clauses or a single nominal clause? The phrase can read either "Yahweh is Our God, Yahweh is one" or "Yahweh, our God, Yahweh is one." The Septuagint and the Nash Papyrus support the former translation; however, their reading is considered prosaic and secondary.¹² The phrase "Yahweh, our God" is used frequently in the Old Testament as a stereotyped formula (Exo. 20:12; Hosea 12:10; 13:4; Isa. 26:13;

¹⁰ R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs. The Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1972), p. 17.

¹¹ Jacob Jocz, *A Theology of Election: Israel and the Church* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1958), p. 40. The large letters also form the word 'edh, "witness," so when it is spoken, the speaker witnesses to God's unity.

¹² McBride, *op. cit.*, p. 291, n. 37.

Jer. 14:22).¹³ The constant use of such a formula would favor the latter reading except for the position of 'echadh after the formula. This makes the phraseology difficult if it is taken as one clause.

Von Rad suggests that this is a single nominal clause in which 'Elohenu and 'echadh are in apposition. He indicates that 'the formula "Yahweh is one" is unique in the Old Testament but has parallels in Egyptian literature. A papyrus of the twenty-first dynasty (1090-945 B.C.) designates Amon as "the one god, the only god."¹⁴ However, because of the lack of concrete evidence, no definitive solution exists.

Second, which word functions as the subject and which as the predicate? Is this declaration an answer to the question "Who is Yahweh?" or "Who is our God?" Yhwh 'echadh may be in apposition to the predicate Yhwh, whereby the phrase then translates "Our God is Yahweh, one Yahweh."

Another possibility is that 'Elohenu is in apposition to Yhwh. Whenever 'Elohim is used as a predicate after Yhwh in the Deuteronomic material, it is always preceded by hu' (4:35; 7:9; Josh. 24:18; 1 Kings 8:60).¹⁵ Both the Nash papyrus, which adds hu', and the Septuagint have interpreted 'Elohenu as predicative.¹⁶ Again, although the evidence supports the contention that 'Elohenu is appositional, no definitive answer exists.

Finally, what is the semantic force of the final element, 'echadh? The primary meaning for 'echadh is "one." However, as a numerical adjective, it can mean "only" and "solitary," and it is interchangeable with lebhadh, "alone."¹⁷ If 'echadh means "alone" in this passage, the phrase would then read "Yahweh, our God, is Yahweh alone."

Anderson argues that 'echadh cannot mean "alone" on the grounds that lebhadh, which is also used in Deuteronomy, would be more appropriate. However, McBride counters by stating that lebhado

¹³ Helmer Ringgren, "'Elohim," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. I, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p.278.

¹⁴ Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. I, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd 1957), p. 227, n. 87.

¹⁵ Norbert Lohfink and Jan Bergman, "'echadh" *TDOT*, Vol. 1, pp. 196, 197.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

(a preposition plus a substantive plus a pronominal suffix) functions as an adverbial accusative of specification with an objectifying force (2 Kings 19:15, 19; Isa. 37:16, 20; Psa. 3:18, 86:10; Neh. 9:6), while the author needs the subjective classification which 'echadh can supply.¹⁸ In conclusion, 'echadh may mean "alone" or "one." If it means "one," it may indicate "the only one in the universe" or "the only one for Israel."¹⁹

Since all the grammatical evidence is inconclusive, one turns to the realm of theology for the solution to the interpretation of verse 4. The phrase Yhwh 'Elohenu Yhwh 'echadh is either a declaration of monotheism, a statement of God's unity, an oath of allegiance to Yahweh alone, or a combination of the three.

Rabbinic tradition, the Nash Papyrus, and the Septuagint consider the phrase as a declaration of monotheism. However, since rabbinic tradition arises much later as a result of Jewish martyrdom and a conflict with the theology of the Trinity, it can be disregarded as a reliable source of interpretation. Because the Nash Papyrus and the Septuagint are secondary readings, they are also unreliable. The only favorable evidence is the apparently monotheistic statements about God in Deuteronomy (3:24; 4:7, 34f., 39), and the later statements in Zechariah 14:9 and Jeremiah 10:1-16.

Second, if 12:1-14 refers to the centralization and unification of the cult of Yahweh and if a historical setting during the time of Josiah is accurate, verse 4 depicts God's unity and oneness in the face of many divergent traditions and sanctuaries of Yahweh. However, monotheism is also conceptualized in the time of Josiah (Jer. 10:1-16).

Third, a historical setting of Judges or the early monarchy, when there was a temptation to worship the Canaanite Baals, pushes for the interpretation of verse 4 as an oath of allegiance to Yahweh alone. The suzerain motif would also lend weight to this understanding. Israel, the vassal of God, must pledge allegiance to the suzerainty of God alone. Furthermore, if 6:4 is a commentary on 5:7, then 6:4 declares the uniqueness and exclusiveness of the God of Israel's history

¹⁸ McBride, op. cit., P. 293, n. 45.

¹⁹ 'echadh may also mean that his name is "One." Plotinus, *Enneads* 6:19, refers to a discussion "Concerning 'The Good' or 'The One.'" Xenophanes of Colophon (565 B.C.) also identified god with "The One" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1:5:12-13). See Cyrus H. Gordon "His Name Is 'One'," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 29 (1970), 198.

and the giver of her blessings. There is no denial of other gods, but only a statement that Yahweh is the one and only God for Israel (6:14).

Although the third possibility is most appealing and most consistent with the thrust of Deuteronomy, the answer probably lies in a combination of the first and third theories. Yahweh is the sole God of Israel. He is the God of her history and demands her obedience, love, and loyalty. And yet, even as the exodus from Egypt manifested not only the God of the Israelite people, but also the God of all peoples, so here, under the declaration of God's unique and exclusive covenant with Israel, hides the concept that there is one God, not only for Israel, but also for the world. "Yahweh, our God, is the one Yahweh for Israel and the world." In Israel's practical faith Yahweh is her God alone. In truth, Yahweh is the God of the universe.

The Shema continues in verse 5 as the author proclaims the intended result of God's loving kindness to Israel. God loves Israel and has chosen her for a holy people (4:37; 7:6, 7; 10:15; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9). He has set her apart and extended His mercy to her. Because of his blessings, which enable her to possess the land and live prosperously in it, she is to reciprocate his love.

'*ahēbh*, in Deuteronomy, implies duty and obligation when describing man's relationship to God.²⁰ In all of the Old Testament, only thirteen passages occur outside Deuteronomy wherein the love of men to God is proclaimed (Exo. 20:6; Josh. 22:5, 23:11; Judges 5:31; 1 Kings 3:3; Neh. 1:5; Psa. 18:2; 31:24; 91:14; 97:10; 116:1; 145:20; Dan. 9:4). It occurs in Deuteronomy alone eleven times (6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6,16, 20). Since many of the passages which appear outside Deuteronomy are in Deuteronomistic material, it is evident that the love of men for God is a characteristic principle of the Deuteronomist. Whereas individual security once rested in Jewish citizenship, now the national security is contingent upon the personal love of its people for God.²¹

'*ahēbh* is a more domestic and intense term than *chesedh* and illustrates the close family bond between God and man.²² God is the

²⁰ J. W. McKay, "Man's Love for God in Deuteronomy and the Father/Teacher-Son/Pupil Relationship," *Vetus Testamentum*, 22 (1972), 426.

²¹ Andrew Harper, *The Book of Deuteronomy. The Expositor's Bible* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 140.

²² Laurence E. Toombs, "Love and Justice in Deuteronomy," *Interpretation*, 19 (1965), 402.

father; Israel is the son. Furthermore, this love is a convenantal love. The Amarna letters state that love is the correct response of a subject to his king or a vassal to his suzerain.²³ This type of love comprises loyalty and obedience.

This love is not mere lip-service. The Deuteronomist clearly states the implications of this love. Israel is to fear God (4:10; 5:29; 6:24; 8:6; 10:12; 14:23; 17:19; 28:58; 31:13), to cleave to him (10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20), to serve him (10:12; 11:13), to obey his voice (30:20), to walk in his ways (10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16) and to keep his commandments (5:10; 7:9). Such fidelity is motivated by Israel's gratitude for what Yahweh did and by a desire for her own well-being (4:40; 5:16, 29; 6:3,18; 12:25, 28; 22:7).

In verse 5 this love is further intensified by the phrase "with all your heart and with all your life and with all your might." There are three possible interpretations of this expression. First, the terms are distinct but complementary. The author may be exhorting the Israelites to love God "with your undivided loyalty, your commitment to God, and your substance."

Second, Christian exegesis, derived from the Septuagint and manifested in the New Testament quotations of the verse (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:17), considers the terms to be complementary attributes of the inner man--the mind, the soul, the spiritual and moral power.

Third, the words may be syntactically coordinate but semantically concentric.²⁴ The phrase is probably a stereotyped expression to be interpreted "with your whole self." An analysis of the expression throughout Deuteronomy confirms this idea. This formula, which occurs frequently in the book (4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10), states an all-encompassing sense of personal devotion to God.²⁵

Eichrodt beautifully expounds the Deuteronomic concept of love when he writes:

Here love the miracle of free affection, is seen to be the basis of the whole relationship of God to man, and it calls for personal surrender as the living heart of

²³ A. O. Haldar, "'ahebh," *TDOT*, vol. 1., p. 101.

²⁴ McBride, *op. cit.*, pp. 303, 304.

²⁵ In many of these instances "might" is not included in the formula. This short version occurs seventeen times in the Old Testament in Deuteronomic material.

any obedience to law. . . . Love is the effective power in the saving stipulations of the covenant; it ensures their success, and bestows itself in blessing on all who keep its "commandments" and "walk in its ways" ...To realize this love, which constitutes as it were the available capital, requires simply the positive act of obedience to the law; and by this means it is possible to establish, within the framework of this world, a holy people of God, separated from the nations. Love is here understood as the power which upholds the present order, and which maintains the covenant in the character of a *restauratio*, not a *renovatio omnium*, though men may admittedly violate its terms and thus lose the right to participate in it.²⁶

The traditional rabbinic Shema continues in verses 6-9 with an exhortation to personal sincerity and commitment. "These words" should have their dwelling in the "heart" of the individual. Whether these words" refers to the things that have been or will be discussed is questionable. However, since the preceding chapter iterates the Decalogue and the following chapters explain its practical application, the verse is probably a reference to everything which was spoken to the Israelites on the occasion. Again, obedience is prominent. The formula "which I am commanding today" frequently appears in the book (4:40; 6:6; 7:11; 11:13, and elsewhere). These laws are not suggestions but are stipulations of the covenant relationship. Also these laws reside in the heart (10:16; 30:5). According to Egyptian literature, the heart as the seat of motivation for personal commitment is the sanctuary for love.²⁷ This indicates the close connection between love and law. Law is the manifested fulfillment of genuine love.

Yet the laws are not only to be kept in the heart, they are to be taught to succeeding generations. Shanán generally means "to whet" or "to sharpen." But because of this context and the intensive force of the Piel, Shanán means "to teach incisively."²⁸ In addition, the Arabic word *sunna*, "life rule," may be related to Shanán. If it is shanan may mean "teach them as a life rule."²⁹

Watts argues that this teaching occurred when ritual dramas and narratives were rehearsed in festivals and absorbed by the people. The

²⁶ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament. The Old Testament Library*, vol. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 256.

²⁷ Jan Bergman, "'ahebh," *TDOT*, vol. 1., p. 99.

²⁸ William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Edward Robinson, ed., Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Biggs (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 1042.

²⁹ Joseph Reider, *Deuteronomy. The Holy Scriptures with Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1937), p. 73.

people learned the laws of the covenant by the yearly repetition of the three major festivals: the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).³⁰ Although teaching took place at the gatherings, this is not the methodology expressed in 6:7. Here the author commands a daily instruction.

The father was the family religious leader (6:7; 12:15; 14:22; 15:19). He was expected to fulfill the need for daily worship by stressing family religion in the home (4:9, 10; 5:30f.; 11:19; Prov. 6:20-22). His responsibility to teach God's salvation narratives (6:20-25) and Israel's necessary response was an essential component of community life.

The book of Proverbs sheds some light on the methodology used, but the date may be quite later than the ancient tradition in Deuteronomy. Both the father and the mother shared the teaching responsibilities (1:8), but the father was the authoritative guide (4:1-4). Organized schools, which couched their instruction in figures, parables, and allegories, were rare and for the rich (1:6). Instruction was usually oral; books were rare. Corporal punishment was an essential element in children's education (13:24). This is depicted best by quotations from Egyptian texts which state that the pupils were required to learn: "Boys have their ears on their backsides; they listen when they are beaten," and "You caned me, and so your teaching entered by ear."³¹ The severe extremes to which the Israelites practiced corporal punishment is clearly portrayed in Deuteronomy 21:18-22.

In conclusion, although Egypt had a highly developed system of both elementary and secondary education, there is no evidence that Israel did.³² The father handled most of the instruction at home. Thus he is commanded to teach his children the stipulations of the covenant with Yahweh, just as one of the treaties of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (700-600 B.C.), obliges the vassals to instruct their children on the duties of vassal relationships.³³

The author's admonitions in verses 8 and 9 complete the Shema. 'oth and totaphoth are metaphorically employed by the author to

³⁰ John D. W. Watts, "The People of God: A Study of the Doctrine in the Pentateuch," *The Expository Times*, 67 (1956), 234-237.

³¹ Whybray, op. cit., p. 80.

³² Ibid., p. 4

³³ It is possible, but doubtful, that "sons" in 6:7 refers to Israelites pupils) and not to literal children. Such an Interpretation would require a wisdom motif similar to the use of "son" in Proverbs (2:1; 3:1; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1 and elsewhere).

intensify his exhortation that the people must live for Yahweh daily. Their religion is to travel with them wherever they go. They are always to radiate their love for Yahweh. *totaphoth*, "bands" or "frontlets," occurs only four times in the Old Testament (Exo. 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18). The injunction to bind *qashar* the bands upon the forehead was originally figurative for "perpetual remembrance," but later the Jews developed from this figure the custom of wearing phylacteries.³⁴ However, despite this late innovation, the essence of this scripture still shines forth. The passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy show traces of a wisdom literature formula and influence. If Exodus 13 is pre-Deuteronomistic, then Deuteronomy modified it by the influence of the wisdom literature. If the passages in Exodus are not pre-Deuteronomistic, Deuteronomy still used wisdom literature. In both cases, the author writes with a wisdom-literature motif and formula (Prov. 1:9; 3:3; 6:21; 7:3).

Although it was the custom of the Egyptians to inscribe good sentences on their doorposts, the Deuteronomist's injunction in verse 9 is still figurative.³⁵ But again, rabbinic tradition converted a beautiful exhortation to live a heartfelt religion into a ritualistic and legalistic program concerning the *mezuzah*. *mezuzah*, "doorpost," evolved to represent a small cylindrical container which housed a parchment copy of the *Shema*. It was attached to the frame of the door on the outside of the house and acknowledged with a gesture as a person entered or left the house. Unfortunately, a literal interpretation of 6:8, 9 created a nation which knew **where** its law was, but seldom **what** it was. Israel could read its law, but she could seldom live it.

The next section of scripture is a stereotyped list of the "real estate" God has acquired for His people (6:10-12), a list possibly patterned after Hittite treaties with vassals.³⁶ Statements that Yahweh gives or has given (*nathan*) the land (*'adhamah*, *'erets*) are frequent in a parts of Deuteronomy 4:40; 6:10; 15:7; and elsewhere). The author intends to humble the people by demonstrating to them the mercy lovingkindness, and goodness of Yahweh. The passage warns of the danger of sudden success. If Israel can remember that God was the one who built, filled, digged, and planted, she has a basis for remaining

³⁴ William Gesenius, *op. cit.*, p.378.

³⁵ George Adam Smith, *The Book of Deuteronomy. The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1950), p. 100.

³⁶ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 64.

faithful to the stipulations of the covenant. Israel's obedience to the commandments is the condition for a happy and prosperous life in the land. If they push God into the background and boast in their accomplishments, God will bring vengeance. Although Israel fought the Canaanites for possession of the land, even then God led them to victory.

The covenant rests on a two-dimensional love. First, love moves in the crucial instance from God to Israel and initiates the covenant. Second, love, as a consequence, flows from Israel to Yahweh and keeps the covenant in effect.³⁷ It is God's initiating love, expressed in his gift of the land and of freedom from slavery, which is examined in these verses.

Following his sounding the dangers of sudden success, the author then warns Israel of the sin of idolatry (6:13-15). The practical side of Israel's religion is to maintain the covenant and to avoid kindling God's divine anger. They can accomplish this if they fear God, serve him, and swear by his name. To fear God is a popular concept in Deuteronomy (4:10; 5:29; 6:24; 8:6; 10:12; 14:23; 17:19; 28:58; 31:13). Although Israel's motivation for maintaining the covenant comes from God's initiating love, the reverence and awe of God's powerful justice and vengeance also help the Israelites to be loyal and obedient.

'abhadh, "to serve," with reference to God, represents an act of worship (Exo. 3:12; 13:5), and 'abhodhah is often a technical term for the religious rites of the priests and Levites.³⁸ After God has done so much for Israel, to worship any other god would be an abomination to the Lord. Because of his bountiful gifts of grace, God should be and expects to be worshipped and praised. The author does not deny the existence of other gods (vs. 14), but he emphatically states that Yahweh is the only God active in the life of the nation Israel.

Israel is to swear (shabha') by His name. It is God to whom they must pledge their allegiance and loyalty as a vassal to his suzerain. Further, it was a standard practice for people to swear by their god in a business transaction. Indeed Yahweh was to be a part of their daily affairs. bishemo, as well as 'otho and Yhwh, is in an emphatic position, which indicates that the fearing, worshipping, and swearing

³⁷ Toombs, op cit., p. 407.

³⁸ Reider, op. cit., p. 64.

are not as important as the deity to whom they are directed. Yahweh is the God of Israel; *Yahweh* has delivered Israel; Yahweh be praised!

For this reason, verse 14 announces God's abhorrence of the worship of other gods.³⁹ The phrase "other gods" is used seventeen times in Deuteronomy, and it always occurs with "to serve" 'abhadh or "to go after" (halakh 'acharey), except in four places (5:7; 18:20; 31:18, 20). Yahweh will not tolerate the worship of other gods by a people for whom he has done so much. God is a jealous God (4:25; 5:9; 6:15; 27:15-26; 32:16, 21). Jealousy and wrath are just as much functions of his lordship as his love and grace. They are anthropopathic attributes given to God on the basis of his action. God actively works against that which he dislikes and his power can destroy. Even as the king will crush a rebellion or a teacher discipline a pupil, so Yahweh will crush those who act like rebellious sons and break his covenant. It can be broken by the worship of other gods and by social injustices. Even as love cements the bond of the covenantal relationship, so also justice is important to love. Justice localizes and charts love's course. Therefore Deuteronomy speaks of social justice as a requirement for covenant purity (5:16; 15:1, 9, 15; 21:18-21; 22:13-29; 24:10-18; 27:16). If the stipulations are not met, the punishment will come. A break in the covenant relationship is the result of Israel's sin. Yahweh is never unfaithful.

The author continues analyzing the maintenance of the covenant and employs the incident at Massah as an example of a breakdown (cf. Exo. 17:1-7).⁴⁰ At Massah, the thirsty people cried out against Moses and God. They doubted the sovereignty of God, and so they wavered. If the Israelites had had faith and trust, they would not have

³⁹ Verses 14, 16, and 17 are often considered editorial editions because the author switches from the singular to the plural of the second person. Smith counters that Moses here and in the Decalogue uses the plural for his own words but quotes what God gave him at Horeb in the singular. Another argument for the deletion of vs. 14 is that although vs. 14 is a continuation and conclusion of vs. 13, it limits the scope of the preceding verse. But it appears to focus negatively upon the opposites of Yahweh, who is positively and emphatically the center of attention in vs. 13. See Smith, op. cit., pp. 98, 102.

⁴⁰ Verse 16 is also considered an addition because of its apparent appropriate reference. That the author, in a time of prosperity, would use Massah, which happened in a time when Israel was in need, as an educational lesson appears unusual. However, the emphasis was "do not test God." The subordinate clause begun by "as" could still represent a general reference to a time of tempting, rather than a specific reference to a particular type of tempting.

tempted the Lord. However, they lacked faith and thought that God would not deliver the water. As a result they tempted God and strained the covenant relationship (9:22; 33:8).

God will not break his covenant. His faithfulness is steadfast; his love endures. If problems occur, the Israelites, not God, will be responsible. Conversely, all will be well with Israel if they diligently keep the commandments and do what is right and good (vss. 17, 18).

To do what is right is to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord, to obey the covenant law. To do what is good is to obtain the abundant life as described before (cf. 6:3, 10, 11). The author indicates that Israel's goodness assures Yahweh's goodness and thus maintains the relationship. When the covenant is valid, the combination of Israel's obedience and God's faithful promises allows Israel to possess the land when they push out all their enemies (vs. 19). In fact, regardless of who the enemy may be, Israel will be victorious with the aid of her teacher, father, and suzerain, Yahweh. Yet she must always remember to do what is right (12:25; 13:18; 21:9) and what is good (6:18; 12:28) in the eyes of God.

In conclusion, the author knows that the success or failure of Israel's venture across the Jordan, even her growth as a nation, depends upon her ability to keep the commandments, statutes, and ordinances of God. Simply stated, Israel must worship the right person--Yahweh, at the right time--daily, in the right place--the heart. To maintain her good health Israel's heartfelt religion must be daily directed to Yahweh.

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