

Deuteronomy 6:20-25  
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“When your son asks you in time to come [anticipating the transmission of covenant training to future generations], saying, ‘What *do* the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments *mean* which the LORD our God commanded you?’ [i.e., why do the parents live as they do?] <sup>21</sup> then you shall say to your son [to communicate your values], ‘We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt [revealing a historical situation of helplessness], and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand [*mighty hand* = pictures God as a warrior savior; Deut 5:15; 7:8; 9:26; 26:8]. <sup>22</sup> ‘Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household [overthrowing the superpower of that day]; <sup>23</sup> He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land [He owns; cf. Lev 25:23; Psa 85:1; Hos 9:3; Joel 2:18] which He had sworn to our fathers [Gen 17:7-8; 26:24; 28:13-14].’ <sup>24</sup> “So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes [as part of the covenant relationship], to fear the LORD our God [i.e., to reverence Him] for our good always and for our survival, as *it is* today [God’s directives were intended for their benefit]. <sup>25</sup> “It will be righteousness [תְּצַדִּיק *tsedaqah* - righteousness = right living according to God’s expectation] for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment [מִצְוָה *mitsvah* – a singular noun; regarding the Law as a unit] before the LORD our God [who watches], just as He commanded us.

**Summary:**

In this pericope, Moses anticipates the curiosity of children toward their parents, asking why they follow the Lord’s commands (Deut 6:20), and how the parents must seize those moments and explain God’s mighty deliverance from Egypt and how He brought them into a covenant relationship with righteous directives intended for their good (Deut 6:21-25). Moses opens this section, saying, “When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What *do* the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments *mean* which the LORD our God commanded you?’” (Deut 6:20). This assumes Israelite children will, in time, ask their parents why they live differently than the surrounding culture. In Israel, God intended theological training to start in the home with parents training their children in right theology (orthodoxy) and right living (orthopraxy). The training that started in the home was to continue into adulthood as God’s people were to learn from the Levitical priests (Lev 10:8-11; Deut 31:9-13; 33:8-10; Mal 2:7). It’s interesting that before getting to the laws (which the children ask about), the parents were to recount the historical narrative of God’s special deliverance from Egypt. The script Moses provided to the parents started with, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a

mighty hand” (Deut 6:21). At the outset, Israel is described as being in a helpless situation of suffering, and God is seen as the mighty deliverer, an image repeated throughout Deuteronomy (cf., Deut 5:15; 7:8; 9:26; 26:8). The instruction continues, as the parents explain, “Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household” (Deut 6:22). Israel is portrayed as captive observers who witness the Lord’s assault against Egypt, the superpower of their day. God’s defeat of Egypt resulted in their rescue, as “He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers” (Deut 6:23). The deliverance not only brought them out of their suffering, it was also intended to bring them into the place of blessing; a place connected with physical land, real estate which God had previously sworn to give to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 17:7-8; 26:24; 28:13-14). God continued to own and control the land promised to Israel, even after they came to live in it (cf. Lev 25:23; Psa 85:1; Hos 9:3; Joel 2:18). Then, after explaining the historical narrative, the reason for the law was given, “So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as *it is* today” (Deut 6:24). The commandments were part of the covenant relationship Israel had with God, and these came after their salvation and were never the cause of it. God’s directives were for their “good” and for their “survival” in the land. The word *survival* translates the Hebrew verb *חָיָה* *chayah*, which connotes *preservation* (CSB, ESV, NET). The parents then close by saying, “It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us” (Deut 6:25). The word *righteousness* translates the Hebrew *צְדָקָה* *tsedaqah*, which refers here to right living in conformity to God’s revealed will. Israel was to observe God’s *commandment*, here translated by the singular Hebrew noun *מִצְוָה* *mitsvah*, which regards God’s laws as a unit. As we will observe in the chapters ahead, God’s directives provided an objective standard for right living in a world that was otherwise arbitrary and chaotic. God’s standards for right living were important for Israel’s success and prosperity from one generation to the next, as there was a real danger His people would become perverted by the culture around them and turn away from the Lord. When properly followed, God’s directives pertained to everyone in Israel, whether male or female, rich or poor, old or young, servant or free, king or peasant, and served as the basis for a stable society. It’s interesting that Moses repeats this parental formula later in his message (cf. Deut 26:5-9). Subsequent generations copied this didactic method of retelling Israel’s historical deliverance from Egypt, wilderness wanderings, possession of Canaan, failure to the covenant by worshipping idols, the Lord’s punishment upon them, and ensuing deliverances when they humbled themselves (See Psa 78; 105; 106; 135; Josh 24:1-13; Neh 9; Acts 7).

## Biblical Education Starts in the Home

God expected His people to teach their children about Him in order that they might walk with Him and live righteously. God said of Abraham, “I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice” (Gen 18:19). After the exodus from Egypt, the command was given to God’s people, saying, “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deut 6:6-7; cf., Ex 10:2; 2:26-27; 13:14; Deut 4:9; 11:19; 31:10-13). One of the psalmists wrote, “He [God] established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments” (Psa 78:5-7). The psalmist also hoped the children would learn from their parent’s failures, that they would “not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not prepare its heart and whose spirit was not faithful to God” (Psa 78:8).

It appears Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs (Pro 1:1) as a training manual for parents to educate their children “to know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion” (Pro 1:2-4). Proverbs opens with a direct address from a father who tells his son, “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching; indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head and ornaments about your neck” (Pro 1:8-9; cf., 4:1-9). And the book closes with the words of a wise king, “King Lemuel”, who recalls his youthful instruction, “the message which his mother taught him” (Pro 31:1).

In the NT, Christian fathers are instructed, “do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Paul’s friend, Timothy, was a spiritually mature believer, in part because of the godly influence of his mother and grandmother. Paul wrote to Timothy, “I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well” (2 Tim 1:5). Later, Paul referenced Timothy’s godly upbringing, saying, “from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15).

