THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT

A COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

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Introduction

It may not be possible to underscore the importance of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to Judaism and Christianity. This passage has become known as the Shema, a designation derived from the transliteration of the initial word in Hebrew (meaning “hear, listen to”).\(^1\) It has been called “the fundamental truth of Israel’s religion … and the fundamental duty founded upon it.”\(^2\) Early Judaism essentially turned the Shema into a creed\(^3\) and orthodox Jews to this day recite it twice daily, every morning and evening,\(^4\) with their eyes covered to prevent distraction.\(^5\) Children are taught the Shema as soon as they learn to speak\(^6\) and those on their deathbed want it to be the last words on their lips before departing from this world.\(^7\) This text is the pivot around which the entirety of Deuteronomy revolves and the plumb line by which Israel’s relationship to Yahweh is

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\(^1\) A cursory comparison of commentaries reveals that the term Shema is loosely used to refer to:

\(^2\) S. R. Driver, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1885), 89.


\(^5\) Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 440.


\(^7\) John D. Currid, A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy (Darlington, Eng.: Evangelical Press, 2006), 161.
measured throughout the remainder of the Old Testament. When asked which commandment in the Law was the most important, Jesus quotes from the *Shema* and says that the entire Old Testament depends on this passage and Leviticus 19:18 (Matt 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-31).

The *Shema* appears in the second major discourse in the book of Deuteronomy, in which Moses reminds the Israelites of Yahweh’s expectations for them. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 commences the second section of this address, following the section that contains the Decalogue. An outline of Deuteronomy, expanded around the pericope of interest (in bold), appears below. The commentary that follows is arranged according to this outline.

**Outline of Deuteronomy**

I. General Introduction (Preamble) (1:1-5)

II. Historical Retrospect (1:6–4:49)

III. Exposition of the Covenant Stipulations (5:1–26:19)

A. General Stipulations of the Covenant (5:1–11:32)

1. The Ten Commandments (5:1–6:3)

2. Moses exhorts Israel to tangibly manifest their love for Yahweh (6:4-25)

   i. Yahweh’s most important commandment (6:4-9)

   a. The explanation of the commandment (6:4-5)

      1) The fundamental truth (6:4)

      2) The fundamental response (6:5)

   b. The application of the commandment (6:6-9)

      1) An internal matter (6:6)

      2) A family matter (6:7)

      3) A public matter (6:8-9)

   ii. Yahweh demanded that Israel worship and obey Him exclusively (6:10-19)

   iii. Yahweh demanded that Israel remember past divine activity on their behalf (6:20-25)

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3. The blessings and requirements occasioned by Yahweh’s choice of Israel (7:1-26)
4. The Need for Israel to depend on Yahweh totally (8:1-20)
5. Moses warns Israel against self-righteousness and rebellion (9:1-10:11)
6. Yahweh deserves and demands Israel’s undivided loyalty (10:12–11:32)

B. Specific Stipulations of the Covenant (12:1–26:15)

C. Mutual commitments of covenant renewal (26:16-19)

IV. Covenant Blessings and Curses (27:1–29:1 [Heb 28:69])

V. The Grounds and Need for Covenant Renewal (29:2 [29:1]–30:20)

VI. The Continuity of the Covenant from Moses to Joshua (31:1–34:12)\(^9\)

**a. The Explanation of the Commandment (6:4-5)**

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 are perhaps the most recognizable verses in all of Deuteronomy. These verses contain a statement that requires the fullest response of which human life is capable.\(^{10}\)

1) The Fundamental Truth (6:4)

**Text:**

\[\text{שָמַעְתָּ, יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי אִםֶּהוֹ בֹּשֶׂם ה', אֶלָּהָי, אֶלָּהָי, אֶלָּהָי.} \]

**Translation:** [4] Listen, Israel: Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!\(^{11}\)

**Commentary:**

In the Hebrew, the final letters of the first and last words in this verse are enlarged. There are only a few dozen words in the entire Masoretic Text (hereafter, MT) in which one letter is

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\(^9\) This outline is adapted from Michael A. Grisanti, “Deuteronomy,” in *EBC*, unpublished excerpts from the rev. ed., 9-14. Only the portion in bold has been modified.

\(^{10}\) Moberly, “Interpretation of the Shema,” 126.

\(^{11}\) Unless otherwise noted, all translations are that of the writer.
written larger than the others and two of those instances occur here. Various explanations are given for this, e.g. to warn that the reading must be precise, to call attention to the importance of the Shema, to prevent confusing the Hebrew letter ר with the similar letter ר, which would produce the blasphemous reading ראה (“another”) instead of ראה, and to spell out the word יר (“testimony, witness”), referring to the testimony of faith contained in this passage.

ןמיס ("listen, Israel"). The word יישאר (“Israel”) is a vocative. These instructions are addressed to the nation of Israel. The phrase יישאר (“listen, Israel”) is typical of the rhetorical style that permeates the book (cf. 4:1; 5:1; 6:3, 4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9). These terms typically serve as an important structural signal in Deuteronomy. Here, they denote the beginning of the second section of the second Deuteronomic discourse.

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13 Christensen, WBC, 141.


15 Tigay, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 441.

16 Abudarham, fourteenth-century liturgical commentator (Wertheimer 1963), as referenced by Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy I-II*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 338. If the first letter of the first word and last letter of the last words were enlarged, as one might initially expect, this would spell out the word רות (“demon”). Hence, it was decided to enlarge the last letter of the first word instead (William R. Scott, *A Simplified Guide to BHS: Critical Apparatus, Masora, Accents, Unusual Letters & Other Markings*, 3rd ed. [N. Richland Hills, Tex.: BIBAL Press, 1995], 4).

17 Christensen, WBC, 142.

18 Note the *petuha* at the end of verse 3 and the *seder* at the beginning of verse 4 in the MT. Cf. Block, “How Many Is God?,” 193.
The root שָׁאֲמַה is usually translated “hear” in English Bibles. However, this falls short of what the original language expresses. The Hebrew word carries with it the sense of “obey,” i.e. hearing that leads to obedience\(^\text{19}\) (Hebrew has no other word for “obey”\(^\text{20}\)). Action or response is expected based on what is heard (cf. 5:1; 27:10). Moses is soliciting attention and is anticipating a positive response.\(^\text{21}\) This notion is most accurately conveyed in English as “listen” or “pay attention.”

The verb שָׁאֲמַה (“listen”) is an imperative and sets the verbal tone for the pericope. The following seven wq\(^\text{1}\)q\(^\text{2}\)als in verses 5-9 continue the imperatival force and signify a logical relationship: שָׁאֲמַה ... וְאָרַהְתָּ ... וְשָׁמַעְתָּ ... וְהָעַנְתָּ ... וְהַעֲבַרְתָּ ... וְהַעֲבַרְתָּ ... וְהַעֲבַרְתָּ ... וְהַעֲבַרְתָּ (“listen … love … are to be … school them … explain … tie them … are to be … write them”).\(^\text{22}\) The two uses of לְדַבֵּר (“are to be”) are third person verbs with inanimate objects as their subjects and thus are technically jussives. However, since words cannot be “known by heart” (v. 6) or “a headband on your forehead” (v. 8) on their own accord, even these appeals function imperatively.\(^\text{23}\)

The singular form of the verb is a carryover from verse 2. Moses has been addressing the nation with the second-person plural (cf. 5:1ff.), but in this verse he transitions to the singular.


Some suggest that this might be evidence that verses 2-3 were inserted at a later date. However, because the singular is not consistently preserved (see יְהֵֽוָֽהִי־יְהֹוָֽהִי [“you may multiply greatly”] in v.3, which is second-person plural), it appears that this is not a latter addition, but rather a deliberate shift by the original author to make a point. Others propose that this switch emphasizes the collective or corporate nature of Israel, referring to the people as a whole. This would mean that Moses had been addressing the individuals and now moves his focus to the importance of the nation as a whole fearing and obeying Yahweh. Additionally, reverting back to the plural in verse 3 would imply that the individual who obeys will be multiplied greatly. But individual prosperity for individual obedience seems contrary to the Sinaitic covenant, which promises nation-wide blessing/cursing for nation-wide obedience/disobedience (Lev 26; note the use of the second-person plural throughout the chapter, but especially in vv. 3, 9). More likely, the plural to singular transition is communicating the exact opposite. Moses had been addressing the nation as a whole and now wishes to home in on the individual and get his attention.

ִֽוְּהֵֽוָֽהִי־יְהֹוָֽהִי (“our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!”). Although the remainder of the verse is perhaps the most familiar part of the Shema, there is a lack of consensus as to how it should be translated. Four Hebrew words appear without a verb. Literally they read, “Yahweh our God Yahweh one.” Verbless clauses are not uncommon in Hebrew. In such instances, the verb “to be” is supplied. In this example, the supplied “to be” verb is most


26 Weinfeld, AB, 327.
likely present tense, since this accords with the context. What makes this verse challenging is that the construction is without parallel in the Old Testament and a number of translations are feasible. This leads to debate about where the “to be” verb(s), i.e. “is,” should be placed. Put another way, the question is: Which word(s) is(are) nominative(s) and which word(s) is(are) predicate nominative(s)? That is, which element(s) is(are) the subject(s) and which element(s) is(are) the predicate(s)? Several possibilities exist. The following represent the most common options:

1. “Yahweh our God is one Yahweh.”
2. “Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one.”
3. “Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one.”
4. “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.”

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27 IBHS, 135 (§8.4.2g); Miller calls this, “The most striking example of a verbless predication in the Hebrew Bible, and one that resists any simple resolution” (“Pivotal Issues in Analyzing the Verbless Clause,” in The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches, ed. by Cynthia L. Miller [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999], 4).

28 There are other options, e.g. “Our one God is Yahweh, Yahweh” (Francis I. Andersen, The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch [JBLMS 14; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970], 47; Miller, “The Verbless Clause,” 4-5).


31 E.g. NAU; NET; J. Gerald Janzen, “On the Most Important Word in the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5),” VT 37, no. 3 (1987): 280-300; Merrill, NAC, 162-63 (Merrill somewhat merges this translation with option 2).

32 E.g. NRSV; NLT; Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 76, 438-40; Nelson, OTL, 86, 89-91; A. D. H. Mayes, Deuteronomy, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 175-77; Christensen, WBC, 141-
There are two ways to understand the first colon, יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (lit. “Yahweh our God”).

The first contends that יְהֹוָה (“Yahweh”) and אֱלֹהֵינוּ (“our God”) are both the subject, the latter in apposition to the former, i.e. “Yahweh our God” (see options 1-2 above). The other sees יְהֹוָה (“Yahweh”) as the subject and אֱלֹהֵינוּ (“our God”) as the predicate, i.e. “Yahweh is our God” (see options 3-4 above).

Moberly advances the strongest argument in favor of the first interpretation. He notes that of the 312 times that יְהֹוָה (“Yahweh”) and אֱלֹהֵינוּ (“God”) are juxtaposed in Deuteronomy (in over 300 of those instances, אֱלֹהֵינוּ has a pronominal suffix, e.g. אֱלֹהֵינוּ [“our God”], as in 6:4), אֱלֹהֵינוּ (“God”) is never used as a predicate but always in apposition. When יְהֹוָה (“Yahweh”) is the subject and אֱלֹהֵינוּ (“God”) is the predicate, Deuteronomy adds the article ה (“the”) to אֱלֹהֵינוּ (“God”) and inserts the pronoun הוא (“he”) between the two nouns, i.e. יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הוא (“Yahweh is God”) (4:35, 39; 7:9; cf. 1 Kgs 8:60). Hence, the expression יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ in 6:4 should be translated the same way the other 311 instances in Deuteronomy are translated, as “Yahweh our God.”

42; Grisanti, rev. EBC, 33, 35; McBride, “The Yoke of the Kingdom,” 273-306 (McBride contends the first colon should be translated “Our God is Yahweh”); Block, “How Many is God?,” 193-212 (Block also offers “Yahweh our God” or “Our God is Yahweh” for the first colon and “Yahweh is the only one” or “Yahweh is the one and only” for the second, 201).

33 “Yahweh is One,” 213-14; cf. Weinfeld, AB, 337.
Although Moberly makes an excellent point, his case is not as airtight as it first appears. Block counters with three responses.\(^{34}\) First, the suffixed form \(\text{ם"ל"ר"נ"י"נ"מ"י"נ"מ"י"נ"מ"י"נ"מ"י"נ"מ"י"נ"מ"י"נ"מ"י"נ"מ"י"n}\) ("our God") is already definite and therefore it is morphologically impossible to add the article \(\text{י"ר"נ"י"נ"מ"י"n}\) ("the"). Second, in the majority of the instances where \(\text{י"ר"נ"י"נ"מ"י"n}\) ("Yahweh") and \(\text{י"ר"נ"י"נ"מ"י"n}\) ("God") are juxtaposed, these words occur in verbal clauses, where this phrase serves as either the subject or the object. Deuteronomy 6:4 is a verbless clause and thus the grammatical constructions in most of the 312 passages are not parallel. Third, the syntax of this verse is unique. So even if \(\text{י"ר"נ"י"נ"מ"י"n}\) (lit. "Yahweh, our God") functions appositionally in all of the (few remaining) Deuteronomic passages with parallel grammatical constructions, this does not preclude the possibility that 6:4 is the sole exception.

On the other hand, after an exhaustive study of the verbless clauses in the Pentateuch, Andersen maintains that supplying a "to be" verb in the second colon, \(\text{י"ר"נ"י"n}\) (lit. "Yahweh, one"), is problematic because a number that functions as a predicate precedes rather than follows its subject, i.e. the translation should read "one is Yahweh" rather than "Yahweh is one."\(^{35}\) Instead, he argues that the supplied "is" belongs between the proper noun, i.e. \(\text{י"ר"נ"י"n}\) ("Yahweh"), and the suffixed noun, \(\text{י"ר"נ"י"n}\) ("our God"), with the proper noun as the predicate, i.e. "Our God

\(^{34}\) Block, “How Many is God?,” 197.

\(^{35}\) Andersen, The Hebrew Verbless Clause, 47; cf. 42-45 (rule #3); Miller, “The Verbless Clause,” 4.
is Yahweh” (cf. Isa 33:22). The declaration is not identifying “Yahweh,” but “our God.” It is not trying to answer the question, “Who is Yahweh?” but rather, “Who is our God?”36

However, Andersen overlooks the fact that there are many exceptions to his coined rule, i.e. a number functioning as a predicate precedes its subject.37 Also, as pointed out by Block above, the syntax of the Shema is unique, so this verse could differ from the other verbless clauses in the Pentateuch.

Putting Moberly, Block, and Andersen’s observations together, it seems best to conclude that the likely translation of הָיוָה יָהָה הַיּוֹם is either “Yahweh our God” or “Our God is Yahweh,” though neither translation is required.

Even though there are four (plus) possible renderings of the second colon of the verbless clause in Deuteronomy 6:4, יָהָה הָיוָה הַיּוֹם (lit. “Yahweh one”), the debate really reduces to two alternatives: a statement about Yahweh’s nature or character, e.g. “Yahweh is one,” (generally translations 1-3 from above) or a statement about the Israel’s relationship with Yahweh, e.g. “Yahweh alone,” (generally translation 4 from above).38 The latter is understood as a pledge of allegiance. However, the former can be taken as a declaration of Yahweh’s uniqueness and incomparability, a monotheistic confession (i.e. there is only one God),39 or a reference to Yahweh’s integrity (i.e. His internal consistency and fidelity; the unity between His desire and

39 A monotheistic confession and a pledge of allegiance convey a similar thought. However, the former is a statement about Yahweh whereas the latter is a statement about Israel’s relationship.
action, His intention and execution). The following table maps the translation options to these different possible meanings for a sampling of commentators.

### Different Ways to Understand the Final Clause of Deuteronomy 6:4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “… is one Yahweh”</td>
<td>Dahood</td>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Craigie</td>
<td>Statement about Yahweh’s nature or character</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-3. “… Yahweh is one”</td>
<td>Wright</td>
<td>Monotheism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Merrill</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. “… Yahweh alone”</td>
<td>Tigay</td>
<td>Allegiance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McBride</td>
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<td>Block</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In seeking to unravel the enigma of the second colon, the word יְהַַњ quickly comes to the front and center. This term most commonly expresses the cardinal number, “one.” Many who advocate this meaning in Deuteronomy 6:4 argue that if “alone” had been the intended sense, the

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40 Technically, if the second colon is taken as a statement about Yahweh, there is yet another way it can be understood, i.e. as a declaration of Yahweh’s unitary nature. As opposed to Baal who supposedly had multiple localized manifestations that were worshipped differently at each sanctuary (cf. “Baal of Peor” in Num 25:3; “Baal-berith” in Judg 8:33; etc.), there is one Yahweh who is God of all Israel. This view appears to have once been popular, but moved away from in recent times. While many argue against this interpretation, this writer could only find one modern commentator that supports it: Nelson (OTL, 89).

41 HALOT, 1:30.
text would read לְבָדָה (“alone,” lit. “in his solitude”) instead of לְבָדָה. However, לְבָדָה is an adverb and since the clause in question is verbless, an adverb would be inappropriate in this context. At the same time, even though “alone” or “only” is not the primary definition of לְבָדָה, this word is used elsewhere with this meaning (e.g. Josh 22:20; 2 Sam 7:23 [= 1 Chron 17:21]; 1 Chron 29:1; Job 23:13; 31:15; Song 6:9; Ezek 7:5; Zech 14:9), so it is not unreasonable to translate it this way in the Shema. Moreover, the syntax might favor reading this word as “one.” Based on Andersen’s aforementioned study, if this verbless clauses intended to communicate “Yahweh is one,” it would read either אָהָד לְבָדָה or לְבָדָה אָהָד, rather than לְבָדָה אָהָד (cf. Gen 42:26).

Of those who render the second colon as a statement about Yahweh, there is a lack of discussion about the rationality of its different possible meanings. An affirmation that a person known by a proper name is “one” is odd. A discrete entity is not in danger of being thought of as more than one or less than one. This is likely overlooked because “the Lord” is substituted for

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43 Ehrlich, as referenced Weinfeld, AB, 337-38.


45 Admittedly, the syntax of this verse is unique. So while conclusions about this colon based on Andersen’s rules can be considered likely, they are not required.

46 Andersen, The Hebrew Verbless Clause, 42-45 (rule #3); cf. Block, “How Many Is God?,” 200. Block also addresses syntaxes that would more likely be used to express “integrity,” if that was Moses’ original intent. See the discussion about the Nash Papyrus in the excursus.
the proper name הוהי in English Bibles. The same is also true of understanding this colon as a reference to Yahweh’s integrity. It does not make sense to offer assurance that a person does not have schizophrenic tendencies unless evidence indicates otherwise. What reason would Israel have to believe that Yahweh was internally inconsistent or that His desire did not match His action? If this colon is a statement about the nature or character of Yahweh, it seems most plausible that this is a declaration of Yahweh’s uniqueness and incomparability.

While there is reason to understand this colon as an expression of Yahweh’s uniqueness (cf. Deut 10:17; see also the use of הוהי [“one”] in Song 6:8-9), the context seems to support a different interpretation. In the following verses, Moses exhorts Israel to exclusive allegiance to Yahweh. He calls the people to love Yahweh with unreserved and unqualified love (Deut 6:5). This commitment must be an internal matter (6:6), a family matter (6:7), and a public matter (6:8-9). Devotion to Yahweh is demonstrated in the repudiation of other gods and diligently keeping His commandments (6:13-17). Additionally, Moses concludes his previous speech with reminders that there is no other god besides Yahweh (4:35; 39) and opens this speech with a command to have no gods before Yahweh (5:7). Even Moberly admits, “the rendering ‘Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone’ is more obviously [sic] in keeping with the central concerns of Deuteronomic covenant theology than is a statement about the oneness of Yahweh whose precise sense is not immediately apparent and which is all too easily interpreted in the light of the monotheistic concerns of later periods.”


48 “Yahweh is One,” 211. Elsewhere, Moberly writes, “What ‘YHWH is one’ means must be something that makes appropriate the total and unreserved response of ‘love’ that is immediately specified [in v. 5] … To say
object of Israel’s devotion? Who will the Israelites worship?”—questions that should be answer with a resounding, “Yahweh alone!”

In light of all that has been examined, it seems best to translate אֲלָהוֹתֵי יְהֹוָה יָאָהוּ as either “Yahweh our God, Yahweh alone!” or “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!” The expression reads more like a slogan than prose. It is a cry of allegiance, a pledge to covenant commitment.

It is significant to note that this clause, though bracketed by imperatives, is not itself an imperative. Rather, it is a statement of fact, a declaration or a confession. To be an Israelite, by definition, means to be solely committed to Yahweh.

2) The Fundamental Response (6:5)

Text: אֲלָהוֹתֵי יְהֹוָה יָאָהוּ [5]

Translation: [5] Love Yahweh your God with your entire mind, with your entire being, indeed with your entire capacity.

that YHWH is ‘one’ is not to say something about God that is separable from its human counterpart of ‘love,’ but rather designates Yahweh as the appropriate recipient of unreserved ‘love’” (“Interpretation of the Shema,” 132-33).

49 Block, “How Many Is God?,” 211.


51 In some sense, this verse is a positive expression of the first two commandments (cf. 5:7-10) (J. A. Thompson, Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary, TOTC [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1974], 121) and the epitome of the first half of the Decalogue (5:6-15) (John Cumming, Book of Deuteronomy [Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1982], 83).
Commentary:

This command to love Yahweh does not occur in isolation, but is connected to the relationship that is expressed in the previous verse. For someone who understands that he is to be exclusively devoted to Yahweh, the proper response is unqualified love for Him.

לְאָהָבֵךְ אֶלֹהֶיךָ (“love Yahweh your God”). The verb אָהֵב (“love”) and its antonym, לְנָהָס (“hate”), are often used to describe family relationships. These terms express emotions towards people or things. The former indicates affection and yearning to draw near while the latter indicates aversion and desire to separate or keep distant. In addition to simply feeling something, these terms often denote doing something as well, i.e. acting in a way that is or is not useful, beneficial, or helpful to another.

In a covenant context, as is Deuteronomy, אָהֵב (“love”) and לְנָהָס (“hate”) do not necessarily signify emotion (though this is not excluded), but rather commitment or lack thereof, i.e. to choose or to reject (cf. Deut 7:7-9). The root אָהֵב (“love”) is “an expression of covenant

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52 It might be tempting to construe the verbless clause in verse 4b by itself as the basis for verse 5, i.e. “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone. Therefore, love Yahweh your God…” However, this would interrupt the string of wqatal verbs in verses 5-9 that continue the force of the imperative המַגְּנָה (“listen”) in verse 4. Instead of an imperatival force, one would expect a future aspect, i.e. “will love” (IBHS, 534-35 [§32.2.4]; cf. Gen 20:11; Ruth 3:9).

53 Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 66.

54 Van Groningen, לְנָהָס,” in TWOT, 2:880.

55 Based on texts such as 2 Chronicles 19:2, where אָהֵב is parallel to הָיִיר (“help”), and 26:10, where translating כִּי לֵבָנָה אֲלָמָה לְרָעָה (“for he loved the soil”) would anachronistically import a 19th century English expression into the text, Malamat argues that אָהֵב often denotes “the act of being useful and beneficial to its object” (“Love Your Neighbor as Yourself: What it Really Means.” Biblical Archeology Review [July/August, 1990]: 51).

56 Merrill, NAC, 148, cf. 75-76, 163-64.
commitment demonstrated in action,” and “seeks the well-being and the pleasure of one’s covenant partner, often without regard for oneself.”57 Yahweh Himself demonstrates this kind of love towards Israel, as recounted throughout Deuteronomy. Because Yahweh loves the Israelites, He chose them (4:37; 10:15), brought them out of Egypt and redeemed them from slavery (4:37; 7:8), turned Balaam’s curse into a blessing for them (23:5[6]), and will bless them and multiply their families and animals (7:13). For the vassal or servant of the covenant, i.e. the nation of Israel in this context, to love the suzerain or overlord, i.e. Yahweh, is to obey and to act loyally towards Him (cf. 5:10; 11:1, 22; 19:9; 30:16).58 This means that the stipulations provided in Deuteronomy are specific and concrete ways that the people of Israel can express their love towards Yahweh.59 The love Israel is commanded to have for Yahweh is the appropriate counterpart of the love Yahweh has demonstrated to Israel.60

The command to love Yahweh does not contradict the exhortation to fear Yahweh that closes the previous section (cf. v.2). Rather, love and fear are two aspects of one relationship,61 both producing the same practical effect: obedience.62 This is why Moses clusters his appeals to love Yahweh with pleas to fear Him (10:12; 13:3-4), hold fast to Him (11:22; 13:3-4; 30:20),

57 Block, “How Many is God?,” 201.


59 McConville, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, 147.


61 Ridderbos, Bible Student’s Commentary, 114.

62 Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 77. Tigay also notes that that Deuteronomy is the first book in the Torah to speak of loving Yahweh. The previous books emphasize fearing Yahweh, whereas Deuteronomy emphasizes both loving and fearing Yahweh.


It is with your entire mind, with your entire being, indeed with your entire capacity. This is a three-part adverbial phrase modifying the clause contained in the first half of the verse. It qualifies the love Israel is to have for Yahweh. The closest it comes is in Nahum 2:8, where it refers to handmaids who are mourning and beating on their “chests.” Otherwise, this word is employed to express virtually every immaterial function of human beings, though it frequently signifies the mind, will, emotions, or the inner man in general. By a large majority, it primarily refers to the mind as the seat of thinking and reason, and can be thought of as one’s “mission-control center” (e.g. Deut 8:5; Josh 23:14; Job 12:3; Prov 15:28; Isa 6:9-10). Hebrew has no other word for “mind.”

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64 The synonym בָּל ("heart, mind, will, emotions, inner man") refers to a blood-pumping organ perhaps 9 times out of 600 occurrences (Exod 28:29; 1 Sam 25:37; 2 Sam 18:14; 2 Kgs 9:24; Job 41:24[16]; Ps 38:10[11]; 84:3; Jer 4:19; Hos 13:8). However, even several of these instances could refer to “chest.” Because בָּל and בֵּית are so similar and most lexicons list them together under one entry, the remaining comments in this paragraph pertain to both of these words.

65 Andrew Bowling, “בֵּית,” in TWOT, 1:466. The only exception to this is about 8 times when בֵּית is employed metaphorically to refer to “inside, middle” of something (e.g. “in the heart of the sea(s)” in Exod 15:8; Ps 46:2[3]; Prov 23:34; 3x Ezek 27:25-27; 28:8; and “to the heart of the heavens” in Deut 4:11).


"your being"). Although *nephesh* is often translated “soul” in English Bibles, this is rarely its meaning.\(^{68}\) It literally refers to the breath of a living creature and as such can signify the living being itself (e.g. Gen 1:20, 24; 2:7; Lev 4:2) or life in general (e.g. Gen 9:5; 2 Sam 23:17).\(^{69}\) This term can also be used more concretely to denote neck or throat (Jon 2:5[6]; Ps 69:1[2]) or more figuratively to denote desire or appetite (Prov 23:2; Hos 4:8).\(^{70}\) In legal contexts, as is the situation in Deuteronomy, *nephesh* most often expresses the whole inner self (cf. Ps 103:1, where *nephesh* is further explained as *hakmah* [“all that is within me”]).\(^{71}\)

"your capacity"). The word *nafša* is typically used adverbially, denoting grades of degree,\(^{72}\) to mean “very, exceedingly, greatly.”\(^{73}\) In this context, it functions as a noun, making it somewhat difficult to translate in a way that does not flatten its original nuance. It connotes “very-muchness,”\(^{74}\) “capability,”\(^{75}\) and “the superlative degree of total commitment.”\(^{76}\) It is not uncommon to find the requirement to love Yahweh modified by the first two terms, ("with your entire mind and with your entire being"), but this is the

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\(^{68}\) D. A. Fredericks, "*nephesh,*" in *NIDOTTE*, 3:133.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.


\(^{71}\) Wright, New International Biblical Commentary, 99.

\(^{72}\) *IBHS*, 659 (§39.3.1i).

\(^{73}\) *HALOT*, 2:538.

\(^{74}\) Wright, New International Biblical Commentary, 99.

\(^{75}\) Nelson, OTL, 86.

\(^{76}\) McBride, “The Yoke of the Kingdom,” 304.
first time the third term is added to the formula. The additional term seems to convey the strongest possible emphasis.\textsuperscript{77} The only other verse in the Old Testament where רָאָה is employed as a noun is 2 Kings 23:5, which is also the only other verse in the Old Testament where this triadic formula recurs. Here, King Josiah is said to turn to Yahweh with \textit{Shema}-like devotion, a devotion that was unmatched by any other Israelite king.

בֵּן ("with entire"). The word unit בֵּן ("with entire"), which is prefixed by a ב- conjunction in the latter two occurrences, precedes each of the above terms, forming three distinct construct chains. Each construct chain expresses one compound idea. These are attributive or descriptive chains, where the substantive qualifier in the construct state, בֵּן ("all, whole"), conveys the measure or number of the noun in the absolute state, i.e. the term from above.\textsuperscript{78} The command is to love Yahweh with every single aspect of one’s mind, being, and capacity. One commentator refers to בֵּן as “the stress in our sentence.”\textsuperscript{79}

Putting all these pieces together, the three-part adverbial phrase has been interpreted in multiple ways. Rabbinic tradition, prompted by the observation that love requires action and not simply emotion, understands this phrase as designating ways to express love towards Yahweh. Thus each part is given a specific behavior application, i.e. בֵּן (“mind”) is taken as "inclinations" (i.e. undivided loyalty), בֵּן (“being”) is taken as “readiness to sacrifice life,” and

\textsuperscript{77} Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 77.


\textsuperscript{79} Hirsch, \textit{Deuteronomy}, 93.
(`capacity`) is taken as “wealth, possessions.” On the other hand, early Christian exegesis, primarily working with Greek translations of the Hebrew terms, tended to construe these terms as elements or attributes of personality with which to love Yahweh, the sum of the parts adding up to the whole inner man (thus supporting a trichotomous view of humanity as opposed to a dichotomous view). Another alternative is that this phrase delineates the intensity of love for Yahweh that is demanded. This would mean that though the three terms are syntactically coordinate, “semantically they are concentric, forming a sort of (prosaic) climactic parallelism.” Clearly this third view best accords with the context, which is speaking of neither modes of expressing love nor Greek psychology, but of absolute allegiance to Yahweh. Moses heaps up relatively synonymous terms, progressing from one’s mind to one’s being to one’s capacity, to accentuate the fervency of this devotion.

**Excursus: Zechariah, the Nash Papyrus, the LXX, and the Gospels**

There are two issues for consideration in this excursus. The first is Deuteronomy 6:4 as it appears in Zechariah, the Nash Papyrus, the LXX, and the Gospel of Mark. The second is Deuteronomy 6:5 as it appears in the Synoptic Gospels.

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80 Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 77. This was also the view of Calvin (*Sermons*, 272, as referenced by Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 103).


83 Grisanti, rev. *EBC*, 34. This triadic formula may also express the superlative degree, just as *יִשְׁנֶשׁ* ("iniquity, sin, and transgression") may refer to “every conceivable sin” in Exodus 34:7 (Block, “How Many Is God?,” 204, n42).
Deuteronomy 6:4

Deuteronomy 6:4 is found in Zechariah, the Nash Papyrus, the LXX, and the Gospel of Mark. There should be a way to reconcile any plausible interpretation of the MT’s verbless clause with all of these occurrences. Is such the case for the translation proposed in this paper, “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!” (see the commentary under v. 4)?

Almost 1,000 years after it was written, there is an echo of the Shema in Zechariah 14:9. Here, the verbless clause has been transformed into a verbal clause and reads, “And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one” (NAU, bold added). This declaration stresses exclusive worship of Yahweh, the sole King over the world (cf. 13:2). Interestingly, according to this verse, what is true of Israel in Deuteronomy will be true of all humanity in the future.

In the Nash Papyrus, a second-century B.C. liturgical Hebrew text, and the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament during the time of Jesus, required adjustments to Deuteronomy 6:4 were made so that both texts clearly read “Yahweh is one.” However, both

84 Mark J. Boda, Haggai, Zechariah. The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 526.

85 Ibid. Moberly is so intent on demonstrating that דחא (“one, alone”) is the predicate of יהוה (“Yahweh”) that he overlooks what the verse is actually saying (“Yahweh is One,” 214-15). If דחא (“one, alone”) is used predicatively in Deuteronomy 6:4, the sense of “Yahweh alone” can be maintained in the same way that it is in the NAU translation of Zechariah 14:9, as “Yahweh is the only one” or “Yahweh is the one and only.”

86 Janzen tries to circumvent the obvious meaning of the verse by arguing that its two lines fall in different sections of the chapter (“The Most Important Word in the Shema,” 297-98). However, there is no reason to alter the verse divisions of the MT when the natural reading produces a plausible translation such as the case here.

87 McBride, “The Yoke of the Kingdom,” 275-76.

88 The Nash Papyrus adds a ה (“he”) after יהוה (“Yahweh”) so that the text reads, יהוה יהוה יהוה ("Yahweh is one"), rather than יהוה יהוה יהוה. The LXX reads, "Ακοῦ, Ἰσραήλ: Κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν Κύριος εἶς ἑστίν ("Listen, Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" or "Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one").
the Nash Papyrus and the LXX also preface this verse with a long liturgical addition patterned after Deuteronomy 4:45 and 6:1, demonstrating that neither text necessarily provides the original reading. Furthermore, no one argues that these readings are more preferable than the MT. On the other hand, the fact that verse 8 was interpreted literally during this same time period likely shows that verse 4 was already prone to misinterpretation (see the commentary under vv. 8-9).

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4-5 when He is asked which commandment in the Law is the most important (Mark 12:28-30). In doing so, He cites verse 4 verbatim from the LXX, lending support to the notion that the Septuagintal reading is correct. But this should not be surprising since the LXX was written in the lingua franca of the time and frequently used by New Testament writers when referencing Old Testament texts. Also, the verbless clause was probably not essential to the point Jesus was making (remember, the verbless clause is not a command; cf. Matt 22:35-37, which only quotes Deut 6:5). Moreover, the context in Mark clarifies that Deuteronomy 6:4 should be understood as an assertion of allegiance. After Jesus cites the Shema, the scribe who asked the question repeats Deuteronomy 6:4 and connects it with Deuteronomy 4:32, “and there is no one else besides Him” (Mark 12:32, NAU), to which Jesus perceives that “he had answered intelligently” (Mark 12:34, NAU).

89 Weinfeld, AB, 337.
81 There are some contextual differences between the three gospel accounts that quote the Shema (Matt 22:37; Mark 12:29-30; Luke 10:27). The question that Jesus is addressing in Matthew and Mark centers on the greatest commandment in the Law, whereas in Luke the topic is inheriting eternal life. Additionally, Jesus cites the Shema in Matthew and Mark, while it is a lawyer who references Deuteronomy in Luke. Furthermore, in Luke the parable of the Good Samaritan follows, making the emphasis not the greatest/most important commandment but the second, i.e. loving one’s neighbor as himself. Therefore, it appears that Matthew and Mark refer to one occasion and Luke refers to another.

From this brief survey, it is clear that the interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:4 in Zechariah and the Gospel of Mark accords perfectly with the one proposed earlier in this paper, that this verse is a declaration of exclusive allegiance to Yahweh. This interpretation does not match the Nash Papyrus or the LXX, but those readings are suspect.

Deuteronomy 6:5

More troubling and harder to reconcile is the different versions of Deuteronomy 6:5 in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 22:37; Mark 12:29-30; Luke 10:27). These passages appear below with their deviations from the LXX highlighted in red.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LXX (Deut 6)</th>
<th>Matt 22</th>
<th>Mark 12</th>
<th>Luke 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4 καὶ ταῦτα τὰ δικαιώματα καὶ τὰ κρίματα, ὡσα ἐνετείλατο κύριος τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραήλ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ξεδιδύντων αὐτῶν ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου Ἄκουε, Ἰσραήλ· κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἰς ἔστιν 5 καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἑξ ὄλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἑξ ὄλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἑξ ὄλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου | 37 ο δὲ ἔφη αὐτῷ: Α' Αγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἑν ὄλη θηκό καρδίασο σου καὶ ἑν ὄλη θηκό σου καὶ ἑν ὄλη θηκό σου καὶ ἑξ ὄλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἑξ ὄλης τῆς δυνάμεως σου | 29 ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὡτι πρώτη ἔστιν: καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἑξ ὄλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἑξ ὄλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἑξ ὄλης τῆς δυνάμεως σου καὶ ἑξ ὄλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου καὶ ἑν ὄλη θηκό ἰσχύοι σου καὶ ἑν ὄλη τῆ δυνάμεως σου | 27 ο δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν: Α' Αγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἑξ ὄλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἑξ ὄλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἑξ ὄλης τῆς δυνάμεως σου καὶ ἑξ ὄλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου καὶ ἑν ὄλη θηκό
The Septuagintal text in blue is the long liturgical introduction mentioned in the excursus on Deuteronomy 6:4 (above). Translated into English, it reads, “And these are the regulations and the judgments that the Lord commanded the children of Israel in the wilderness, when they came out from the land of Egypt.” The LXX also has a textual variant in Deuteronomy 6:5. Some Septuagintal manuscripts have καρδία (“heart”) for β'λε (“heart”), whereas others have διάνοια (“mind”).

There are basically two differences between the Synoptic Gospel texts. The first is grammatical. Three times in Matthew and twice in Luke, the preposition ἐν (“in, by, with”) appears instead of ἐκ (“out of, from;” ἐξ before a vowel).93 Mark follows the Septuagintal reading of ἐκ (“out of, from”), which seems to indicate source, i.e. “love the Lord your God from the source of your heart,” etc.94 On the other hand, Mathew and Luke’s use of ἐν (“in, by, with”) clearly reflects the Hebrew preposition ב (“in, by, with”) in the MT of Deuteronomy 6:5.95 Since ἐν (“in, by, with”) is used with the dative case and ἐκ (“out of, from”) with the genitive case, the words following ἐν appear in the dative in Matthew and Luke instead of the genitive like the LXX and Mark.

The second set of differences between the gospel renderings of Deuteronomy 6:5 pertains to the list of elements with which God is to be loved. Interestingly, none of these readings agree.

93 These variations no doubt fuel the Synoptic debate. However, before Markan priority is assumed, it is also worth noting that Luke uses both ἐκ (“out of, from”) and ἐν (“in, by, with”). If Luke was trying to “smooth out” the text in Mark’s gospel, why does he change the latter prepositions but not the first?


95 Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 14-28, WBC 33B (Dallas: Word, 2002), 647.
Five Greek terms are found in these four accounts: καρδία ("heart"), ψυχή ("soul"), δύναμις ("power"), διάνοια ("mind"), and ἰσχύς ("strength"). The LXX has καρδία, ψυχή, δύναμις; Matthew has καρδία, ψυχή, διάνοια; Mark has καρδία, ψυχή, διάνοια, ἰσχύς; and Luke has καρδία, ψυχή, ἰσχύς, διάνοια. Mark and Luke both appear to employ ἰσχύς ("strength") to translate the Hebrew דַּעְמ ("capacity") in the MT. In contrast, the LXX translates this Hebrew word with a different Greek noun, δύναμις ("power"). Merrill suggests that the three Gospels distinguish between καρδία ("heart") and διάνοια ("mind") by using καρδία to mean "love" or "affection," since διάνοια ("mind") almost always translates the Hebrew דַּעְמ ("heart, mind") in the LXX. If this is the case, then Mark and Luke further explain the original text by splitting the Hebrew term דַּעְמ ("heart, mind") into its proper semantic categories of emotion and intellect, whereas Matthew substitutes “love, affection” for דַּעְמ ("capacity"). However, the latter implication is unsettling because it does not make sense for Matthew, who wrote to a Jewish audience, to record the form of the Shema that deviates the most from the MT. Foster proposes that, since the text form of the LXX was not standardized by the first century (again, note the textual variant in Deut 6:5), Matthew likely provided his own translation of the MT, preserving the threefold form of the verse, which would be more familiar to a Jewish audience, and using the terms from the LXX that were already most associated with the Shema. This would also explain his use of the Greek preposition ἐν ("in, by, with") for the Hebrew

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96 Deuteronomy, NAC, 165; cf. “καρδία” in BDAG, 509.

97 This would also imply that Mark and Luke shuffle the order of the elements in the MT and that Matthew reverses the order of the elements.

preposition ב (“in, by, with”). Combining Merrill’s and Foster’s explanations, the differences in these texts seems to arise from the different audiences (i.e. Jew or Gentile) that each gospel writer was addressing.

This understanding offers further credence to the translation of the three-part adverbial phrase, מִכֶּל-לָבַעַת בּּמֶלֶכֶת נְצָקָה בּּמֶלֶכֶת מַנָּאָרָה ("with your entire mind, with your entire being, indeed with your entire capacity"), that is proposed above (see the commentary under v.5). If this phrase was meant to designate the ways to express love towards God or the parts of the inner man with which to love God, all of the gospel writers have differing views. On the other hand, if Deuteronomy 6:5 is piling up relatively synonymous terms to communicate loving God comprehensively, the variation in elements is not a problem.

b. The Application of the Commandment (6:6-9)

This expression of unreserved, wholehearted commitment demonstrated in action is to be a living reality in one’s internal life (6:6), family life (6:7), and public life (6:8-9).99 The rapid sequence of forceful verbs in these verses moves from the internal “heart” outward to the public realm of “gates.”100

1) An Internal Matter (6:6)

Text: [6] מִכֶּל-לָבַעַת בּּמֶלֶכֶת נְצָקָה בּּמֶלֶכֶת מַנָּאָרָה

Translation: [6] These words that I am commanding you today are to be known by heart.


100 Nelson, OTL, 91; cf. Wright, New International Biblical Commentary, 100.
Commentary:

(“these words that I am commanding you today”). The expression (“these words”) could refer narrowly to some part of the Shema (e.g. v. 4b, vv. 4-5, or vv. 4-9), to the preceding Decalogue (cf. 5:22, where the exact same expression occurs), to the subsequent parenthetic address on the general stipulations of the covenant (6:4-9 possible forming an inclusio, i.e. book ends, with 11:18-20), or broadly to the whole of Deuteronomy. The fourth option is preferable because this expression is modified by (“that I am commanding you today”).¹⁰¹ This phrase recurs throughout Deuteronomy and clearly refers to more than a portion of chapters 5-11 (cf. 4:2, 40; 19:9; 28:1, 15).¹⁰² Moreover, the entire book is presented as a record of (“the words”) that Moses spoke at Moab (cf. 1:1).¹⁰³

(known by heart,” lit. “on your heart/mind”). Again, can signify mind, will, emotions, and the inner man in general, but it most often refers to the first (see the commentary under v. 5). The idiom (“known by heart”) means to commit to


¹⁰² Note also the similar phrases (“that I am commanding you”) in 6:2 and (“that I am commanding you all today”) in 28:14. Also, the “that I am commanding you” phrases modify one or more of the terms (“word”), (“statute”), and (“commandment”) in each of these verses (including those in the parentheses above). In all but two of these verses (i.e. 4:2; 28:14), these terms are also modified by a demonstrative adjective (i.e. (“this”)/ (“these”)) or a 3MS pronominal suffix (i.e. “His,” referring to Yahweh).

¹⁰³ Vogt, Deuteronomic Theology, 157.
memory. But more than simply learning a list by rote, this phrase also connotes “constant, conscious reflection.” The Israelites are to perpetually keep the Deuteronomic teaching in mind, thinking about it and meditating on it, such that it exerts a permanent influence on them. This is the imagery of Jeremiah 31:33, where the prophet foretells of a new covenant in which Yahweh promises, (“I will put My law within them and I will write it on their hearts”). The Mosaic Law was inscribed on tablets of stone (cf. Deut 4:13; 10:1), and here Yahweh wants His people to inscribe it on the tablets of their heart (cf. Prov 3:3; 7:3). Moses is not calling for external conformity to the law, but internalizing the law. As one commentator puts it, “understanding who God is (6:4) should lead to absolute loyalty (6:5), which leads to internal transformation (6:6).”

2) A Family Matter (6:7)

Text:

Translation: [7] School your children by them and explain them, whether you are sitting in your house or walking along the road, whether you go to bed or get up.

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104 Merrill, NAC, 167.
106 Hirsch, Deuteronomy, 98.
107 This appears to be a chiastic structure, emphasizing (“within them”) / (“on their hearts”).
108 Grisanti, rev. EBC, 34.
Commentary:

The masora parva notes that נִנְצְרַנְתָּנֵי ("school them") is a hapax legomenon, found nowhere else in the Old Testament. This has posed a challenge to finding an accurate translation.

Traditionally, this term was thought to be from the root meaning “sharpen.” However, Ugaritic suggests that the root means “repeat, recount, recite.” Regardless, the context and the parallel passage in 11:19, which has the root לָמָּה (“teach”), clarifies the sense of this word. If the root here means “sharpen,” the translation is something along the lines of “sharpen with instruction” (cf. NAB “drill them into your children”) or “impress” in such a way that the message is there to stay.

וְבָאָבֵרְתָּהוּ (“and explain them”). The ב preposition marks the object of a verb of speaking, i.e. not “speak with them” but “speak about them” (cf. 1 Sam 19:3).

The verbs נִנְצְרַנְתָּנֵי ("school them") and בָּאָבֵרְתָּהוּ ("and explain") are coordinate.

Together, these two tasks provide instruction about teaching Yahweh’s covenantal demands to

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109 BDB, 1041-42; Weinfeld, AB, 332-33.


111 Nelson, OTL, 87.

112 Merrill, NAC, 167.

113 IBHS, 198-99 (§11.2.5f).

114 The latter verb could possibly delineate the means for doing what the former verb commands, i.e. “school them … by explaining …” This would have minimal impact on the commentary provided here. However, Grisanti’s suggestion that the latter verb as well as the instructions in verses 8-9 delineate the means for doing what
future Israelite generations. God’s people are to transmit the knowledge of these truths to their
children and unpack their meaning with them.\(^{115}\)

(“whether you are sitting in your house
or walking along the road, whether you go to bed or get up”). The four infinitive constructs here
are each prefixed with \(ב\) prepositions, introducing clauses that are subordinate to the first half of
the verse.\(^{116}\) The \(ב\) prepositions are employed temporally, expressing the moment or point in
time when the Israelites are to teach their children. When used with the infinitive construct, \(ב\)
connotes “when, whenever, while, as.”\(^{117}\)

These clauses constitute two merisms (using two antonyms to refer to everything, i.e. totality, similar to the English expressions “from A to Z” or “from top to bottom,” cf. 4:26; Ps
121:8). Moses is not instructing the Israelites to teach their children only when they are sitting at
home or walking along the road, or only when they go to bed or get up.\(^{118}\) Rather, these double
merisms denote place (sitting at home vs. out on a journey) and time (the evening when going to
bed vs. the morning when awaking), i.e. everywhere and always.\(^{119}\)

the former verb in verse 7 commands (rev. \textit{EBC}, 34) does not seem likely since verses 8-9 appear to apply at all
times, even when there is no opportunity to teach one’s children (e.g. children do not always accompany their
parents to the city gates).


\(^{116}\) Putnam, \textit{Hebrew Bible Insert}, 36 (§2.2.6a).

\(^{117}\) Arnold & Choi, \textit{Biblical Hebrew Syntax}, 103-04 (§4.1.5[b]); cf. 69-70 (§3.4.1[b]).

\(^{118}\) Grisanti, rev. \textit{EBC}, 34.

\(^{119}\) Nelson, \textit{OTL}, 91-92; Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 78; Block, “How Many Is God?,” 170; Keil and
Delitzsch, \textit{Pentateuch}, 885. Merrill suggests the first merism signifies all of human effort, “sitting at home”
referring to inactivity and “walking along the road” to activity (\textit{NAC}, 167).
Having internalized the Deuteronomic message themselves, the Israelites are to be preoccupied with passing it along and explaining it to their children at every possible opportunity in every context of life. God’s Word is to be the topic of ordinary conversation in ordinary life, at home and away, from breakfast to bedtime, whether busy or not. Future generations should understand that this is not simply a set of rules to be followed, but part of the fabric of daily life.

3) A Public Matter (6:8-9)


Translation: [8] Tie them as a reminder on your hand. They are to be as a headband on your forehead. [9] Write them on the doorframes of your house and on your gates.

Commentary:

Waqsha'ta le'ahel le'veynah ("tie them as a reminder on your hand"). The לְ preposition marks the indirect object, specifying how the object, “them” (= “these words,” cf. v. 6), is to be used. The term זָאָה means “sign.” Tying “these words” on one’s hand as a sign is comparable to the practice of tying a string around one’s finger to remember something. Hence, זָאָה is more appropriately translated “reminder” in this context.

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120 Grisanti, rev. EBC, 34; cf. Wright, New International Biblical Commentary, 100.
121 McConville, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, 142.
122 IBHS, 209 (§11.2.10d).
123 HALOT, 1:26.
124 Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 79.
“they are to be as a headband on your forehead”). Again, the preposition specifies how “they” (= “these words,” cf. v. 6), are to be used. The exact meaning of is somewhat uncertain. Various options have been offered, including “mark or sign,” “pendant,” and “headband.” The phrase , which literally means “between your eyes,” is an idiom for “forehead” or “hairline” (cf. 14:1).

(“on the doorframes of your house”). The term literally means “doorposts” and refers to the support posts (sometimes more than two, cf. 1 Kgs 6:31, 33) for the entrance of a home (e.g. Exod 12:7, 22, 23), the tabernacle/temple (e.g. 1 Sam 1:9), or the city (e.g. Judg 16:3).

125 Technically, is a jussive with “them” as the object (lit. “you let them be”). However, it is translated as an imperative here to maintain the force of the leading verb in the w’qatal chain. Furthermore, there is an imperatival aspect to this appeal since words cannot be “a headband on your forehead” on their own (see the commentary on verse 4). The preposition marks the indirect object, specifying how the object, “them” (= “these words,” cf. v. 6), is to be used (IBHS, §11.2.10d).

126 Nelson, OTL, 87. The masora parva points out that is only found once defectively written in the Old Testament. However, the non-defective form, occurs in the parallel passage in 11:18 and also in Exodus 13:16. Its usage is virtually identical in all three texts and so cross-referencing does not help clarify the sense of this word.

127 Ralph H. Alexander, “,” in TWOT, 1:348. Merrill notes that (“sign”) and are parallel (NAC, 168).

128 Nelson, OTL, 86. Weinfeld asserts that this rendering is from “the rabbinic Hebrew verb ‘to drip’ and noun ‘drop,’ which are based on a variant of the biblical root ‘to drip.’ ” (AB, 334).

129 Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 79. Tigay’s suggestion is made on the basis of Egyptian and Assyrian art, which seems to indicate that a headband was the characteristic headdress worn in the Syro-Palestinian area in biblical times. See J. H. Tigay, “On the Meaning of Ṭ(W)ṬPT,” JBL 101 (1982): 321-31.

130 Kalland, EBC, 66; cf. Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 359, n32.
The nouns in the phrase פֵּרֶת מַחְאֹזֶת ("on the doorframes of your house") form a construct chain, expressing one compound idea. This is a subjective chain, where the noun in the construct state, מַחְאֹזֶת ("doorframes"), belongs to the noun in the absolute state, בְּבֵיתךְ ("your house"). The 2MS pronominal suffix attached to בְּבֵיתךְ ("house") makes the entire chain definite.

וְבְבֵיתךְ ("and on your gates"). The term בֶּית ("gate") refers to the city gate. It designates not just the doors to the city, but also the entire structure that houses them, including several rooms. Because they were typically the most open areas in the city and places of constant traffic, the city gates were the center of public activity. All sorts of business transactions, from market vendors setting up shop to negotiations with witnesses, were conducted at the city gates (e.g. Gen 23:10-18; 34:20-24; 2 Kgs 7:1; 18; Ruth 4:1-12). Judicial decisions were rendered at the city gates (e.g. Deut 21:18-21; 22:13-19; 2 Sam 15:2-6; 19:8[9]). Moreover, something well known was said to be known at the gates (Prov 31:23; cf. v. 31; Ruth...

131 IBHS, 145 (§9.5.1g).
132 Putnam, Hebrew Bible Insert, 18 (§1.8.1).
133 Contra Dahood, who, based on a Ugaritic parallel and Psalm 122:1-2, suggests that the words in this verse that are translated “house” and “gates” are synonymous (“Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs,” 158). Unlike the Ugaritic parallel and Psalm 122:1-2, the parallel here is between בְּבֵיתךְ מַחְאֹזֶת ("the doorframes of your house") and בֶּית שֵׁם ("your gates"). As noted above, the terms מַחְאֹזֶת ("doorframes") and בְּבֵיתךְ ("your house") form a construct chain, expressing on compound idea. Furthermore, houses rarely had a gate in those days, let alone multiple gates (Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 79). See also Block, “How Many Is God?,” 171, n20; Grisanti, rev. EBC, 35; Nelson, OTL, 92.
134 Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 79.
135 Ibid.
3:11). Sometimes, this word is used figuratively to refer to the entire city (e.g. 5:14 and 12:12, 15, 17, 21, where the NIV has “towns”).

The switch from the preposition הָלַך ("on") in the previous phrase to ב ("on") in this phrase likely carries no exegetical significance. Both prepositions are used spatially to indicate the location where “these words” are to be written. The latter phrase probably employs the ב preposition because it is more common (used about 3x more frequently than הָלַך), whereas the former phrase uses הָלַך because a construct chain cannot take a ב preposition.

The instructions in these verses have been understood literally at least since the latter part of the Second Temple period (cf. Matt 23:5). Passages from the Torah were written on pieces of parchment and inserted into small leather pouches. These pouches, referred to as phylacteries or tefillin, had leather straps on both sides and were fastened around the upper arm and head. The head phylacteries had four chambers and one text from Exodus 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; or 11:13-21 was placed in each. The arm phylacteries had only one

136 Kalland, EBC, 66.
137 Arnold & Choi, Biblical Hebrew Syntax, 102-03 (S4.1.5[a]), 120-21 (S4.1.15[a]).
138 The word “phylactery” is a transliteration of the word φυλακτήριον, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word תִּפְלָח (Craigie, NICOT, 171, n16). The term תִּפְלָח ("headband") in 6:8 is sometimes rendered “phylactery,” but clearly this is an anachronism.
139 Judges 15:14 possibly supports the notion that יָד (“hand”) can sometimes mean “arm.”
140 Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 441.
141 The Decalogue has also been found in some of these pouches at Qumran (Craigie, NICOT, 171, n18).
chamber, but contained the same passages. Similarly, though passages from the Torah might have originally been inscribed directly on the doorposts of homes and gates, by the Second Temple period, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and the parallel passage 11:13-21 were written on parchment and encased in containers that were affixed to the upper, right-hand side of doorposts as one enters. These attachments have become known as mezuzah, the transliteration of the Hebrew word תֶזּוֹז (lit. “doorposts”). Many orthodox Jews today still wear phylacteries during special worship occasions, e.g. weekday morning prayers, and have mezuzah on their doorframes.

Although Judaism has a long history of taking the instructions in Deuteronomy 6:8-9 literally, scholars are divided over whether they should be interpreted literally or figuratively. It seems most likely that Moses expected Israel to understand these verses

\[\text{\textsuperscript{142}}\text{Merrill, NAC, 168.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{143}}\text{Weinfeld, AB, 343; cf. Currid, A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy, 166.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{144}}\text{Grisanti, rev. EBC, 36; cf. Craigie, NICOT, 171.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{145}}\text{Merrill, NAC, 82; cf. Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 442.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{146}}\text{Though some Jewish groups in the Second Temple period, e.g. the Pharisees and the Qumran sect, understood these verses literally, not all did. The LXX takes Deuteronomy 6:8 as metaphorical and translates מָצִקָּה (“headband”) as ἀδιάλευκον (“immovable”), meaning “these words” are not to be moved from one’s mind (Weinfeld, AB, 335).}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{147}}\text{Those who argue for a literal interpretation include Driver, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, 92-93; Hirsch, Deuteronomy, 103-15; Mayes, New Century Bible Commentary, 177-78; Weinfeld, AB, 341-42; and Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 78-79, 441-43. Those who argue for a figurative interpretation include Keil and Delitzsch, Pentateuch, 885; Thompson, TOTC, 123; Ridderbos, Bible Student’s Commentary, 116; Kalland, EBC, 3:66; Merrill, NAC, 167-68; Harman, Deuteronomy, 90-91; Currid, A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy, 165; and Grisanti, rev. EBC, 35. Nelson seems to walk the line between figurative and both, referring to these verses as “literary metaphors … based on actual cultural and religious practices,” but also stating “the balance between the metaphorical and the literal in these imperatives is hard to weigh” (OTL, 92). Christensen is silent about his position, but states that these injunctions “led to specific practices that, at times, caused people to lose sight of the remarkable vision of an internalized covenant suggested in vv 5-7” (WBC, 143). Those who are undecided include Craigie, NICOT, 171; Raymond Brown, The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone, The Bible Speak}\]
metaphorically for several reasons. First, similar statements about attaching teachings to one’s body are found in Proverbs (1:8-9; 3:1-3; 6:20-22; 7:1-3; cf. 4:9), where they are clearly metaphors for remembering teachings. For example, Proverbs 7:3 reads, “bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.” The second colon is obviously metaphorical and, by parallelism, the first is too. Second, the language in Exodus 13:9 and 16, which is nearly identical to the language in Deuteronomy 6:8, has to be metaphorical. Exodus 13:9 refers to the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Exodus 13:16 refers to the sacrifice/redemption of the firstborn. These ceremonies “are to be as a reminder on your hand and as a memorial/headband on your forehead.” Undoubtedly, the verses in Exodus cannot be understood literally since ceremonies cannot be attached to one’s body. Third, the impracticality of wearing phylacteries or similar contraptions in everyday life suggests that these instructions are to be taken metaphorically. There is nothing in the context that limits wearing phylacteries to special

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148 Weinfeld notes that comparable figurative statements are also found in ANE loyalty declarations, expressing constant awareness. For example, a Hittite covenantal text reads, “as you wear a dress so shall you carry with you these oaths” and a declaration to the Egyptian sovereign by Abdimilki the king of Tyre states, “I carry upon my belly and upon by back the words of the King” (AB, 341).

149 Rabbinic commentators tend to reject this argument on the grounds that everything written in Proverbs is proverbial in style (cf. Prov 1:1), whereas the Torah is not (Ibn Ezra as referenced by Weinfeld, AB, 342). Still, at least one Rabbinic commentator conceded that the text in Deuteronomy is metaphor for always remembering (Rashban as referenced by Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary, 442). Similar metaphorical language exists in the Old Testament outside of the Torah and Proverbs, though it does not refer to teachings, e.g. Job 29:14; Isaiah 62:3; Jeremiah 2:32; 13:11; 22:24; and Haggai 2:23.

150 Harman, Deuteronomy, 90-91.

151 At the same time, it is possible to understand Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18 literally because written words, unlike ceremonies, can be attached to the body. However, the phylacteries worn in Second Temple and modern Judaism still contain the verses from Exodus. At the very least, the Exodus passages should not be included.
worship occasions, as is the current practice in modern Judaism. Fourth, the “them” that are to be tied on one’s hand and forehead and written on doorframes and gates refers back to הֶלֶחַת ("these words") in verse 6, which most likely refers to the entire Deuteronomic teaching (see the commentary under v. 6). The sheer volume of material makes a literal interpretation of these instructions impractical, if not impossible. Fifth, the context suggests that these verses should be understood metaphorically. Verse 6 maintains that “these words” are to be יִשְׁתַּחֵץ ("known by heart," lit. "on your heart/mind"), a figure of speech for committing something to memory and constantly thinking about it. Verse 7 contains double merisms, figures of speech denoting that the Israelites are to teach their children “these words” everywhere and always. Likewise, in keeping with the context, verses 8 and 9 should follow suit, referring to another application of “these words” with figures of speech.

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152 Merrill, NAC, 168.

153 Ridderbos, Bible Student’s Commentary, 116. Mayes notes that “these words” could refer to a shorter portion of Deuteronomy that is a sign standing for the whole (New Century Bible Commentary, 178). However, this is unlikely (see the commentary under v.6).

154 Merrill, NAC, 168; cf. Ridderbos, Bible Student’s Commentary, 116; Harman, Deuteronomy, 91.

155 McConville suggests that it is hard to take verse 9 in a metaphorical sense, implying that it should be taken literally and thus opening the door for a literal interpretation of verse 8 (Apollon Old Testament Commentary, 142; cf. Driver, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, 93). But rather than let the language at the end of the pericope influence the understanding of the preceding verses, it makes more sense to follow the order of reading and allow the imagery in the preceding verses to influence the understanding of the latter verse(s). Additionally, it is not as difficult as McConville suggests to quantify the metaphor in verses 8-9. These verses express the centrality of the Deuteronomic message to everyday life, whether at home or away (see the next paragraph). Finally, because of the fourth reason mentioned above, it is hard to read verse 9 literally (likewise, because of the third and fourth reasons mentioned above, it is even harder to read verse 8 literally).
These verses express the centrality of the Deuteronomic message to everyday life.\textsuperscript{156} Israel’s devotion to Yahweh is not to be simply a private relationship nor something that only one’s family knows about. In addition to those things, there is an element of public confession.\textsuperscript{157} Whether at home or away, God’s Word should permeate all of life.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Indeed, the \textit{Shema} strikes at the heart of Yahweh’s expectations for Israel. With a call to attention and a cry of allegiance, the people of Israel are reminded of their relationship with Yahweh, one that demands exclusive devotion to Him (6:4). Because of this relationship, the people are to respond with an unreserved, wholehearted commitment, expressed in obedience to Yahweh (6:5). This commitment should be internal—incorporated into one’s heart and constantly reflected upon (6:6), familial—intentionally taught to their children at every possible opportunity and in every context of life (6:7), and public—manifesting itself outwardly to others in social settings and daily life (6:8-9). In short, the fact that their God is Yahweh should compel the Israelites to devote themselves to Him in a way that flavors the whole of life. As the order of this pericope demonstrates, this process must be upward—beginning with a recognition of one’s relationship with God and responding accordingly (6:4-5), inward—resulting in internal transformation (6:6), and then outward—showing up in conversation and action (6:7-9). But as Israel’s history would prove, it is far too easy to start with the outward, which results in honoring God with one’s lips while his heart is far from Him (cf. Matt 15:7-9; Mark 7:6-7).

\textsuperscript{156} Merrill, NAC, 167-68. Grisanti notes that the door to someone’s home and the gate to the city were the primary points of access into one’s life (rev. \textit{EBC}, 34).

\textsuperscript{157} Brown, \textit{Deuteronomy}, 97.
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