

# **THE CENTRAL TRUTH OF BIBLICAL RELIGION: EXEGESIS ON DEUTERONOMY 6:4-13**

**JOSEPH DUDU YAFI**

Department of Christian Education

Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State Nigeria

Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, Los Angeles, California, United States of America

Email: revjosephduduyafi@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

The central truth and the core point of the Biblical message in its entirety is to present to people a monotheistic God who rules both in the affairs of men and that of heaven; hence the concept of Biblical religion is deep-rooted on the foundation of God is one and He is to be worshipped as the true eternal triune God of all time. Man is expected to holistically serve and worship this triune God revealed in the Holy Bible as one God with all his heart, his mind, his strength, and his soul. This study therefore aims at elucidating the fact that the central truth of Biblical religion is the worship of one triune God who historically has made Himself manifest in several ways to the nation of Israel and to the entire universe through the works of His creation. The study will present a thorough exegesis on Deuteronomy 6:4-13 which is the key point of the research work. The research will apply hermeneutical and qualitative methods to bring out the true meaning of the text. The research work will add flavour to academia as reference material, and hence its significance is tremendous to Christianity in such a contemporary globalized and modernized Godless society.

**Keywords:** Central, Truth, Biblical, Religion, Exegesis

## Introduction

There are numerous religions in the world today, some with written scripture and others without any literature. The concept of Biblical religion is that of monotheistic movement which the Israelites were instructed to worship One and only true God-Yahweh. This movement began in Egypt where the Israelites have lived as slaves for about four hundred and thirty (430) years (Exodus 12:40),<sup>1</sup> before their holy cry went up to heaven and God heard their cry. God used Moses to lead this movement and God gave Moses Laws or Commandments written in two tablets. The first chapter of the commandments did not mince words but went straight to present God as one and only true God whom Israel must worship diligently while desisting from polytheistic religion or paganism. We observed in Exodus 20:2-5 where God elucidated to Moses that He is One LORD; therefore, Israel should take heed not to mix worshipping Him with the worship of images or idols.<sup>2</sup> Bearing in mind that He would hold the iniquities of those who lust after worshipping images up to their children down to third and fourth generations. The Hebrew text reads thus “*Yisrael, Yehovah Eloheinu, Yehovah achad.*” Which bears the English translation as “Israel, hear! Jehovah, our God, is one Jehovah,” or “Jehovah is our God, Jehovah is one.”<sup>3</sup> These sentences present God to Israel in singular noun indicating the Monotheistic nature of the

Israelites' Religion. Christianity which is an offshoot of Judaism also upheld the same concept of a monotheistic belief of one God despite the Trinitarian controversy,<sup>4</sup> which many have viewed as polytheism or the worship of three gods and tends to see Christianity as an adulterated religion. But this paper is here to prove that both Judaism and Christianity upheld the belief in one God and hence, monotheistic religions. God's expectation from the Israelites is that they should love Him with the totality of their being which include the heart, soul, body, action, desire, intent, and every reflection should be on Jehovah God.<sup>5</sup>

### **Background To The Book Of Deuteronomy**

The book of Deuteronomy identifies its content with Moses which was delivered to the Israelites at Mount Sinai in the wilderness as they journey to Canaan Land (31:9).<sup>6</sup> According to the commentary from *Spirit Filled Life Bible*, Moses' name appeared nearly forty times; indicating the authenticity of the book that it was written by Moses and delivered to the priests. It further authenticates that both Jewish and Samaritan traditions are unanimous in identifying that Moses was the Author of the book and that the last chapter of the book which contains the account of Moses' death must have been probably written by Joshua, Moses' intimate friend.<sup>7</sup>

## **Date Of Writing**

The *Spirit Filled Study Bible* in its introductory part to the book of Deuteronomy acknowledged the fact that the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt was in about 1440 B. C. and that most likely they arrived the plains of Moab where Deuteronomy was written in 1400 B. C. on the occasion of speaking of its content to the people in the eleventh month, and on the first day of the month; and in the fortieth year of their sojourn and perambulation in the wilderness (1:3).<sup>8</sup> If this claim was true, it is scholarly agreeable that the book of Deuteronomy would have actually been written in 1400 BC just shortly before the death of Moses and Joshua taking the mantle of leadership as Jehovah has instructed to accomplish the journey into Canaan Land; hence it covers the period of less than two months as many scholars have suggested, including the thirty (30) days of mourning Moses' death.<sup>9</sup>

## **Content And Purpose**

At this critical moment of entering the Promised Land, though Moses was forbidden to enter the Land because of his disobedience, and most of the people that were about to enter the Promised Land were the children given birth to, while the Israelites were sojourning in the wilderness, there was need for Moses to remind this new generation of Israel the

uniqueness of God's Covenant with them and the uniqueness of upholding the monotheistic worship of Yahweh. Hence this was Moses' farewell speech as he was not going to enter the Promised Land, he crystalized made it clear with them about God's faithfulness throughout history and he reminded them of the unique Covenant relationship with God.<sup>10</sup> By critical thinking and going by the experiences Moses had with the Israelites within the forty years journey through the wilderness, Israel's greatest temptation in the new land would be to forsake God and take up the worship of the Canaanite idols.<sup>11</sup> This made him to re-emphasize how sacrosanct it was for the Israelites to maintain a monotheistic worship of God, let's they invoke God's wrath on themselves.<sup>12</sup>

To this effect, Moses was specifically more concerned for the perpetuation of the covenant relationship between Israel and God, hence he prepares the nation of Israel for new life in the Promised Land, expounding heavily on the commandments and the injunctions which God had given in His covenant.<sup>13</sup> He maintained that obedience to God is indeed equated with life, blessings, good health, and prosperity. But disobedience is equated with death, curses, diseases, and poverty.<sup>14</sup> The covenant would show them the way to live in fellowship with God and with each other. This can't happen until they submit totally to God, hence

Moses emphasized the need for them to love God with their hearts, strengths, minds, souls, body, and spirit (Deut. 6:5-6).<sup>15</sup>

### **Contextual And Textual Meaning Of Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

Deuteronomy consists of four different 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.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the book is viewed as parenetic or is homiletically in tone.<sup>17</sup> The bulk of the book focuses on the importance of keeping the law as a manifest token of the existent covenant between Yahweh and Israel.<sup>18</sup> 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 therein be accrued.<sup>19</sup>

The book of Deuteronomy is similar to Hittite treaty texts which describe the relationship between a Suzerain and a Vassal.<sup>20</sup> A Hittite treaty texts contains a preamble, historical prologue, a general stipulation, specific stipulation, blessings and curses, and witnesses.<sup>21</sup> All these aspects can be seen in Deuteronomy, even though Deuteronomy goes beyond a mere Hittite similarity but emphasizes the covenant with God.<sup>22</sup> 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 as follows:<sup>23</sup>

The first general principle which Moses reviewed, is keeping God's commandments. The second principle is recognizing who God is always and the need to be faithful to him.<sup>24</sup> The Third principle is, not making unnecessary treaties with foreigners. The Fourth principle is that the Lord alone is the source of blessing. The Fifth principle is love which must be acted out and the Sixth principle is the importance of keeping the commandments of God.<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is a self-contained unit marked by "Hear O Israel" in v. 4 and a paragraph marker called a setumah in v. 9.<sup>26</sup> 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 Biblical Religious truth.<sup>27</sup> Thus education seen in the covenant context was for the purposes of propagating a faithful covenant relationship with God which both teacher and the one taught needed to be in right standing with God which is a proper and acceptable Biblical Religion.<sup>28</sup>

### **Exegesis And Interpretation Of Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

The passage begins with a verb<sup>29</sup> which shows a command for all the people to give their ears and listen to the words which Yahweh commanded through Moses.<sup>30</sup> At the affirmation of the sovereignty and the monotheistic nature of God, the people are reminded of the covenant they have with Yahweh. The reference to Yahweh as One and the only true God is made contextually with the message of a monotheistic

religion being delivered at that time and even now.<sup>31</sup> According to the Old Testament reports, the expression indicates the call of God in seeking the audience of man in each time. Therefore, the injunction “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” presents an educational focus on Monotheism. The focus here is for teaching to know God.<sup>32</sup> The knowledge of the Lord leads to the blessings of the Lord who gives wisdom from His mouth. From the Lord’s message comes knowledge and understanding (Prov 2:6).<sup>33</sup> The v. 5 also begins with an injunction; A particle conjunction with a verb in the consecutive, perfect, second person, masculine, and singular in form which means “you shall love.”<sup>34</sup> Israel is called to love God as a genuine and kind response to His loving nature showed towards them. They are to adhere to the commandments He has given them.<sup>35</sup> The kind of love required here is holistic in nature. It involves all the body parts and senses. the love for God is to help them keep the words spoken (v. 6).<sup>36</sup> Its 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.<sup>37</sup> To love God is to answer to a unique claim, to be obedient, to keep the Laws of God, to heed them and to hear the voice of God, and to serve Him and humanity. The term love refers to obedience from the heart involving all the being of a person.<sup>38</sup> In the New Testament, 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.”<sup>39</sup> Robert W. Pazmino 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 responsibility of parents, yet this goal has significance for all forms of education.<sup>40</sup>

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.<sup>41</sup>

In verse 6, “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 is to be employed in teaching.<sup>42</sup> This source of the educated had to be completed with the usage of a special instrument, that is, a committed parent-teacher.

you shall “as translated in verse 7 is a phrase to teach them diligently to the children” can be seen as central in the teaching and learning process.<sup>43</sup> The Hebrew root connotes continuous or repeated effort in teaching.<sup>34</sup> It should not only suffice for a short period of time, but it should be carried out daily and always. With the following phrase confirming and stressing

on how the teaching should be done. In the house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise. This involves every aspect of the daily life of the individual.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, the process of education is to be diligent and excellent and receptive and active. The word of God is to be assiduously used to bring out the best amongst the people of God. The setting in which these are carried out is the linkage of theory and 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.<sup>46</sup>

How the teaching and learning experience is to be done is what is set in verse 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 physical development, intellectual growth, spiritual maturity, and social interaction.<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup> Frontier Physical hand, upon sign, upon Writing◎ “Intellectual eyes between doorpost Spiritual; and writing upon the gates Social. The task of educating the people to know and love God 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.<sup>49</sup>

### **Educational And Missiological Implications**

The implications for education and mission are thus. First education and mission must be centered on one God. As shown above education in Israel was for the purpose of maintaining a right relationship with God.<sup>50</sup> Both student and teacher were in a covenant relationship with God. Thus, for Africans, education and Mission must be rooted and based on leading teacher and student to a deeper knowledge of God.<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup>

Second, the written Word, illustrated Word, and living Word of God is to be employed in teaching. As a source of intellectual development, the bible is essential.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup>

Third, education and missions must be holistic. Thus, curriculums and extracurricular 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.<sup>55</sup>

Fourth, this passage presents a model for teaching, especially of a monotheistic God. Model is only suggestive in nature but can be refined by professional educators.<sup>56</sup> 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 one life to the principles taught in the word of God.<sup>57</sup> The curriculum must be holistic to develop the intellectual, spiritual, physical, and social dimensions.<sup>58</sup> The scriptures must be leaned upon to understand what it really means to develop aforementioned 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.<sup>59</sup>

The grand design of all the institutions prescribed to Israel was to form a religious people, whose national character should be distinguished by that fear of the Lord their God which would ensure their divine observance of His worship and their steadfast obedience to His will.<sup>60</sup> The basis of their monotheistic religion was an acknowledgment of the unity of God with the understanding and the love of God in the heart (De 6:4, 5).<sup>61</sup> Compared with the religious creed of all their contemporaries, how sound in principle, how elevated in character, how unlimited in the extent of its moral influence on the heart and habits of the people!<sup>62</sup> Indeed, it is

precisely the same basis on which rests the purer and more spiritual form of it which Christianity exhibits (Mt 22:37, Mrk. 12:30; Lu 10:27).<sup>63</sup> Moreover, to help in keeping a sense of religion in their minds, it was commanded that its great principles should be carried about with them wherever they went, as well as meet their eyes every time they entered their homes.<sup>64</sup> A further provision was made for the earnest inculcation of them in the minds of the young by a system of parental training, which was designed to associate religion with all the most familiar and oft-recurring scenes of domestic life.<sup>67</sup> It is probable that Moses used the phraseology in De 6:7 merely in a figurative way, to signify assiduous, earnest, and frequent instruction; and perhaps he meant the metaphorical language in De 6:8 to be taken in the same sense also.<sup>68</sup> But as the Israelites interpreted it literally, many writers suppose that a reference was made to a superstitious custom borrowed from the Egyptians, who wore jewels and ornamental trinkets on the forehead and arm, inscribed with certain words and sentences, as amulets to protect them from danger.<sup>69</sup> These, it has been conjectured, Moses intended to supersede by substituting sentences of the law; and so, the Hebrews understood him, for they have always considered the wearing of the Tephilim, or frontlets, a permanent obligation.<sup>70</sup> The form was as follows: Four pieces of parchment, inscribed, the first with Exod. 13:2-10; the second with Exod. 13:11-16; the third with Deut. 6:1-8; and the fourth with Deut. 11:18-21,

were enclosed in a square case or box of tough skin, on the side of which was placed the Hebrew letter (shin), and bound round the forehead with a thong or ribbon.<sup>71</sup> When designed for the arms, those four texts were written on one slip of parchment, which, as well as the ink, was carefully prepared for the purpose.<sup>72</sup> With regard to the other usage supposed to be alluded to, the ancient Egyptians had the lintels and imposts of their doors and gates inscribed with sentences indicative of a favorable omen (Wilkinson);<sup>73</sup> and this is still the case, for in Egypt and other Mohammedan countries, the front doors of houses (in Cairo, for instance) are painted red, white, and green, bearing conspicuously inscribed upon them such sentences from the Koran, as "God is the Creator," "God is one, and Mohammed is his prophet."<sup>74</sup> Moses designed to turn this ancient and favorite custom to a better account and ordered that, instead of the former superstitious inscriptions, there should be written the words of God, persuading, and enjoining the people to hold the laws in perpetual remembrance that God is one.<sup>75</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The exegetical approach to Deut. 6:4-13 has revealed that the Old Testament concept of education was centered on a covenantal relationship that Israel had with Yahweh. Teaching was for the purpose of promulgating Israel's knowledge of a monotheistic religion and loving

service of the creator. Thus, to teach was not optional but was essential to the life and praxis of Israel.<sup>76</sup>

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