

Comments on Deuteronomy 6

The context of this chapter is established by the preceding one, ch. 5. For example, in v. 1 the commandments, statutes and judgements referenced are those appearing in the preceding chapter, namely the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. Also, the fear of the Lord referenced in v. 2 is in response to the quotation of the Lord appearing in 4:28-29 where the Lord states He wished Israel revered and feared him always as they did at Sinai.

Overall, this chapter is a warning to be faithful to the Lord by keeping the commandments and avoiding idolatry, and teaching your children to do so. It follows a simple A-B-A-B pattern, as follows:

A - (v. 1-6) Do the Lord's sayings
fear God
blessed in the land
Lord alone is God

B - (v. 7-9) Teach your children by letter and deed

A - (v. 10-19) Do not forget the Lord
fear God
do not go after other gods
blessed in the land

B - (v. 20-25) Teach your children from your history

In the A strophes Moses admonishes the current generation to fear the Lord and do what He says, and in the B strophes he admonishes the current generation to teach their children.

1 NOW these [are] the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do [them] in the land whither ye go to possess it:

2 That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.

3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do [it]; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

Fs 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. 6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

v1-3 The laws given in the preceding chapter are those which Israel is to observe in the land which they are to inherit (v. 1). In doing so they will show their respect for the Lord. And they must teach their children to do so also (v. 2). By doing these things which Moses has taught they will become a great nation and live in a prosperous land (v. 3). Only the Lord is the God of Israel (v. 4), so Israel should love and follow Him exclusively (v. 5). The message these words convey should be Israel's desire (v. 6).

v2 "fear the Lord thy God", an archaic usage of the word "fear". A better rendering into modern English would be "revere" or "be in awe of". Reverence and respect for God results in being blessed, prospered, and prolonged in the land.

"which I command thee", the book of Deuteronomy is largely presented as a first-person account with Moses as the speaker and Israel as the audience.

v3 "thy fathers", making reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

v4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord", the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) renders this verse, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone". This is the better translation. The general context of the chapter is anti-idolatry, cf. v. 14. What Moses is saying is only the Lord is God of Israel, so have nothing to do with the idolatrous Canaanite gods. Attempting to use this verse to say God is numerically one is acontextual.

v6 To paraphrase the verse, "If you love the Lord (per v. 5), then these words (i.e., the content of ch. 5) will be in your heart (i.e., you will know them, desire to do them, and do them)."

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. 8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. 9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

v7-9 These verses emphasize teaching children by word and deed. This addresses the present family and culture, the adults the children growing up actually see, where v. 20-25 presents teaching by history. Only if the children see the parents doing the Lord's commands will the children do the Lord's commands.

v8-9 The physical objects, the phylactery and mezuzah (cp.

11:18-20, Exod. 13:2-17), are symbols of what we should be doing spiritually. The binding on the hand indicates all our acts should be dedicated to the Lord and in accordance with His will, the binding between the eyes means our thoughts and what we cast our eyes upon should be the same. The words being written upon the doorposts means that in all of our actions inside and outside of our homes should be godly, not just one or the other. When we go into our homes, and when we go out into the world we are reminded to keep the commandments.

10 And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, 11 And houses full of all good [things], which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; 12 [Then] beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

13 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.

14 Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which [are] round about you; 15 (For the LORD thy God [is] a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. 16 Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted [him] in Massah.

17 Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. 18 And thou shalt do [that which is] right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, 19 To cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the LORD hath spoken.

v10-14 The same subjects of v. 1-6 are repeated in a slightly different pattern with a slightly different presentation. Where v. 1-6 deal with ancient Israel's immediate past of the covenant at Sinai and the wandering in the wilderness, Moses now warns them of their immediate future, their imminent entrance into Canaan.

As they are about to be blessed materially (v. 10-11) they are warned not to forget Who blessed them (v. 12-13) and be seduced by the local idolatrous practices (v. 14-16). If they keep the commandments the Lord will bless them in the land (v. 17-19).

v15 "jealous", the JPS renders this "impassioned", which is a better translation. The Lord is not passive, or apathetic, or detached. He actively participates in Israel's affairs.

20 [And] when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What [mean] the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you? 21 Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: 22 And the LORD shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: 23 And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. 24 And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as [it is] at this day. 25 And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.

v20-25 emphasizes the teaching of children by personal and general history. The present situation of the Israelites is all a result of what has happened in the past, whether it be Abraham or their immediate parents. Knowing the reality or history and the context of their present situation puts their corporate and individual relationships with God into perspective.

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