

DEUT 4:1-8 AND THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

Alexander Salakpi

***Abstract:** For the people of Israel, the observance of the law is an essential requirement not only to live in the Promised Land but also for their existence and identity. The consequence of disobedience is, in fact, exile from the land and loss of socio-religious identity. Observance of the law usually brings peace, prosperity, progress, and development. Against this background, the article analyses Deut 4:1-8 to discover the relationship between obedience and human shalom, not only in ancient Israel but also in contemporary societies. It argues that the lack of peace and fulfilment experienced by people is caused by disobedience to the law. For example, spouses live in their house but are in exile because there is no peace at home; workplaces are often conflictual because workers flaunt the ethical codes; countries experience unrest because citizens ignore the laws of the land. The text challenges our communities to live in obedience to God's law not only in the worship environment but also in any spheres of life: economy, leadership, family and relationship with any 'others,' especially those in need.*

Key Words: Deut. 4:1-8; Law; Israel; Promised Land; Observance.

Introduction

For the past five decades the literary unity and character of Deut. 4:1-40 has continued to attract scholarly attention.¹ This article endorses the literary unity of the chapter but has its focus on the need to observe the law (Deut. 4:1-8). Obedience of the law will enable Israel to have a homeland, enjoy peace, prosperity, progress, development and to be a beacon of wisdom to other nations (cf. Zech. 8:23). Disobedience, however, results in loss of land and socio-religious identity. The relationship between obedience to the law and human fulfilment is not a historical reality but has consequences even for our contemporary society. Many

1 See the list of contributors on the subject in C. Begg, "The Literary Criticism of Deut 4:1-40. Contributions to a Continuing Discussion," *ETHL* 56 (1980): 11; cf. also A. D. H. Mays, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Literary Criticism of Deuteronomy" *JBL* 100, no. 1 (1981): 23-51; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9. WBC 6A* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001): 71-98; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 193-230; Knut Holter and Stavanger, "Literary Critical Studies of Deut 4: Some Criteriological Remarks," *BN* 81 (1996), 91-103; Paul R. House, "Examining the Narratives of Old Testament Narrative: An Exploration in Biblical Theology," *WTJ* 67 (2005): 229-45; N. MacDonald, "The Literary Criticism and Rhetorical Logic of Deuteronomy I-IV," *VT LVI* (2006): 203-224; Stephen A. Geller, "Fiery Wisdom: Logos and Lexis in Deuteronomy 4" *Prooftexts* 14 (1994): 102-139.

nations today are in turmoil because citizens do not obey the laws of the land.

Against this backdrop, the article analyses Deut. 4:1-8 in its original context to discover the call to action for contemporary readers. The aim is to draw attention to the fact that the numerous problems human beings encounter are due to the disobedience of the norms of correct living. Everyday experience testifies that many people are not ‘happy,’ but they are not aware that it is because they ignore the basic human law that was to guide them to happiness. Spouses are living in their house but are in exile because there is no peace at home; they fail to obey their committed marital laws. In the workplaces, ethical codes are flaunted, creating conflicts. Crime and deviance are on the rise in many societies generating unrest in countries because citizens disregard the laws.

The paper is divided into three parts: the first explores Deut. 4:1-8 in its historical context; the second offers an exegetical analysis to elaborate on the need for Israel to observe the law. The third examines the theological implications — the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel, and the reason why they must observe the law —² and the theological praxis emanating from the exegetical study — economy, leadership, family, etc. — as stimulus for further reflection towards contextualising the texts in our contemporary situation.

Deut. 4:1-8 in its Context

The pericope is part of the second section of the book (1:6—4:43).³ Chapters 1—3 dwell on the historical events of the past. It draws the attention of the people of Israel on what YHWH has done for them and what he expects of them. The Israelites are to be a wise, discerning, and reputable people (1:13). Moses proclaimed these words beyond the Jordan in the 40th year after leaving Egypt on the land of Moab (1:5),

² Daniel I. Block, “The Grace of Torah: The Mosaic Prescription for Life (Deut. 4:1-8; 6:20-25),” *BS* 162 (2005), 7.

³ The division of the book is as follows: Introduction to Deuteronomy (1:1-5); The Address of Moses: Historical Prologue (1:6-4:43); The Address of Moses: The Law (4:44-26:19); The Address of Moses: Blessings and Curses (27:1-28:69 [Eng. 29:1]); The Address of Moses: A Concluding Charge (29:1 [Eng. v. 2]-30:20); The Continuity of the Covenant from Moses to Joshua (31:1-34:12). Cf. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 67-69.

after the defeat of King Sihon (2:32) and King Og (3:3).⁴ Moses recounted the exodus event: the slavery, the plagues, the crossing of the Reed sea, the manna, the theophany on Mount Horeb, and the rebellion in the desert where many Israelites perished. The whole story of the exodus event from leaving Egypt to the occupation of the land in Canaan is by conviction a holy war, in which YHWH as the warrior engages other nations in battle for Israel.⁵

While chapters 1—3 elaborate on the past deeds of YHWH, chapter 4 continues with the history of Israel but with special focus on the future.⁶ It dwells more on the incomparability of YHWH, the uniqueness of Israel's history as a distinct people, which led to its nationhood and the excellence of the law of Israel.⁷ Israel has arrived at the border of the Promised Land ready to take possession of its inheritance. But before that Israel must be made aware of its obligations towards the land and its own prosperity in the future, this leads us to the immediate context: *the call for obedience to God's Law* (4:1-40).⁸

Chapter 4 serves as a forward to the Decalogue.⁹ It is considered a literary unit for the parallelism between v. 1 and v. 40: both invite Israel to observe the statutes and ordinances in order to enter, possess and prosper in the land. Furthermore, 4:1-40 is believed to be the work of a single author.¹⁰

The name of the God of Israel (יהוה) appears twenty-six times in this literary unit; a number that correspond to the sum of the numerical values of the four Hebrew letters of the name of the Lord: ך (Y; 10); ה (H; 5); ו (W; 6); ה (H; 5).¹¹

⁴ House, "Examining the Narratives," 232.

⁵ R. Wilson, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *CBQ* 41, no. 1 (1979), 35; G. von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publications, 1991); N. MacDonald, "The Literary Criticism," *Vetus Testamentum* 56, no. 2 (2006), 217; Stephen A. Geller, "Fiery Wisdom: Logos and Lexis in Deuteronomy 4," *Prooftexts* 14, no. 2 (1994), 105.

⁶ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1—21:9*, 79.

⁷ Yitztaq Feder, "The Aniconic Tradition, Deuteronomy 4, and the Politics of Israelite Identity," *JBL* 132, no. 2 (2013), 251.

⁸ Craige, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 68; Michael J. Vlach, "Israel's Repentance and the Kingdom of God," *MSJ* 27, no. 1 (2016), 167; Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*. AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 50.

⁹ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 221.

¹⁰ Mays, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Literary Criticism of Deuteronomy," 24.

¹¹ This could have been the intention of the author of the book; cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 223.

The chapter narrates the deliverance wrought by YHWH to his people (vv. 20, 34, 37), leading to YHWH's self-manifestation to Israel on Mount Sinai (vv. 10-13, 36). Moses' educative speech in this regard is meant to prevent idolatry and enforce monotheism. Failure to comply with these laws will endanger Israel's very existence (vv. 25-28). The message in this pericope is to warn Israel against idolatry and to live the law as an example to other nations.

Verses 1-8 are an exhortation to the people to keep the law; vv. 9-20 command people to stay away from idols. Verses 21-22 reveal the fate of Moses concerning his entrance to the land; this is followed again by a caveat against idolatry (vv. 23-24). Moses called on heaven and earth as witness against Israel for any future apostasy (vv. 25-26); consequent punishment will ensue (vv. 29-31). Verses 25-31 are an explicit reference to the Babylonian captivity suggesting a late date of composition of the literary unit.¹² Verses 32-39 present the election of Israel and the monotheistic nature of the God of Israel (v. 39). Verse 40 closes the pericope with an exhortation parallel to v. 1 forming an inclusion.

Themes and features present in the chapter are:

Caveats: Warnings are given to prevent the worship of idols (v. 9, v. 15, v. 23); advices on the consequence of making an idol (v. 16, v. 25); and warning against overlooking the covenant (v. 23, v. 31). However, should Israel show signs of defiance, God will not destroy them (v. 31).¹³

Parallel Forms: In v. 1, Israel is to keep the law and inherit the land; v. 40 states that Israel is to keep the law to prolong its days on the land.¹⁴ In v. 6, YHWH established Israel as a nation and in v. 38 YHWH drove out the nations. Israel is not to forget YHWH (vv. 9-11) and YHWH will not forget Israel (vv. 29-31).¹⁵ The expression of life and death: living God in vv. 11-12 and dead gods in vv. 27-29.¹⁶

Word Play: The author presents to the readers opposite concepts through repetitions of words: vv. 5-24 and 25-31 have obedience and

¹² Begg, "The Literary Criticism of Deut 4:1-40," 13-14.

¹³ Vlach, "Israel's Repentance and the Kingdom of God," 162, 166; Geller, "Fiery Wisdom: Logos and Lexis in Deuteronomy 4," 108.

¹⁴ Mays, "Deuteronomy 4," 25.

¹⁵ MacDonald, "The Literary Criticism," 218.

¹⁶ Begg, "The Literary Criticism of Deut 4:1-40," 43.

disobedience; vv. 9 and 23, remembering and forgetting; vv. 7 and 34, YHWH and other gods; vv. 8 and 28, the law of YHWH and the law of other nations; vv. 12-20, YHWH and idols.¹⁷

Use of Imperatives and Emphatic Particles: To increase the vivid nature and flow of the message, the author used imperatives with emphatic particles to enforce the necessity and the obligation of the law, v. 1 שְׁמַע וְעָתָה;¹⁸ v. 9 רַק הַשְּׁמֶר; v. 32 כִּי שְׂאֵל-נָא

The Recourse to the use of Experiential Knowledge: The author supports his call to obedience and observance of the law by recalling to the mind of the Israelites the signs and wonders that YHWH has done for them (v. 3, v. 9, v. 34).¹⁹

The Use of Rhetorical Questions: Another feature worth mentioning is the author's use of rhetorical questions, for example vv. 7, 8, 33, 34 are questions that express Israel's accessibility to YHWH.²⁰

The Uniqueness of YHWH and Israel: The questions in v. 7 and v. 8 express the uniqueness of Israel while v. 33 and v. 34 express the uniqueness of YHWH, the God of Israel.²¹ What links vv. 7-8 and vv. 33-34 together is the reference to the law:

The unique laws are intertwined with the uniqueness of the God of Israel and the uniqueness of Israel: a great nation that has an extraordinary God (close to his nation) and extraordinary laws.²²

The uniqueness of YHWH is identified with YHWH's superiority over other gods.²³ Hence, the practice of monotheism: the worship of only YHWH as the sole God and the consequent abstention from idolatry. The uniqueness of Israel, according to vv. 1-8 derives from its election by a unique God (vv. 32-40). It is important to notice that the central verses (vv. 9-31) contain the warning against worship of idols. In that sense, the uniqueness of Israel (vv. 1-8) serves as a prologue of the

¹⁷ Mays, "Deuteronomy 4," 25.

¹⁸ Begg, "The Literary Criticism of Deut 4:1-40," 30; Geller, "Fiery Wisdom," 119.

¹⁹ Typical example is *Baal Poer*, cf. S. R. Drive, *Deuteronomy. The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 63-64; Block, "The Grace of Torah," 7; Geller, "Fiery Wisdom," 122.

²⁰ MacDonald, "The Literary Criticism," 218; Geller, "Fiery Wisdom," 114.

²¹ Feder, "The Aniconic Tradition, Deuteronomy 4," 267; Mays, "Deuteronomy 4," 50.

²² Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 201.

²³ MacDonald, "The Literary Criticism," 217; Wilson, "The hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 35.

chapter, the uniqueness of YHWH (vv. 32-40) as the epilogue while their responsibility (vv. 9-31) is the central theme of the chapter.²⁴

YHWH's superiority over other gods emerged from the narrative of the 'plagues' (Exod. 4:21-14:17). According to Wilson, the plagues' account starts the holy war traditions between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt and function to set up the comparison between the actions of Pharaoh and of Israel.²⁵ These signs and wonders offer an appeal to Israel to listen and to obey YHWH and prepare the people towards the Covenant and the Law on Mount Horeb.

Moreover, the plagues execute God's judgment on the gods of Egypt (Exod. 12:12; Num 33:4). The Nile is attributed to the god Hapi, frogs to the goddess Heket, cows to the god Hathar, bulls to the god Apis and the Sun to the god Re.²⁶ The worship of the Sun god Re and Amon-Re pervaded the official ritual of the palace of Pharaoh. The plague of darkness was a humiliation of the Sun god.²⁷ As Pharaoh represents the Sun god, the plague denigrated his reign for he was powerless over this plight.

The plagues can also be read as humiliation to the following: the god of Hapi which represented the Nile; the goddess of Heket, the frogs; the god of Hathar, the cattle; and the god of Apis, the bull. The final blow was the death of all living creatures, pure sign that the God of the Israelites defeated the gods of Egypt.²⁸ These 'wonders' eventually reveal YHWH's uniqueness and led to the monotheistic tendency of Israel; YHWH is great and declared supreme over the gods of Egypt. This is evident in the saying of Jethro, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods" (Exod. 18:11a).²⁹

²⁴ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1—21:9*, 73. See also A. D. H. Mays, *Deuteronomy*. *New Century Bible* (London: Oliphant Publishing, 1979), 143; MacDonald, "The Literary Criticism and Rhetorical Logic," 218.

²⁵ Wilson, "The hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," 35; see also G. von Rad, "Holy War in Ancient Israel;" MacDonald, "The Literary Criticism," 217.

²⁶ J. K. Hoffmeier "Egypt, Plagues," in *ABD* 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 376.

²⁷ N. N. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus the Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 79.

²⁸ Hoffmeier, "Egypt, Plagues," 377.

²⁹ Other episodes worth mentioning are the crossing of the reed sea with YHWH dividing the sea into two, feeding with manna in the desert, water from the rock, and the defeat of enemy nations in the war.

The uniqueness of Israel stemmed from the fact that she is chosen and set apart (Exod. 19—24).³⁰ Exod. 19:5-6 provide the promises and the conditions of the covenant. The covenant is governed by an ‘if clause.’ This is a conditional covenant; the contract depends on the observance of the law. God’s rescue from Egypt was based on the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. On Mount Horeb, the reason for Israel’s election and consecration was revealed to them. Israel has become a treasured possession of YHWH to other nations. The term “treasured possession” has been illuminated by writings found in the ancient city of Alalakah in Turkey. The royal seal of King Abban, 15th century BCE, testified that ‘treasured possession’ is used as titles of the monarch in parallel to ‘servant’ and ‘the beloved of a god.’ A comparable text from Ugarit sent by the Hittite Suzerain, the last known king of the Ugarit, to his vassal Ammurapi, refers to the vassal as “his servant” and “his treasured possession.” Similarly, the biblical usage of “treasured possession” for Israel connotes a special sense that has political and legal implications on Israel.³¹

The promise made to Israel is an extraordinary vow assuming Israel heed the voice of YHWH. Per the promise, as YHWH’s special possession, Israel will occupy a worldly position of political authority of a ‘kingdom’ and of a ‘nation’ and a religious authority of priests who are holy. Israel will then be a community wherein worldly power and spiritual purpose converge.³² This privilege ends, however, when Israel disobeys the Laws of YHWH.

Exegesis of Deut. 4:1-8

a) Structure of 4:1-8

The Text is divided into two sections, vv. 1-4 and vv. 5-8;³³ both start with imperatives: שָׁמַע (listen; hear; obey) in vv. 1-4 and רָאָה (see) in vv. 5-8.³⁴ The necessity of observing the law is underlined by the choice of words; for instance, the verb שָׁמַע appears in v. 1 and v. 6 with the meaning/nuance of ‘to listen, to hear and to obey.’ Similarly, it occurs

³⁰ Bricker, “God so Near,” 348.

³¹ Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 130.

³² Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” 835.

³³ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy. Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 54-52; Mays, “Deuteronomy 4” 25; Holter and Stavanger, “Literary Critical Studies of Deut 4,” 94.

³⁴ Begg, “The Literary Criticism of Deut 4:1-40,” 30; Geller, “Fiery Wisdom,” 109; Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 54-55.

in v. 2 and v. 6, with the meaning ‘to observe and to keep.’ The choice of these words is a key signal for the reader to know the purpose of the author.

The first section: *the laws of the Lord as the source of life* (vv. 1-4) enjoins the obligation to observe the commandments of God.³⁵ Strict observance of the law, without the slightest deviation, will ensure life and inheritance of the land. This renders Israel’s relationship a conditional one:³⁶ living on the land depends on the observance of the law; neglect of the law will deprive them of the land; the observance of the law gives life and disobedience gives death. To emphasise the message, the text recalls the event on Baal-Peor, on the threshold of the Promised Land (cf. Num. 25:1-5; Hosea 9:10), when those who disobeyed and worshiped Baal died.³⁷

The motif of ‘life’ serves as an *inclusio* for vv. 1-4; the term is repeated in v. 1 and in v. 4. ‘Life’ as embedded in the observance of the law contrasts with ‘death’ as symbolised by Baal-Poer and its worshipers. A similar example also occurs in 30:15ff with the offer of a choice between ‘life’ in following God or ‘death’ for worshipping idols.

The second section: *the laws of the Lord as the culture and wisdom of the people of Israel* (vv. 5-8) has an inclusive framework with the repetition of *וְנִשְׁפָּטִים וְנִחְקָיִם* in vv. 5 and 8.³⁸ Verse 5, like v. 1, calls for the observance of the law. The pericope serves as a motivation for observing the law giving precedence to the law of Israel over all other laws.³⁹ It also expresses the uniqueness of Israel to other nations.

³⁵ Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 54.

³⁶ R. E. Clements, “The Book of Deuteronomy” in *NIB 2*, ed. Leander K. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 314.

³⁷ Peor was a mountain in the vicinity of Mount Nebo to which Balak took Balaam in hope of getting him to curse Israel (Num 23:28). Numbers 25:1-9 reports that later at this same place the Israelites engaged in horrendous acts of idolatry and immorality. Technically, Baal Peor, that is “Baal of Peor,” identifies the local manifestation of Baal as worshiped by the Moabites. The first occurrence of the phrase in Deuteronomy 4:3, it is treated as a name of a place, similar to others Baal Gad, Baal Hamon, Baal Hazor, and others. The allusion creates a link with Deut. 3:29.

³⁸ Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 55.

³⁹ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 201; Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 55.

b) *The First section (4:1-4)*

The text gives the summary of the whole Book of Deuteronomy and serves as a pillar for Jewish liturgy.⁴⁰ The focus is on obedience to the statutes and precepts.

¹ And now, Israel, listen to the laws and customs which I am teaching you today, so that, by observing them, you may survive to enter and take possession of the country which Yahweh, God of your ancestors, is giving you. ² You must add nothing to what I command you, and take nothing from it, but keep the commandments of Yahweh your God just as I lay them down for you. ³ You can see for yourselves what Yahweh has done about the Baal of Peor; Yahweh your God has destroyed all those of you who followed the Baal of Peor; ⁴ but those of you who stayed faithful to Yahweh your God are all alive today.

Verse 1: The adverb וְעַתָּה (“now”) marks the transition from one discourse to another.⁴¹ It is frequently found in covenant contexts, especially if it has a moral injunction that must be heeded to (cf. 10:12 that is after 9:6-10:11; see also Exod. 19:5; Jos 24: 14; Judg. 9:16; 10:23, 25; 1Sam. 12:13).

The syntagm שְׁמַע אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (“listen Israel”) is a characteristic of didactic address (cf. 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9), which is also found in wisdom literature. For instance, in the book of Proverbs (1:8; 4:10; 23:19; see 8:33), we see the sage impacting wisdom to his pupils.⁴² The phrase is

⁴⁰ Bricker, “God So Near,” 351-352; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 228. In the worship of the gods and the gods taking care of the worshippers, the capricious behavior of the gods of ancient Near East made the officials in charge to ensure that the easily offended gods were placated, because an angry god might bring infertility, a lack of prosperity, failure at the national level, and a lack of peace and security to the people. In contrast, Yahweh was committed to the covenant displaying steadfast love and mercy towards Israel (Deut 7:9, 12). Cf. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 138-142. YHWH is very near to Israel (Deut 4:7). Mesopotamian gods were not seen as omnipresent. The worshippers go to the temple of the god that is near to them hence limiting them to a kind of god to worship. Cf. Karel van der Toorn, “Family Religion in Second Millennium West Asia (Mesopotamia, Emar, Nuzi),” in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, ed. John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 82-84. In the Torah, the text did not place any temporal or spatial limit on YHWH. YHWH is known to appear or to speak to different people at different times and at different places. Cf. Georg Braulik, “Wisdom, Divine Presence and Law,” *The Theology of Deuteronomy: Collected Essays of Georg Braulik, O.S.B* (trans. Ulrika Lindblad; N. Richland Hills, Texas: Bibal, 1994), 16.

⁴¹ MacDonald, “The Literary Criticism,” 203; Mays, “Deuteronomy 4,” 30.

⁴² Brace K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 466; Tremper Longman, III, *Proverbs, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 517; Bryan Murphy, “The Unalterable Word,” *MS* 26, no. 2 (2015), 170-72.

an appeal to Israel to prepare itself with the observance of the law to occupy the land and to have life. There was no life for Israel in Egypt because the Israelites did not have a land, a God and a law.⁴³

הַחֻקִּים and הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים is a frequent syntagm in Deuteronomy and the meaning of the two terms are difficult to distinguish. Literally הַחֻקִּים means ‘statutes’ and הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים ‘judgments;’ the two words embraced the whole law that Israel is to observe,⁴⁴ and have moral status and judicial decisions.⁴⁵ According to Christensen,

In traditional Jewish interpretation, הַחֻקִּים and הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים were understood to represent two categories of commandments—the former as commandment, like the dietary laws, for which no reason is obvious, and latter for laws whose purpose is evident, such as the prohibitions of murder and theft.⁴⁶

The combination of the two terms with the verb לָמַד (to teach) bring civil and criminal law into general context of religious instruction and teaching.⁴⁷ This is the first time the verb לָמַד occurs in the Pentateuch and thus gives a didactic character to the whole book of Deuteronomy (4:9-10; 6:2, 7, 20ff; 11:19; 31:12-13, 19, 22). Moses became the teacher of the law, that he received on Mount Horeb (4:12-13 cf. 5:19, 28), to the people who have wandered in the wilderness. Moses thus becomes the symbolism and the educator of the law (cf. Matt. 23:2-3).

The motivation for learning and keeping the law should be understood in the context of education, so as to have life on the land.⁴⁸ The fulfilment of אָחִירָהֶ אָחִירָהֶיךָ (“inheriting the land”), possessing the land and living on the land promised to their fathers, depends on their obedience

⁴³ We find similar usage of the root also in the Psalms (50:7; 81:9). We, however, need to make a slight distinction between שָׁמַע with a vocative as an opening address without an object (6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9), and שָׁמַע with an object (4:1; 5:1). See Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 199. The same distinction applies in the book of Proverbs with the verb לָמַד (learn) without an object (8:33) and with an object (23:19).

⁴⁴ Murphy, “The Unalterable Word,” 166; John Currid, *Deuteronomy* (Faverdale North, UK: Evangelical Press, 2006), 96; Mays, *Deuteronomy*, 149; Block, “The Grace of Torah,” 5.

⁴⁵ The idea in חֻק is a statute that is inscribed on a surface (Ezek 23:14; Isa 49:16; Job 19:23). It refers more to moral ceremonial laws or enactment. The idea in מִשְׁפָּט is of a judicial decision that is authoritative and binding. This may demand judgment with the provision of civil and criminal laws, cf. Drive, *Deuteronomy*, 62.

⁴⁶ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1—21:9*, 79.

⁴⁷ Mays, *Deuteronomy*, 149; see also Murphy, “The Unalterable Word,” 166-69.

⁴⁸ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 129.

in observing the law. Observance of the law is widespread in wisdom literature (Pss 1; 37:11, 22, 29, 34; Prov 2:21-22; 3:1-5; 10:30; 30:5-6) and mainly for individuals⁴⁹ but in Deuteronomy the observance assumes a national character that will determine the fate of the nation.⁵⁰

The motivation for observing the law in v. 1 is for Israel to live, occupy the land and to possess it. Life in this context means living in the land across the Jordan. Therefore, the primary goal of the law is for Israel to live (cf. 30:15-20).

Verse 2 starts with a divine warning “not to add and not to subtract.” It is a characteristic feature that forestall misrepresentation of God’s decrees.⁵¹ In this verse, the divine warning begins with the speech of Moses on the observance of the law (see also Deut 12:32 and 13:1).

Divine warning occurs in different parts of the Bible. Such admonition ends the book of Revelation (22:18-19) and it is found at the beginning of divine work in Jeremiah (26:2).⁵² Identical warnings are present in wisdom literature, concerning the completeness of God’s work (Eccl 3:14; 12:12-13; Sir 42:21; Prov 30:5-6),⁵³ and they are also attested in a treaty (1 Macc 8: 30).⁵⁴ הַדְּבָרִים, literally ‘the word,’ is understood in this context as the commandment the Israelites are to observe. It is comprehensible in relation with the Hebrew title of Deuteronomy, אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים (‘These are the words’ - 1:1).⁵⁵

The formula “do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it” (v. 2) has parallels in ancient writings, for instance, in the treaty of Esarhaddon.⁵⁶ The prohibition, in this case, is closely related to the worship of idols (see 13:1). The warning clearly expresses the integrity

⁴⁹ Pauls and Franktyr, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31*, 466; Longman, *Proverbs*, 517; Murphy, “The Unalterable Word,” 170-72.

⁵⁰ Feder, “The Aniconic Tradition, Deuteronomy 4,” 251-274.

⁵¹ Geller, “Fiery Wisdom,” 118; Murphy, “The Unalterable Word,” 166-77.

⁵² Murphy, “The Unalterable Word,” 174; Brace M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed., New York: American Bible Society, 2006), 690; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 200.

⁵³ Geller, “Fiery Wisdom,” 117.

⁵⁴ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 129-130.

⁵⁵ Murphy, “The Unalterable Word,” 165, 170-174.

⁵⁶ M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 43.

of YHWH'S revelation.⁵⁷ Israel is supposed to be a prime example to all nations. Their role as a model could be jeopardised through acts of neglect, forgetfulness of what YHWH has done for them and the peril of influence by the neighbouring nations who have created their own gods. Moses' warning and emphasis on the observance of the law should be understood from this viewpoint of not adding or subtracting.

Verses 3-4 recalled to their mind the consequence of disobedience of some Israelites.⁵⁸ The literary signal עֵינֵיכֶם הָרֵאָה ("You can see for yourselves") occurs in 3:21; 11:7 and in transposition in 4:9; 7:19; 10:2; 29:2.⁵⁹ The reference to Baal-Peor becomes important in the context of the Deuteronomist idea of monotheism.⁶⁰ In Hos 9:10, Baal-Peor is mentioned as a place, implying that the people whom Moses delivered his farewell address to were standing in front of Beth-Peor. The evidence in Hos 9:10 suggests Israel's first contact with paganism. The detail of the offense is not mentioned in Hos 9:10 but in Num 25:1-5, which involves the ritual manifestation of Baal in sexual acts with Moabite women especially in the context of Canaanite fertility rite.⁶¹ Those who involved themselves in idolatrous acts were destroyed; those who obey YHWH and did not implicate themselves in the ritual, lived. Disobedience to the law leads to death and obedience of the law promotes life.

The sentence is a motivation towards monotheism. The danger of pagan worship is fully treated in 12:30-31; but here again, it is followed by the command not to add or subtract from the law. Defection from the worship of YHWH poses a colossal peril that an injunction is appropriate before they settled on the land. Similar idea is expressed by Moshe in these words,

⁵⁷ C. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (New International Biblical Commentary; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), 46. Wright explains that the law is not supposed to be look upon as a menu for one to make preference. The law must be taken in its totality with the demands that goes with it. It is not to be tampered with. See also, Drive, *Deuteronomy*, 63.

⁵⁸ Block, "The Grace of Torah," 7-9.

⁵⁹ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 189.

⁶⁰ For the existence and the location of Baal-Peor, see Drive, *Deuteronomy*, 63-64.

⁶¹ Craige, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 130; Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 80. Just as a woman become pregnant after sexual intercourse, so, it is believed that the land will become fertile and reproduce.

It is possible that the proximity of the exhortation about Baal-Peor to the injunction about not adding and not subtracting (v. 2) was also motivated by the temptation to imitate foreign worship.⁶²

The sentence in v. 4 creates a contrast with v. 3 those who held on to YHWH lived (v. 4) and those who followed Baal died (v. 3).⁶³

c) *The Second Section (4:5-8)*

⁵ Look: as Yahweh my God commanded me, I have taught you laws and customs, for you to observe in the country of which you are going to take possession. ⁶ Keep them, put them into practice, and other peoples will admire your wisdom and prudence. Once they know what all these laws are, they will exclaim, "No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation!" ⁷ And indeed, what great nation has its gods as near as Yahweh our God is to us whenever we call to him? ⁸ And what great nation has laws and customs as upright as the entirety of this Law which I am laying down for you today?

While the opening sentence of the first section (v. 1) is a declarative sentence rendered with a present tense, the second division (v. 5) starts with a past tense. Verse 5 presents Moses as carrying out the command of YHWH by instructing the people. As Moshe elaborates,

The truth is that in the Semitic languages, when one makes a formal declaration, one uses the finite verb, though the declaration pertains to the present or the future and not to the past. Thus 1:8 reads literally, 'See, I *placed* the land at your disposal,' but it actually means, 'I *hereby place* the land at your disposal.'⁶⁴

Such formal declarations are mostly found in the perfect tense and are often followed by 'see' or 'behold' (cf. Gen 1:29; 41:41; 47:23; Deut 2:31; 30:15). In this context, וַיֵּאמֶר has the value of interjection.⁶⁵

The syntagm והחוקים והמשפטים ("laws and customs") forms an inclusion (vv. 5, 8).⁶⁶ The repetition of לְמַדְתִּי (to teach) reminds the reader of the didactic nature of the book and it is only through obedience and

⁶² Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1—11*, 200.

⁶³ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 46.

⁶⁴ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1—11*, 201; Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 80.

⁶⁵ It is rendered in the singular instead of the plural although it addresses many people. See Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 134.

⁶⁶ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 80; Block, "The Grace of Torah," 5.

practice of the law that Israel's wisdom can be witnessed by other nations.⁶⁷

Therefore, the verse illustrates that the law given to Israel is what governs life in the land.⁶⁸ Israel is favoured to be the people that bring salvation to others (Exod 19:4-6). Israel has become an 'open book' for other nations to read;⁶⁹ it would be scandalous should they disregard the law and be punished for it (Deut 4: 25-28). The obedience in fulfilling the demands of the law will grant peace to Israel and enhance her life. Their stellar example of observance of the law ensure prosperity and merit an awe-inspiring praise from other nations. This is what makes Israel a great nation.

Verse 6: The syntagm וְשָׂמְרֵתֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם ("keep and do") occurs in various places (7:12; 16:12; 26:16; 28: 13), sometimes in the infinitive form. In the priestly code, the phrase occurs with זָכַר (Num 15: 39, 40);⁷⁰ Gen 37:11 expresses the idea in this verse; the doggedness of keeping in mind, remembering and not forgetting. The term is vital for it stresses obedience. The observation of the law attests Israel's wisdom and becomes a testimony to other nations. The people of Israel are supposed to be wise, discerning and reputable (Deut 1:13).⁷¹ This verse demonstrates how the Torah becomes the source of wisdom just as it is stated in the Psalms and other Wisdom books (Pss 1; 147:19-20; Sirach 24) where the Torah is identified with wisdom. The one who observes the law lives in wisdom and as a consequence has knowledge to live.⁷²

The expression 'great nation' has a moral and spiritual connotation.⁷³ The spiritual essence is manifested in the physical realm, a nation that will be holy and politically powerful in the sight of other nations. The land promised to them is the means to identify them as a nation and is never in contrast to the political greatness of Israel (Gen 12: 2; 17: 5-6, 16; 18: 18; 28:14; 35: 1; 46: 3 [Deut 26: 5 draws on Exod 1]), because

⁶⁷ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 80; Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 47.

⁶⁸ Mays, *Deuteronomy*, 150.

⁶⁹ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 47.

⁷⁰ See also other similar references in Esther 9:28; Exod 20: 8; Deut 5:12.

⁷¹ The identification of the observance of the law and manifestation of wisdom is late in the history of Israel. In wisdom literature, wisdom is a gift of YHWH through which one receives life and blessing of YHWH (Prov 8). Cf. Mays, *Deuteronomy*, 150. However, wisdom as law for promulgation is found in the ancient Near Eastern law codes. For instance, in the law of code of Hammurabi, *ANET* 164ff, 178.

⁷² House, "Examining the Narratives," 242.

⁷³ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 131; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1—11*, 202.

the spiritual Israel can only be seen and experienced in its physical success and achievements.

Small as Israel is among the nations (Deut 7:7), it is the beacon of YHWH's wisdom. It is through Israel's interaction with other nations that the nations will become an eyewitness to its wisdom. The greatness of Israel is supposed to be an experiential one that is why the book of Deuteronomy is filled with hear, see, observe, keep and teach.⁷⁴ So that when the nations hear of Israel, out of interest in their phenomenon will make an inquiry and then learn of their religion, kinship, economy, leadership and hospitality.⁷⁵ Thus, the nations' interaction with Israel will lead to acknowledgement of the greatness of Israel. The particle כִּי (surely) has an affirmative and assertive force, which denotes the surprise of the nations who will experience Israel's wisdom.⁷⁶ The laws themselves do not show the wisdom of Israel; only through the fulfilment of the law will Israel's wisdom emerge for other nations to see.⁷⁷

In verse 7, the author buttresses the choice of Israel in its uniqueness and the proximity of its God (1 Kgs 8:52; Psa 145: 18). Israel's greatness depends on its relationship with God and so YHWH's proximity to Israel is essential for recognising the manifestation of its wisdom.

This phrase $\text{אֱלֹהִים קְרִיבִים אֵלָיו}$ is a major factor that will confirm Israel's greatness. The nearness of YHWH to Israel will be the source of their greatness because anytime they call on him, he will answer.⁷⁸ In the ancient Near East, the gap separating the high god from human beings is filled in with minor gods who act as intermediaries.⁷⁹ Israel needs no intermediaries because YHWH is always present. The nearness of YHWH, therefore, is a necessary factor in Israel's theology.

⁷⁴ MacDonald, "The Literary Criticism," 213.

⁷⁵ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 49.

⁷⁶ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 195. He suggested that the phrase $\text{כִּי עַם-הָעַם וְנִבְּוֹן הַנְּהוּל הַזֶּה}$ is to be understood as "this nation is nothing but a wise and a discerning people." See Takamitsu Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Leiden: Brill 1985), 131.

⁷⁷ Therefore, the translation of this word הוּא is an hermeneutic key. הוּא as a separate pronoun sometimes refers in general to the verbal idea but a preceding sentence. It corresponds to the English translation of "it" see, Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar* (transl. A.E. Cowley, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), §135. See also Num 14: 41; Jgd 14:4.

⁷⁸ Bricker, "God So Near," 337.

⁷⁹ Mays, *Deuteronomy*, 150.

Verse 8 concludes the discussion on the greatness of Israel. Israel's greatness is seen in its righteous life in observing the law. In the law is YHWH's wisdom. A nation without a just law cannot exist; therefore, the greatness of Israel will again be seen in the implementation of its just law. Israel's just law will exercise a quality of social justice that no nation on earth has ever practiced. In this context, the word צָדִיק (righteous) is understood as a qualification conforming to what is good and worthy of praise.⁸⁰ The sentence mimics the code of Hammurabi (4:9-10; 24: 1-5, 26-31), a product of the Mesopotamian kings, who have the profound wisdom to promulgate efficient and just laws. The code was known in the ancient Near East and was copied in schools; it is probable the author of the book of Deuteronomy knew the code and applied it to Israel.⁸¹

Nevertheless, the righteous laws stem from Israel's ready access to YHWH and their greatness is seen in his proximity and availability. No other nation has access to their gods as the Israelites have with their God, YHWH. Israel has become incomparable to other nations and its reputation will be admired by all nations. In the external forum, the reputation of Israel will be based on the manifestation of its wisdom and understanding, but in the internal forum it is the nearness to YHWH and the just law that accounted for its visible reputation.⁸²

The law, התורה is an equivalent to חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים (statutes and ordinances).⁸³ It denotes instruction or direction of what is just and right; the instructions are cultic in character and the directions are mostly on the moral level. תורה for Israel has become an instruction for education, impacting wisdom to meet the goals of life and a discipline for human life. Thus, being a rule of life and controlling public affairs, the law can be experienced in the following five perspectives: religion, family, leadership, hospitality, and economy.

d) Summary

The law forms part of the covenant relationship of Israel with YHWH and in Deuteronomy, the observance assumes a national character that will determine the fate of the nation. The motivation for observing the

⁸⁰ Block, "The Grace of Torah," 17-19; see also Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 80.

⁸¹ D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant, AnBib 21A* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978), 190-194; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 150.

⁸² Drive, *Deuteronomy*, 64; see also Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 48.

⁸³ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 150-151; Block, "The Grace of Torah," 15-17.

law in v. 1 is for Israel to live, occupy the land and to possess it. Life in this context means living in the land across the Jordan. Therefore, the primary goal of the law is for Israel to live. The land is not a recompense for the observance of the law; it was a gift to their ancestors for their inheritance.

The law in this context is to be studied and applied in Israel's day to day life. It is meant to be understood in that regard. Comprehension of the law means the knowledge of why Israel must obey the law to dwell on the land. It is an obligation for them, but if they make it a choice and do not observe the law, they lose the land. Now, the theological implications of the text.

Theological Analysis of the Text (4:1-8)

a) Theological Elements

The notion of the distinctiveness of Israel's laws in vv. 1-8 is one of the main pillars of Jewish liturgy.⁸⁴ Liturgy involves symbolic gestures; to remember is to make the past present. Remembering suggests much more than a mere recall and is done symbolically. As Christen and Narucki correctly stated, the faith of Israel is enshrined in its Scripture, which is full of symbols. Therefore, Scripture can be defined as theology transmitted through symbols.⁸⁵

The symbols communicate the meaning of what they represent because they make the past present in the eyes of the people. For instance, the two tablets of the written law kept in the ark became the symbol of the presence of YHWH among Israel (1 Kgs 8) and the living law for them. Similarly, the festivals celebrated by Israel are a symbolic recall of the great deeds of YHWH in the life of Israel. For instance, Sabbath (seventh day rest and worship), Passover (the passing over of the angel in Egypt), Atonement (reparation for sin), Tabernacles (dwelling in booth of Jewish males to commemorate their wilderness event). The prayers at the Sabbath and the festival celebrations open the concept of God's election of Israel, testified by the gift of the law (Neh 9:13-14). The laws of Israel are good, just, righteous and are true teachings (v. 8; see

⁸⁴ House, "Examining the Narratives," 240-41; Bricker, "God so Near," 351-352; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 228; Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 138-142; van der Toorn, "Family Religion in Second Millennium West Asia," 82-84; Braulik, "Wisdom, Divine Presence and Law," 16.

⁸⁵ D.L. Christen and M. Narucki, "The Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch," *JETS* 32 (1989), 467-68.

also Neh 9:13 cf. Psa. 147: 19-20). Through these laws Israel inherited a true divine worship⁸⁶ and the celebrations add rich meaning to the faith of Israel and made them to seek his face always.

Being the chosen nation, Israel has to seek always the face of YHWH. For Israel not to seek the face of YHWH is to be absent in his presence and not to be in his presence is not to have life. Right after the passage about the superiority of the law (4:9-11), the parents are commanded to teach their children to observe and to stand before YHWH seeking always his face.⁸⁷

The link between law and life is essential in the Old Testament (Lev 18:5; Pss 1; 19; 119; Ezek 18) because only the wisdom of the law helps to shape human life and preserve it. Israel needs that wisdom from observing the law to have life to dwell on the land. The land was a gift to their father, Abraham but their settling on the land depends on their obedience to the law. The gift of the land is YHWH's faithfulness to the covenant with their ancestors, but long life and enjoyment of the land depend on their compliance to the law that is why it is imperative to remember and to keep the law, which is their source of wisdom.⁸⁸

As Israel's God surpasses all other gods, Israelites must be distinct and superior to other nations. It is in this distinction that Israel's mission will be fulfilled, as a source of blessing to other nations (Exod 19:5-6), bringing other nations to learn the wisdom of Israel, to practice her just law, and to have the knowledge of YHWH. Thus, the attraction of other nations to Israel's ethical life is the means through which they will come to know YHWH; so, in Israel, religious and ethical lives are inseparable.

b) Theological Praxis of the Law

A law needs to be practiced and in Israel's case the law needs to be lived, to be put to action. The observance of the law required in 4:1-8 is concretised in rules and regulations (הַחֻקִּים and הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים) spread throughout the whole book and expressed in worship, leadership, social life, economy, and hospitality.

⁸⁶ Bernhard Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 53-54; House, "Examining the Narratives," 243.

⁸⁷ Block, "The Grace of Torah," 13, 19-22.

⁸⁸ House, "Examining the Narratives," 236.

*Religion (Monotheism).*⁸⁹ Israel belongs to YHWH, so all worship is due to YHWH and no other God (4:1-20); YHWH is ‘imageless’ so, any attempt to create an image of YHWH god.⁹⁰ To enhance its monotheistic faith, details of rules and regulations are explained in the following chapters; in chap. 5, Moses tells the people of the commandments given by YHWH; chapter 6 continues with total obedience to YHWH (6:4-5). Inter marriage with their neighbours are totally forbidden (7:3), and they are to destroy pagan altars (7:5) since that can easily lead them to idolatry.⁹¹ In times of abundance, when the heart is cheerful Israelites are reminded not to lose sight of YHWH, the provider of their prosperity (8:11-18). Sacrifices are to be offered in designated areas to forestall idol sacrifice (12:4-7) and the blood of the gift of sacrifice is to be poured on the ground and not to be eaten (12:23-25). False prophets are to be killed (13:2-6) and a brother or sister who attempt to lure others to the worship of other gods is to be killed (13:7-12; 17:2-7). Any vow made to YHWH has to be fulfilled (23:22-24) to enable them receive blessings to be healthy and to live on the land.⁹²

Healthcare is considered under religious worship and it is presented as YHWH’s rule over them. For instance, skin disease (24:8-9) is to be reported and a cured leper should be declared fit to live in the society by the priest. There is a law against eating the blood of an animal or to eat an animal that died naturally, because no one knows its cause of death (14:3-8, 11-18).

Family: The family acquires prime importance in Israel as source of life and education. The land has been given to the family of Abraham; the family is responsible for perpetuating life and so anything that inhibits life must be eliminated. It is important to note that ‘perpetuation’ does not involve just procreation but also companionship and having at heart the wellbeing of the other. The consequence for endangering and not safeguarding life is the elimination of the deviant; that is, the one who murders or destroys life (19:1-21) must die because the welfare of every human being is essential (20:1-20). Inheritance and love of children

⁸⁹ House, “Examining the Narratives,” 236-237.

⁹⁰ Mays, “Deuteronomy 4,” 27.

⁹¹ Feder, “The Aniconic Tradition, Deuteronomy 4,” 251-75.

⁹² For example, according to Jer 4:23-26, human conduct resulted in cosmic disaster and Hag 1:9-11; 2:15-19 state human sin affects the fertility of the land. Bricker, “‘God So Near,” 337; see also Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and Changes in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 23.

(21:15-17) are factors that contribute to the health of the family life, but a defiant child is an abomination to the family (21:18-21) and rebellious to divine order.

Life follows a divine order that must be maintained (22:1-30): the respect for womanhood and the consequence of women who tell lies (vv. 13-19); the treatment of a woman who is not a virgin (vv. 20-21); cases of adultery (vv. 22-24) and rape (vv. 25-27); an assault on a virgin betrothed (vv. 28-29); the abomination of marrying a stepmother (23:1); and protection of the family (25:5-19). Prohibition on adultery is against the contractual right of the man. In the ancient Near East, the man has the right of deciding whether to execute the wife for adultery (Laws of Hammurabi § 129). In the Decalogue, the law promotes life; the wife is not at the disposal of the man and both have to face the rigors of the law (Deut 22:22). The implementation of these laws depends on good leadership.

Leadership: The leaders of Israel must see to the implementation and observance of the rules and regulations. Leadership is considered in two categories: sacred and secular. The sacred group consists of true and false prophets (13:2-6), priests and the Levites (18:1-5; 18: 15-22); the secular include kings, magistrate, officials, heads of the tribes who are to govern the people with due justice rejecting any form of corruption (16:18-17:13). For example, the king must be an Israelite chosen by the people, who must not have many wives and must not have amassed wealth (17:14-17) for himself. He must have the knowledge of the Torah and read it often (17:18-20). Wisdom is needed for the leaders to guide the people, which comes from the observance of the law. Good leaders with wisdom will harness the resources of the land for the good of the people.

Economy: There are rules and regulations to abide with to sustain the economy of the land flowing with milk and honey (Exod. 3:8, 17). Israel is to recreate life that must be sustained on food, clothing and shelter because Israel cannot praise YHWH on an empty stomach and basic amenities are very necessary for a comfortable life.

To achieve the aim, the land has been divided according to the tribes. The tribe of Levi was not given a land since they have the sacred duty of the community; therefore, the rest of the tribes are obliged to provide for the Levites (12:19; 14:27-29). YHWH promised food (8:7-10) with

good harvest but the people need to contribute with their work; they plant and YHWH grant the natural growth through rain (11:14-15). To sustain sacred office and as a sign of gratitude to YHWH, a tenth part of all the produce of the land, crops and animals, are to be offered to Him (14:22-26).

To alleviate poverty, remission of debts is enforced (15:1-3). The law enjoins that no needy person shall live in Israel, so provision is made for caring for the fatherless, widow, stranger or any person in need (14:27-29; 15:4-11). Hired hands and indentured Israelites were to serve for only six years (15:12) and when liberated, they were not to leave empty handed (15:13-14). Israelites were not to deduct interest on loans (24:10-13) and were to pay correct wage to those who work for them (24:14-15). In effect, they are to be generous, homely and welcoming.

Hospitality: To have life is to live well with others; to be welcoming. Israelites are warned to be generous because they were once strangers and others were generous to them. Good neighbourliness, service to other people should be part of their life (18:6-8). To bury the dead is an act of charity and Israel is enjoined to do that (21:1-9). To feed the hungry is an act of charity, Israel is enjoined to leave something in the field after harvest for the poor to pick and eat (24:20-22).

Humans are social beings, and they interact with each other so taking care of the property of a neighbour is a religious responsibility (22:1-4). Prosperity in one's life begins with respect of the other person. To live in peace with neighbours enhance one's life and to achieve that is to respect the boundaries of the community where one lives (23:1-18) since disputes about landmark always ends in the unrest of the two parties (19:14-15), which destroys life." The interest of a neighbour is always of key importance.

Full protection is to be granted to anyone who seeks refuge with Israel (23:16-17). It is evil to subvert the right of a stranger or the fatherless (24:17-18) just because he or she has no one to defend him or her. The law made provision for the stranger who dwell in Israel; it recognises the alien's lack of land title and could be economically vulnerable, so it necessitates the implementation of fair treatment, even to an Israelite (1:16; 5:14; 10:18-19; 14:29; 15:15; 16:11; 24:14, 17, 19-21) who dwells among the powerful.

To sum up, the practice of the law in different spheres of life spread throughout the whole book of Deuteronomy. Every Israelite is supposed to have life; they are to worship YHWH because YHWH granted them life. However, Israel cannot worship YHWH without obeying the law. The leaders are to see to the implementation of the law, which is in twofold: to worship YHWH and not to allow any needy person to live among them.

Conclusion

The exegetical and theological analysis of Deut. 4:1-8 has revealed that the "...God so near to them" (4:7) asks his people to *live* his law not only in relationship with him but in any spheres of life: economy, leadership, family and relationship with any 'others,' with special attention to those in need (poor, widows, orphans, foreigners). The call to action of the text becomes, therefore, a challenge to fill the gap between, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, between proclamation of faith and everyday life, that is affecting Ghana and the world at large.

The message of the text is that there is no separation between service to God and service to the society. Consequently, when we are entrusted with a responsibility, we must be delighted to execute it to the best of our ability because those positions are God's fulfilment in us. Wisdom and knowledge are meant to recreate the world, "for this will show your wisdom and knowledge to other nations" (4:6).⁹³

The observance of the law requires continuous education both at home and within the society; it entails to teach children the law (Deut 4:9-11; 6:20-25) and to, to make YHWH present in their lives.⁹⁴ The strict observance demands that the parents add or subtract nothing from the law (Deut 6:4), to have fulness of life. Moses had clearly stated that obedience to the law is key to life (4:3-4),⁹⁵ and this command is relevant for any societies As, Socrates summarised it: "unexamined life is not worth living."

The recall of the past is essential if we need to have a meaningful life, Christensen notes,

⁹³ Ammah, "Islam and Poverty," 8.

⁹⁴ Block, "The Grace of Torah," 4-5.

⁹⁵ Block, "The Grace of Torah," 8.

One of the great lessons we can learn from the experience of ancient Israel in the religious life is that memory serves to lead to the continuing experience of the presence and the activity of God. It is forgetfulness that opens the door to tragic failure on the part of the community of faith.⁹⁶

For this reason, Moses called to mind Israel's history, to show what happened to those who obeyed and those who disobeyed (4:3-4).

God's revelation is made known through the sacred text within a worshipping community of faith. Thus, the Israelites celebrate festivals to commemorate the great deeds of YHWH and the ideals on which their nation was built; service to YHWH and service to the people of YHWH. Perhaps, the encounter with the text can also stimulate our communities to transform our traditional and national holidays in day of remembrance and education to curb the gruesome disobedience of the law and to form law-abiding citizens, able not only to proclaim their faith but to practice it as a commitment to transform our society.

Alexander Salakpi

asalakpi@ug.edu.gh

Department for the Study of Religions
University of Ghana, Legon

⁹⁶ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 82.