

# Exegetical Notes on Deuteronomy 6:1-9

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The reading from the Old Testament which is appointed to the Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost in Series B of Lutheran Worship consists in the initial nine verses of Deuteronomy 6. (The exegesis of these verses below is, in answer to several enquiries, in no way designed to promote the use in the main service of the week of the three-year series provided in Lutheran Worship nor of any other modern selections from the gospels and epistles in such a context. This exegete, on the contrary, would continue to urge, on various grounds, fidelity to the pericopal tradition inherited from the ancient church by the church of the reformation and modified only slightly by the Blessed Reformer of the Church, if one is speaking specifically of the gospels and epistles to be read in the main (Eucharistic) service of the week. No comparable series of readings, on the other hand, from the Old Testament was either handed down from the ancient church or bestowed on us by the Blessed Reformer; nor, indeed, is there such a program of readings from the New Testament to be used in all the possible additional offices of any given week. In such cases, therefore, even such a traditionalist as this exegete is able, with consistency, to make use of any pericope drawn from the region of Holy Scripture desired.)

## THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY SETTING

The historical and literary observations which follow assume the auctorial integrity of the Book of Deuteronomy and, indeed, of the Pentateuch as a whole which this exegete has defended elsewhere (especially in *Isagogical Notes on the Pentateuch*). The Book of Deuteronomy is called in addition, quite correctly, the Fifth Book of Moses. St. Moses, the Prophet Primarius of the Old Testament, delivered orally the various discourses which comprise the book and composed the book itself, as well as including it in a final edition of the Pentateuch, in Shebat (corresponding to late January and early February) of the year 1406 B.C. For all these events took place between "the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month" (Deuteronomy 1:3) and at least "thirty days" (34:8) before the seventh day of Nisan (March-April), considering Joshua 1:11 and 4:19.

The place of the composition of the Book of Deuteronomy, as the locale of the preaching of all the discourses within it, was the plain of Moab across the River Jordan from Jericho (chapters 1: 1-5; 4:46; and 34: 1-8). The original audience, in a general way, was the second generation of the nation of Israel, all of whom (with two exceptions only) had been, if yet born, under the age of twenty years at the time of the rebellion of Israel at Kadesh-Barnea some thirty- seven and a half years previously (Numbers 14: 27-38). The occasion of the book (as of its oral precedents) was the imminence of the entrance of Israel into Canaan, and, among many additional historical circumstances of importance, the one weighing most heavily on the minds of the original addressees would surely have been the imminence, already assured, of the death of the Prophet Moses himself.

The purpose of the Book of Deuteronomy, as already of the discourses collected therein, was to prepare the people from whom the Savior of the world was to come for the occupation of the land in which she was to live as a distinct nation until His coming. The theme, correspondingly,

may be stated as follows: God promised Israel political security and economic prosperity in Palestine so long as she should prove faithful to Him (as the true visible church of the age) and threatened to reject Israel if she should prove unfaithful to Him.

The Book of Deuteronomy consists in seven discourses which are tied together by small pieces of historical narrative. The second discursive section (chapters 4:41-26:19) constitutes by far the most lengthy of these seven portions. A description, firstly, of the circumstances introduces the discourse itself in chapters 4:41-5:1a, beginning in verses 41-43 with the designation of the cities of refuge in Transjordan.

There follows, then, by far the longest continuous portion of the section -- and by far the longest discourse in the Book of Deuteronomy -- which is to say the sermon comprising chapters 5:1b-26:19. This sermon of some twenty-two chapters consists in four chief parts. Following (1.) a restatement of the nature of the national berith (Deuteronomy 5:1b-3) come (2.) a recapitulation of the promulgation of the decalogue (Deuteronomy 5: 4-22) and (3.) a restatement of the various laws binding upon Israel by virtue of the national berith (chapters 5:23-26:15) before, finally, (4.) a concluding call to faithfulness to the God of Israel (Deuteronomy 26: 16-19).

In the third section of the sermon (chapters 5:23-26:15) provisions for the mediation of the founding legislation of Israel by Moses (Deuteronomy 5: 23-33) precede legislation which principally serves to inculcate devotion to the One True God (chapters 6:1-18:22), beginning with the basic command to love God above all, in the sixth of the chapters into which the Book of Deuteronomy has come to be divided in modern times. Deuteronomy 6 itself, then, consists in, firstly, an introduction (verses 1-3); then, secondly, the basic injunction with pedagogical implications in the foundation of the Great Shema (verses 4-9), and, thirdly, a reiteration of the motivations involved (verses 10-25).

The following basic outline of the second discursive section (chapters 4:41-26:19) of the Book of Deuteronomy thereby emerges:

A. The Circumstances (4: 41-49)

1. The designation of cities of refuge in Transjordan (4: 41-43)
2. The isagogical characteristics of the discourse (4:44-5:1a)

B. The Sermon (5:1b-26:19)

1. A restatement of the nature of the national berith (5:1b-3)
2. A recapitulation of the promulgation of the decalogue (5: 4- 22)
  1. The circumstances (verses 4-5)
  2. The decalogue (verses 6-21)

C. The circumstances (verse 22)

1. A restatement of the various laws binding upon Israel by virtue of the national berith (5:23-26:15)

1. Provisions for the mediation of this legislation by Moses (5: 23-33)
2. Legislation principally inculcating devotion to the One True God (chapters (6:1-18:22)
  1. The basic command to love God above all (6: 1-25)
  2. An introduction (verses 1-3)
  3. The basic injunction with pedagogical implications in the foundation of "Great Shema" (verses 4-9)
  4. A reiteration of the motivations involved (verses 10-25)
1. A variety of subsidiary commandments (7:1-18:22)
2. Legislation principally inculcating the treating of others in a God-pleasing way (19:1-25:19)
3. Concluding legislation (26: 1-15)
  1. A call to faithfulness to the God of Israel (26: 16-19)

A more detailed outline of the second sermon of Deuteronomy may be found in the exegete's Isagogical Notes on the Pentateuch.

### **A LITERAL TRANSLATION AND COMMENTS**

1. So, then, this is the mandate -- the statutes and the judgments -- which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you to act accordingly in the land whither ye are going over to inherit it.

The phrase "so, then" in the translation above represents a waw, necessarily weak, prefixed to the demonstrative pronoun introducing a new clause and, indeed, the whole new homiletical section indicated in the outline delineated above. The use of the waw in such a position is always disjunctive in some way, but here is specifically a waw of logical consequence, indicating the transition from the preceding review of the history of Israel (and especially the instruction by the Lord of Moses himself) to his contemporary exhortation to Israel on the basis of this historical background.

The demonstrative pronoun zo'th (rendered as "this" in the translation above) refers, then, to the material which follows in Deuteronomy 6 and, indeed, more generally, in chapters 6:1-26:15 as a whole.

The significance here of mitzwah in relation to "statutes" (huqqim) and "judgments" (mishpatim) must be understood, above all, on the basis of (1.) the two verses which introduce the circumstances of the sermon of which 6:1 now begins the second section (4: 44-45a), (2.) the verse which begins the sermon itself (5:1), and (3.) the three verses which complete the first section of the sermon and provide a bridge to the second portion (5: 28-30 MT; 31-33 EV). Firstly, then, there are already obvious parallels in syntax and vocabulary between the verse before us and verses 44 and 45 of Deuteronomy 4: "Now this is the torah which Moses set before the sons of Israel -- these are the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which Moses spoke to the sons of Israel" (4: 44-45a). Of equal pertinence, secondly, is the verse with which

Moses initiates the sermon which continues in the pericope before us: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the judgments which I am speaking in your ears today, and ye shall learn them and ye shall take care to act upon them" (5:1). Of immediate importance, thirdly, are the words of God to Moses which provide the transition to the passage before us: "I shall speak to thee the whole of the mitzvah -- which is to say [assuming waw explicativum] the statutes and the judgments -- which thou shalt teach them that they may act accordingly in the land which I am giving to them to inherit it. And ye shall take care to act according to that which the LORD, your God, has commanded you. Ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the way which the LORD, your God, has commanded you, in order that ye may live and it may be good for you and ye may prolong days in the land which ye inherit" (5: 28-30 MT; 31-33 EV). Of related relevance is the appendix to the Fourth Commandment: "in order that thy days may grow long and in order that it may be good for thee upon the land which the LORD, thy God, is giving to thee" (5:16b).

The ensuing verses, too, of Deuteronomy 6 pose a crucial question and give a response which must be considered with care. Verse 20 puts the question into the mouth a son of Israel growing up in Palestine in the future: "What are the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which the LORD, our God, has commanded you?" The question, introduced by the interrogative mah, obviously treats the three categories named as aspects of some integrated whole. The response which follows summarizes, firstly, the action of God Himself on behalf of His people (verses 21-23) and only then subjoins the responsibility of Israel: "And so the LORD has commanded us to act upon the whole of these statutes so as to fear the LORD, our God, for good to us ..., to give us life as in this day. Yea, righteousness will it be for us when we take care to act upon the whole of this mitzvah before the LORD, our God, according to that which He has commanded us" (verses 24-25).

It follows, firstly, from a comparison of the foregoing passages that mitzvah is used in the singular in Deuteronomy 6:1 to embrace all those words and actions called "statutes" and "judgments" here, as previously in 5:1 and 5:28 (MT; 5:31 EV) and subsequently in 6:20. It appears, secondly, that the mitzvah of Deuteronomy 6:1, as previously in 5:28 (MT; 5:31 EV) and subsequently in 6:25, is either coterminous with the torah of 4:44 or else requires the addition only of the "testimonies" named there and in 6:20 to constitute such torah. The singular mitzvah is, therefore, rendered, not as "commandment," but rather as "mandate" in the translation above. The connotation of the term emphasizes the nature of the word of God as the canon of His people and, indeed, as the constitution of the nation of Israel according to the terms of the Mosaic Berith which had been established at Sinai. To call the divine word mitzvah, then, is to summon its hearers and readers to faith in all its statements and life in accord with all its injunctions in force at any given time.

2. in order that thou mayest fear the LORD, thy God, so as to take care of the whole of His statutes and His commands which I am commanding thee -- thou and thy son and the son of thy son the whole of the days of thy life -- and in order that thy days may grow long.

In the usual biblical idiom to "fear the LORD" is repentance in the broad sense of the term. For, like repentance, the fear of the Lord begins with the contrition worked in human hearts by the law of God, which makes us rightly fearful of the terrible wrath of God which is justly aroused

by the sins of which we are all guilty. In the *usus loquendi*, however, of the Old Testament *yr'* with God as object and, likewise, such constructs as *yir'ath-YHWH*, proceed to embrace as well the faith in the One True God which is worked in human hearts by the gospel of the Messiah. Such faith is, after all, the real end, ordinarily, to which God is using His law in His "alien work" of convicting and so terrifying sinners. The usage described, indeed, of *yr'* and *yir'ah* is so common that it is to be assumed barring any contrary contextual indications such as the balancing of "fear" with some word more inherently connotative of faith (in places where there is an intention to distinguish between the first and second parts of repentance).

3. And so thou shalt hear, O Israel, and so thou shalt take care to act in such a way that it may be good for thee and in such a way that ye may be exceedingly many, according as the LORD, the God of thy fathers, has bespoken to thee a land flowing with milk and honey.

4. Hear thou, O Israel, the LORD, our God, the LORD is one.

The translation of the verse above follows strictly the syntax of the original Hebrew, since no need of altering the order in any way arises from either the context or the analogy of faith. The translation here likewise includes the copula ("is") but once, since this one insertion is, of course, grammatically necessary, while no others are required by the syntax of the verse itself or, again, the context or the analogy of faith.

Abraham ibn-Ezra interpreted the final four words of the Hebrew Text as "the LORD is our God, the LORD alone." Such a conception, however, would require *lbhado* as opposed to *'echadh* at the end of the verse. J. H. Hertz construed the four words as two independent clauses: "the LORD is our God; the LORD is one." There is, however, as previously stated, no need of any kind to multiply copulas, and we should in such a case have expected a conjunction between such brief clauses to avoid confusion. A much more common rendition is the one found in the Authorized Version and, indeed, in many translations and commentators in various languages: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD, our God, is one LORD." This construction, which sounds reasonable enough to the ear, actually makes little sense when one considers that the second occurrence of "LORD" is again, as the first, a proper noun. If, in other words, the common noun *'adon* were found in this position, one could easily see the significance of "the LORD, our God, is one Lord." In actuality, however, Moses repeats the tetragrammaton, by way of emphasis, as the subject of the nominal clause which *'echadh* concludes as a predicate adjective. By such reiteration in so brief a compass, Moses summons up, as dramatically as could be done, both denotation and connotation of the Divine Name of the God of Israel.

In the Massoretic Text the importance of Deuteronomy 6:4 among the Jews is emphasized by the two letters which are larger than the norm. These are the final letters of the first and last words of the verse, which is to say the *ayin* of *shma'* and the *daleth* of *'echad*. Deuteronomy 6:4 may be called the foundation of the catena of pentateuchal verses which takes its name from the initial word of this verse, the *Shema*, as it is usually spelled in English. The *Shema*, which is regarded as the "heart" of the regular morning and evening services of the synagogue, consists in three paragraphs of the Torah of Moses. (1.) Firstly come verses 4-9 here of Deuteronomy 6, which is regarded as the prime confession of belief in the One True God. (2.) The second paragraph consists in verses 13-22 of Deuteronomy 11, which again urge complete loyalty to the One True

God by means of various promises and threats. (3.) The final verses are 37-41 of Numbers 15, which urge the use of a symbolic fringe on clothing in Israel and mention the liberation from Egypt. Probably already in the days of the visible ministry of our Lord this Shema was enshrined within the same two-fold prologue and epilogue as today in the orthodox synagogue. The catena is preceded by two blessings called the Yotzer and the Ahavah and followed by an attestation of faith and expressions of divine praise (J. H. Hertz, *The Daily Prayer Book*, 108 etc. and 263). All these prayers are considered to antedate the birth of our Lord by an unknown number of centuries.

5. And so thou shalt love the LORD, thy God, with the whole of thy heart and with the whole of thy soul and with the whole of thy strength.

Our Lord Himself quotes this verse in the first two of the gospels. The occasion of Matthew 22:37 (within the context of verses 34-40) and Mark 12:30 (in the context of verses 28-34) was a question posed by one of the Pharisees as the Lord Jesus was teaching in the temple on Tuesday of Holy Week.

Deuteronomy 6:5 is quoted as well in the Gospel of Luke, in connection with the Parable of the Good Samaritan which our Lord told in the autumn of the year 29 A.D. In Luke 10:26, however (within the context of verses 25-37), Deuteronomy 6:5 is quoted, not by our Lord, but by an unnamed "lawyer" in response to a question posed by our Lord as a counter-query to the lawyer's original challenge. The Lord Jesus, nevertheless, certainly endorses the lawyer's conjunction of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 as being a precise summation of the law of God as a whole, even if the lawyer's appreciation of the demands of these words was sadly lacking (verse 28).

This verse is cited four times in the in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, the first two occurring already in the central article of the Apology, which is to say Article IV, the most extensive defense in the Lutheran Confessions of the biblical doctrine of justification. The section on "Love and the Fulfilling of the Law" ("De Dilectione et Impletione Legis"), arguing "that those things which belong peculiarly to the divine Law, i.e., the affections of the heart toward God, which are commanded in the first table, cannot be rendered without the Holy Ghost" [CT, 157a-b], then censures the superficiality of the authors of the Roman Confutation: "They in no way consider the Law that is eternal, and placed far above the sense and intellect of all creatures, ... Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thine heart" [CT, 159a] (Apology IV, 131: "Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo") [CT, 158a; BK, 186, which contains no specification of place]. For this command constitutes, as is stated subsequently in the same article of the Apology, the prime expression of "the doctrine of the Law" of God: "For that is true which the Law says: Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, etc., ... Thou shalt love thy neighbor ... Love is, therefore, the fulfilling of the Law" (Apology IV, 289) [CT, 203a; BK, 217, which contains no specification of place].

Deuteronomy 6:5 reemerges in Articles XII and XXVII of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession in reference to the papistic idea of works of supererogation. Article XII, dealing with penitence, puts the emphasis on the phrase "ex toto corde" [CT, 294a]: "Here men imagine that they can observe the Law of God in such a manner as to be able to do even more than the Law

exacts. But Scripture everywhere exclaims that we are far distant from the perfection which the Law requires. Yet these men imagine that the Law of God has been comprised in outward and civil righteousness; they do not see that it requires true love to God 'with the whole heart,' etc." (Apology XII, 142) [CT, 295a]. Article XXVII, which treats of monastic vows ("De Votis Monasticis"), condemns the notion that monastic life is a work of supererogation which so pleases God that the merits of good monks may even be dispensed to others: "For it is the height of impiety to hold that they satisfy the Decalog in such a way that merits remain, while such precepts as these are accusing all the saints: Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thine heart ..." (Apology XXVII, 25: "Diligas Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo") [CT, 427a BK, 385a, which contains no specification of place, but which, like CT, gives the verbal form here as diligas in place of the diligesfound twice in Article IV]. The German paraphrase of the Apology, actually, expands at length on the comprehensive demands of these words which are called "the First Commandment of God" ("das erste Gebot Gottes: "Du sollst Gott, deinen HErrn, lieben von ganzem Herzen, von Ganzer Seele") [CT, 426b-428b].

6. And so shall these words which I am commanding thee this day be upon thine heart.

This verse stresses the mental preoccupation with the word of God which is already commanded so emphatically in the preceding verse and expounded so concisely in Article XII of the Apology to the Augustana (in the place cited above). Verse 6, then, reiterates the general principle which is then given practical expression in the ensuing verse, both literally (in verse 7) and figuratively (in verses 8 and 9).

7. And so shalt thou teach them incisively to thy sons, and so shalt thou speak concerning them when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest in the way and when thou liest down and when thou risest.

The Blessed Reformer of the Church makes reference to this verse and the ensuing one in his preface to the Large Catechism. There he admonishes us to read the catechism daily for this cause among others: "we should feel sufficiently constrained by the command of God alone, who solemnly enjoins us in Deut. 6 ... that we should always meditate upon His precepts, sitting, walking, standing, lying down, and rising, and have them before our eyes and in our hands as a constant mark and sign. Doubtless He did not so solemnly require and enjoin this without a purpose; but because He knows our danger and need, as well as the constant and furious assaults and temptations of devils, He wishes to warn, equip, and preserve us against them, as with a good armor against their fiery darts and with good medicine against their evil infection" (LC, Preface, 14) [CT, 571a].

8. And so shalt thou bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and so shall they be for frontlets between thine eyes.

This verse and its successor can scarcely indicate any temporal consequence to the action of the preceding verse, which clearly comprehends the whole of human life. Nor, at the same time, can the actions prescribed in verses 8 and 9, if understood literally, be seen as following by logical necessity either from anything in verse 7 or, more ultimately, in verses 5 and 6. Nor, moreover, can the succeeding clauses within verses 8 and 9 be seen as speaking of the logical consequences

of the actions described in the preceding clauses, should these be taken literally. Verses 8 and 9, therefore, of Deuteronomy 6 can only be intended in a figurative sense. All the ingredients, furthermore, of verses 6-9 of Deuteronomy 6 are repeated in but differing order (and switching from the singular to the plural of the second person), in the course of the same sermon by Moses, in verses 18-20 of Deuteronomy 11 (the sequence there corresponding to verses 6, 8, 7, and 9 here). The interconnection of the clauses in Deuteronomy 11 reassures us that the binding of words upon the hand is intended in as equally spiritual a sense as the initial charge there to "lay up these ... words upon your heart and upon your soul" (Deuteronomy 11:18). The injunction, finally, of Deuteronomy 6:8 harks back all the way to Exodus 13 and the exodus from Egypt itself. For there the Lord enjoined the dedication of all firstborn males to Him "for a sign upon thine hand and for frontlets between thine eyes" in verse 16. Already, indeed, in a previous verse, using zikkaron instead of totaphoth, the Lord institutes the Octave of Unleavened Bread "for a sign upon thine hand and for a memorial between thine eyes" (verse 9). In Exodus 13, clearly, the idea contextually is that doing something in accord with the words of God makes the observance a sign upon one's hand to oneself and others (especially, as in all these passages, the posterity of the people of God). By means, then, of its explication, the observance focuses the attention of oneself and others upon itself (in terms of the work and word of God) as much as would the ends of frontlets hanging down between one's eyes.

In intertestamental times, to be sure, the Jews began the wearing of phylacteries on the basis of Deuteronomy 6:8 and its parallels (Deuteronomy 11:18 and verses 9 and 16 of Exodus 13).

There was, to be sure, no sin in the wearing itself of these tepillin (to use the traditional Aramaic word) on the arm and forehead. For wearing such receptacles of portions of Holy Writ could be as useful a reminder to oneself and witness to others of belonging to the Lord as wearing a crucifix around one's neck. Unfortunately, however, some already in the first century imagined that they were more holy than others by wearing such phylacteries, and subsequently the practice was made an obligation binding upon all Jewish men. Our Lord Himself condemns, in addition, the ostentatious legalism which motivated many of the wearers of phylacteries in the time of His visible ministry (Matthew 23:5).

9. And so shalt thou write them upon the doorposts of thine house and on thy gates.

As the Blessed Reformer began his Large Catechism with an appeal to verses 7 and 8, so too, in concluding his discussion of the Decalogue, he returns to the verses of Deuteronomy 6 before us (verses 7-9, in conjunction with Deuteronomy 11:20 and others): "Therefore it is not in vain that it is commanded in the Old Testament to write the Ten Commandments on all walls and corners, even on the garments, not for the sake of merely having them written in these places and making a show of them, as did the Jews, but that we might have our eyes constantly fixed upon them, and have them always in our memory, and that we might practice them in all our actions and ways, and every one make them his daily exercise in all cases, in every business and transaction, as though they were written in every place wherever he would look, yea, wherever he walks or stands. Thus there would be occasion enough, both at home in our own house and abroad with our neighbors, to practise the Ten Commandments, that no one need run far from them" (LC, I, 331-332) [CT, 677a].