



# MULTIPLYING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Study Notes by Thomas Hale

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## Deuteronomy 6:6-8

6 And these words which I am commanding you this day shall be [first] in your [own] minds and hearts; [then] 7 You shall whet and sharpen them so as to make them penetrate, and teach and impress them diligently upon the [minds and] hearts of your children, 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. 8 And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets (forehead bands) between your eyes. The Amplified Bible. The Lockman Foundation, 1987, p. Dt 6:6-8.

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### COMMENTARIES

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*Merrill, Eugene H. "Deuteronomy." CSB Study Bible: Notes, edited by Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax, Holman Bible Publishers, 2017, p. 275.*

6:6 The Shema must be more than a mere abstraction: it must first be deeply ingrained in the heart (that is, the mind; v. 5) and then put into action.

6:7 The old adage that "repetition aids learning" is an ancient one as this verse attests. Parents must repeat the words of the Shema and the rest of God's instruction to their children and not in a hit-or-miss manner. There must be strong intentionality that issues in constant instruction by word and deed about devotion to God. By a figure of speech (merism) Moses described the unremitting process of education by speaking in terms of opposites. To sit and to walk suggest being at rest and being active, that is, in any situation. To lie down and to get up naturally call to mind nighttime and daytime, that is, all the time. The kind of love God requires is one that is full time and under every circumstance. Children must therefore be taught to love him in the same way.

6:8 Though the command to bind the commandments is most likely figurative language, such practices were taken literally as early as the first century BC, and remain part of contemporary conservative Jewish custom when phylacteries are worn.

*Barker, Kenneth L., and John R. Kohlenberger III. Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition: Old Testament). Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, p. 247.*

6-9 The people were not to concern themselves only with their own attitudes toward the Lord but were to impress them on their children as well. They were to talk about God's commands always, whether at home or on the road. Since in Ex 13:9-16 the consecration of the firstborn is said to be "like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips" (v.9), it would seem that here also the tying of these words as symbols on their hands and binding them on their foreheads and writing them on their doorframes and gateposts should be taken metaphorically or spiritually rather than physically. The symbols drew attention to the injunctions in vv.5-7.

*Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. Commentary on the Old Testament. Hendrickson, 1996, p. 885.*

Deut. 6:6ff. But for the love of God to be of the right kind, the commandments of God must be laid to heart, and be the constant subject of thought and conversation. "Upon thine heart:" i.e., the commandments of God were to be an affair of the heart, and not merely of the memory (cf. Deut. 11:18). They were to be enforced upon the children, talked of at home and by the way, in the evening on lying down and in the morning on rising up, i.e., everywhere and at all times; they were to be bound upon the hand for a sign, and worn as bands (frontlets) between the eyes (see at Ex. 13:16). As these words are figurative, and denote an undeviating observance of the divine commands, so also the commandment which follows, viz., to write the words upon the door-posts of the house, and also upon the gates, are to be understood spiritually; and the literal fulfilment of such a command could only be a praiseworthy custom or well-pleasing to God when resorted to as the means of keeping the commandments of God constantly before the eye. The precept itself, however, presupposes the existence of this custom, which is not only met with in the Mahometan countries of the East at the present day (cf. A. Russell, *Naturgesch. v. Aleppo*, i. p. 36; Lane, *Sitten u. Gebr. i. pp. 6, 13, ii. p. 71*), but was also a common custom in ancient Egypt (cf. Wilkinson, *Manners and Customs*, vol. ii. p. 102).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The Jewish custom of the *Medusah* is nothing but a formal and outward observance founded upon this command. It consists in writing the words of Deut. 6:4-9 and 11:13-20 upon a piece of parchment, which is then placed upon the top of the doorway of houses and rooms, enclosed in a wooden box; this box they touch with the finger and then kiss the finger on going either out or in. S. Buxtorf, *Synag. Jud.* pp. 582ff.; and Bodenschatz. *Kirchl. Verfassung der Juden*, iv. pp. 19ff.

*McConville, J. Gordon. "Deuteronomy." New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition, edited by D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed., Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, p. 207.*

6:1-9 Passing on the teaching. Moses then moved on to the teaching which the Lord had given him for Israel in addition to the Ten Commandments, or as further explanation of them. In introducing this teaching he reminds the people again that these commandments are the way to life, reaching into the far future (2c). This long view raised once more the need for the teaching to be passed on—hence the phrase you, your children and their children after you (2). The vision of Israel in the land (3) is one of large numbers (fulfilling the promise to Abraham, Gn. 15:5), and of plenty (fulfilling a promise made to Moses at his call, Ex. 3:17).

The next passage has become a central prayer in Judaism (called the Shema, Hear, after its opening word), because it expresses in so few words the most important ideas in OT religion. First, the Lord alone is God of Israel.

To all intents and purposes he is the only God, since his power extends to all nations (32:8-9). Israel must worship him alone. Secondly, Israel itself is a unity. In Hebrew the words you and your in this passage (as often in Deuteronomy) are the words used when speaking to a single individual (the old 'thou' and 'thy' forms in English). The people's oneness includes both those who then stood before Moses and all the generations to come. This means that they must worship and obey as one, and allow no major divisions among them (see below on slavery, 15:12-18). It is also the reason why they must educate each new generation in the truth about God and themselves (7).

Thirdly, it is not enough for God's people simply to go through certain motions in their life and worship. Rather, they must truly love God, and devote their whole lives to him (5). The phrase with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength is a way of saying the whole person. The biblical idea of the heart covers our ideas of the will and the mind, so when Jesus recalled this passage in slightly different words he is still giving its essential meaning (Mt. 22:37; Mk. 12:30). True godliness means that all our abilities, as well as all we possess, are given to God.

The words of God are to be ever before his people (6-9), part of the routines of life, and of every normal human activity. This is not a religion for the Sabbath (or Sundays) only. God has something to say about every aspect of life and every decision that human beings can make. That is the point of the many kinds of regulations which we meet from ch. 12 onwards; together they express God's rule over the whole life of the people, individually and together—even though we live in a different time and place, we are obliged to work at making them apply to ourselves. Whether the instructions in vs 8-9 were meant to be taken literally or figuratively is hard to tell; the crucial point is that God's words should be upon your hearts (6). Those who love God will want to keep his commandments (Jn. 14:15).

Coakley, James F. "Deuteronomy." *The Moody Bible Commentary*, edited by Michael A. Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, Moody Publishers, 2014, p. 278.

6:6-9. Moses stated that these divine instructions were to be on your heart. Since "heart" refers more to the mind and intellect than to one's emotions, the Israelites were to meditate and reflect on these commandments, as Jos 1:8 stressed later. These were to be taught diligently to their children, not in the sense of a formalized education, but throughout the everyday common experiences of life: when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. The command to bind them as a sign on your hand and ... as frontals on your forehead (v. 8) designates that God's instructions were to be constant reminders to guide all their actions (suggested by "hand") as well as how they viewed the world (suggested by "forehead"). They were also to be written on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, meaning that God's laws were to be obeyed in the home ("doorposts") and in the greater community ("gates"). Although later Judaism later took these commands literally in the use of phylacteries (Mt 23:5) and mezuzoth (Dt 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 written on miniature scrolls, placed in small cases, and affixed to a home's doorposts), it is better to understand these injunctions as to be taken figuratively.

***Brown, Raymond. The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone. Edited by J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, Inter-Varsity Press, 1993, pp. 97-99.***

Moreover, this love for God was not to be a secretive devotion, a purely private relationship which did not concern others. From the start it was to involve the element of public confession as well as personal allegiance.

First, this loving devotion to the one Lord must be shared in the home. These God-given truths must not only be taught by Moses but also by every parent in Israel (7), so that children and grandchildren would learn and keep all his decrees and commands (2). Parents were to impress this word on their children's minds and make it the subject of natural everyday conversation within family life.<sup>8</sup> There is a danger in modern Christian homes that either or both parents can be so fervently absorbed in 'the Lord's work' (often among children or young people) that the spiritual welfare of their own children can be seriously neglected.

It has been wisely said that 'the family that prays together stays together'. In earlier generations family worship was an important aspect of spiritual devotion. Before or immediately after a meal, parents and children met together for a reading from God's word, a brief application of its message, and prayer for the Lord's guidance and help in matters of everyday family concern. It presented a regular opportunity for teaching, the sharing of news, mutual encouragement and united dependence on God. The pressures of contemporary life make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for many families to eat together at any one time in the day but, in order to obey God and apply these verses to our own home-life, every Christian parent should strive for some opportunity to gather the family together for brief biblical exposition and prayer.

Additionally, this love for God and his word must be shared in the community. Displaying the truth on their doorposts and gates makes it unmistakably clear to their neighbours that this family is committed to God's unchanging yet relevant word. They tell everybody where the household stands. The instructions about carrying the word on the hand and forehead are, by contrast, more personal. They testify to where the individual stands—the hand as the symbol of personal action and commitment; the forehead as symbolizing personal direction and deliberate intent.

It is possible that the words about frontlets and doorposts were intended to be taken metaphorically to indicate that the 'covenant demands were to be the central and absorbing feature' (Thompson) of their entire life. Some Jews, however, came to interpret the saying literally, prescribing the use of phylacteries secured around the forehead during morning prayer, and mezuzahs, small boxes containing a tiny parchment with texts from Exodus and Deuteronomy, which were fixed to doorposts. For many devout households, the mezuzah (the word means 'doorpost') must have served as a timely reminder of every family's need to love and obey God, but in the first century some were using phylacteries as a religious form of self-display, 'done for men to see', a practice criticized by Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

In our very different kind of society, there is still need for Christians to give their neighbours the opportunity to learn something about our personal faith. With an ever-increasing number of people in our communities who never attend a local church, many believers are making more imaginative use of their homes for friendly hospitality, coffee mornings, informal occasions for neighbours to meet a Christian speaker so that those who live around them are not ignorant of the gospel and, in a relaxed context, are able to share their doubts and uncertainties in an informed biblical discussion about life's greatest themes.

8 For an exposition of the Hebrew family as 'a vehicle of continuity for the faith, history and traditions of Israel', and for its didactic and catechetical function within the life of God's people, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, pp. 81-84.

***Andrews, Stephen J., and Robert D. Bergen. Deuteronomy. B&H Publishing Group, 2009, p. 86.***

6:6. Spiritual zeal is above all to be personal. God's commandments are not to be treated as a listing of the acts we perform but as a description of who we are. His truth is to be placed upon the hearts of his people. Those who would regard the Old Testament as nothing but a collection of rules have missed the point of it. God's covenant with Israel was not to be merely enforced externally through the imposition of penalties for its violation; God insisted that Israel's faith be essentially a matter of the heart.

6:7. God's commands were not, in the Israelite economy, the property of royalty or the elite. They were true of everyone and for everyone, even the children of those who were entering into the covenant. Godly parents would impress God's commandments upon the inward parts of each successive generation. Here the text uses a word that is often used to describe the sharpening of a

knife upon a whetstone. Children are to be sharpened as willing instruments for God as they grow old.

Deuteronomy knows nothing of the modern folly that suggests that religion be presented in an atmosphere of neutrality and that children be presented with all the options and left to decide for themselves the direction of their spiritual lives. The biblical perspective on the spiritual training of children insists that children already possess a direction when they are born. Unfortunately, that slant is sure to destroy them if left unchecked. Wise parents give their children the added benefit of hearing the truth from the very beginning, so that their wayward tendencies can be brought under control early on.

No opportunity to engage in spiritual training should be lost, whether formal (talk about them) or informal (when you walk along the road), whether late (when you lie down) or early (when you get up). The literary device of using two extremes (high, low; cold, hot; up, down) to represent everything in between (sometimes known as a merism) is a common convention in the Old Testament (cp., e.g., Ps. 139:2-5).