

**The Shema (Duet. 6:4-9):
Its significance and implications for the 21st
century Christian family**

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis paper is my own work, that nobody did for me, and that I have not copied any of it from anyone else. I have cited all sources used such as books, journals and websites.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Schott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

Marilyn J. Schott

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Chapter 1

Background and Context of the Research

1.1 Introduction

As a Christian mother with two young children, my desire and prayer for my children is that they grow up to become strong active Christians. When my daughter, at the age of four, asked us how she could become a friend of God and be His child it was a thrilling day for me. When I thought about how she had come to this point and as Christian friends asked what we did right, I began to ponder the importance of passing down the faith to the next generation. I wondered if the Bible gave us a model as to how best to pass on the faith.

As I look around at the families in my community and even in the church, I see a disturbing trend that Nelson (2006:20) also notices. The trend that many parents do not want to “indoctrinate” their children, they are introducing them to matters of faith, but do not really teach them anything about God so that when they are older the children can make up their own minds. Brewster (2005:1) shares an interesting statistic from Myers which was also supported by research done later by Barna that in the USA, nearly 85% of people who make a decision for Christ do so between the ages of 4 and 14. Unfortunately, there is no comparable data for South Africa. My personal observations as I have worked and travelled around South Africa is that it may not be such a high percentage, but the statistic still holds true, more people come to Christ as a child than as adults.

In the Bible Literacy survey (Smith 2013:44) undertaken by the South African Theological Seminary it was found that 68% of the respondents were born into Christian families. This tells me that if we are not teaching them about God as young children they are less likely to learn it and accept it later in life. If they have not learnt anything about Jesus, how can they accept Him? As I focus my attention more on nominal Christian families, I see many who happily bring their children to Sunday school and church (even if they themselves do not stay for the service) so that they can learn about

God. The faith education of their children is being left to the church. The children are getting an hour on Sunday and possibly another hour during the week at the junior youth programme to get their faith education. Although I do not doubt the effectiveness of some children's and youth ministries, is this the best plan for ensuring the next generation follows Christ?

Christianity has its roots in the Jewish faith, a faith that has survived thousands of years. It is a faith that has survived through exiles, through domination by foreign governments, through the spreading of the Jewish people throughout the world. They have survived not having their own geographic land and yet all around the world, there are Jewish people who have a distinct culture from those around them, and with their religion and faith still intact. Even now with secularism creeping into the religion and more and more Jewish people relaxing the 'rules', even the least devout Jew could tell you about the traditions, celebrations and key verses of their faith. What have the Jewish people 'done right' to pass on their faith to the next generation?

As I began my research, I discovered that one key passage of Scripture stood out: The Shema (Deut. 6:4-9). Almost all the authors I read used words such as pivotal (Miller 1990:98), central (Peterson 1995:20), important (Wiersbe 1999:46), primary (Hall 2000:136), greatest contribution to religious thought (Klein 1992:18), the supreme affirmation (Tan 2008:183), all pointing to this passages' great importance in both the Jewish faith and the Christian faith. Jewish families recite this passage every morning and every evening. It is the first passage taught to Jewish children once they begin to talk (Klein 1992:18; Wiersbe 1999:46) and devout Jews aspire to say it with their dying breath (Lamm 1998:5; Klein 1992:18). Can 21st century families take something from the Jewish traditions that have developed from this passage in Deuteronomy and develop a model for passing on the Christian faith in daily living?

Often the argument towards Old Testament passages especially in Deuteronomy and the Mosaic Law is that that they all belong to the Old Covenant, which the New Covenant has surpassed. So in order to discover if this Old Testament passage is still of value to Christians this study must not only investigate the meaning of the Shema and its history in Jewish culture but also look at how the Shema has shaped New Testament

theology and teaching. The first part of the Shema is quoted in the New Testament by Jesus (Mark 12:29-30; Mat. 22:37; Luke 10:27). In Paul's writings the Shema can be seen influencing passages such as Galatians 3:19-20 and Romans 3:27-31. James 2:19 also has the Shema as its base (Tan 2008:181-206; Janzen 1998:243-257). Paul also brings out the second part of the Shema in his teachings in Ephesians about family relations (Eph. 6:4). Moses taught the Israelites that their first responsibility was to pass on the knowledge of the Lord to their children. Paul in the New Testament (Eph. 6:4) reiterates this instruction by saying fathers are to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Christian history shows that the passing on of faith is crucial within the family for the survival of faith. Graham in his thesis shows how early Christian writers in the first 400 years of Christianity "communicated a profound commitment of the church to challenge parents in the role of transmitting biblical instruction to their children" (2012:57). This trend may have taken a bit of a knock as Christianity became a state religion, but during the reformation, the church placed more emphasis on parents teaching their children about Christ. Luther wrote the Small Catechism especially for parents to use in the training of children in the faith (Graham 2012:64).

As the New Testament and Christian history seem to be affirming the teachings of the Shema what does that mean for the 21st century Christian family? The aim of this research paper will be to answer this question and will conclude by giving some practical guidelines as to how the answer might look in a Christian family today.

1.2 The Research Problem

1.2.1 Primary Research Question

The research will seek to answer the question: what is the significance and implications of the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, for the 21st century Christian family?

1.2.2 Secondary Research Objectives

The following key questions aid in answering the primary question:

- a) **Biblical Perspective:** What is the meaning and importance of the Shema in its original context?
- b) **Historical Perspective:** What was and is the significance of the Shema in Jewish tradition and Christian History?
- c) **Systematic Perspective:** In what way does Shema influence Jesus' teachings and the development of New Testament theology?
- d) **Practical Perspective:** How is the Shema relevant for today's family, and how can families implement it in daily living?

1.3 The Research Plan

The goal of this research paper is to identify biblically based guidelines for the passing on of the faith to the next generation within the family context, taking these guidelines, and contextualize them to the 21st Century Christian family. The aim of the research is not necessarily to produce an academic work for biblical scholars, but rather to research a topic close to home and to produce something that other parents could relate to and use. As a result, the tone of this research will be a bit more relaxed than conventional academic works.

I believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and that it holds the answers to faith and living. To find answers for questions in the world around, the Bible is a first source for the answer. Therefore, a Biblical study of a relevant passage would be the best way to start in finding a Biblical answer to a practical problem.

The study will loosely follow an integrated theology method for the research. Smith (2013:128 -146) explains that this model starts with a problem or proposition. The model then looks at the problem from four perspectives, biblical, historical, systematic and practical, in order to find a holistic theological solution to the problem. Due to the limitations in space in this research paper, the four perspectives will not be exhaustive in the study of the problem.

The first step in the integrated model is the problem. Chapter 1 will introduce the background out of which the problem arose and give an outline of the problem and key

secondary questions. The biblical perspective (Chapter 2) will look at the background information to the key passage in this study, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, followed by a verse-by-verse study of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The historical perspective (Chapter 3) will be a literary review looking at the interpretation of this passage in Jewish culture and a brief survey of the Shema in Christian practice through history. The systematic perspective (Chapter 4) will be a brief biblical survey of the influence of the Shema and its themes in the teachings of Jesus and in the formation of New Testament theology and instruction. The study will then culminate in the practical perspective (Chapter 5), starting with a review of principles discovered from Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The research will end with a look at faith formation in children, and how to implement the guidelines and principles discovered during the study into the life of the 21st century family.

The study (Chapter 6) will conclude with a review of the main research question and key secondary questions with the findings of the research.

1.4 Conclusion

Research on faith formation in children, parenting guidelines and books are plentiful. Many studies have been done on what the Bible has to say about raising children, often taken from Proverbs and key passages in the New Testament. This study however will focus specifically on the role of the family in faith formation of children and the guidelines that God gave to the Israelites and subsequently Christians on how the family is to do this in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. This study is not a 'how to' guide for parenting, rather it is focused on the specific area of teaching faith to the next generation within the context of a Christian family.

This journey begins with in depth look at the key passage in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to find out a little more about its background, importance and instructions.

Chapter 2

Biblical Perspective - a study of Deuteronomy 6:4-9

2.1. Introduction

To pinpoint the central passage in Deuteronomy, the passage that the rest of Deuteronomy revolves around, Miller contends this would be the Shema. "If there is any validity to the claim that Deuteronomy is the center of OT theology, then one must go on to say that the Shema and its content are the center of Deuteronomic theology, and by extension, the cornerstone of biblical faith" (1984:17). Miller points to the passage's location and repetition as the two primary indicators of its centrality. The Shema command is the standard by which the life and faith of Israel's history with God is measured: "It is a negative history, but the negative judgment is made on the basis of this canon, this measuring rod" (Miller 1984:18).

The research started with an investigation into the background and historical context of the passage to see how it fit into the history of the new nation of Israel. A closer look at the passage followed with a verse-by-verse study of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to get an understanding of what the passage is teaching and to see where there are differences in interpretation and meaning. Once complete with the study I drew out principles and guidelines that pertain to the passing on of faith to the next generation.

The study starts with a look at the background of the Deuteronomy passage to get a clear picture of where the passage fits.

2.2. General background and historical context

2.2.1. Author and Date

Up until recently, Moses was the accepted author of Deuteronomy. The book has a uniformity of representation, character, style and method that points to a single main author, and as far back as can be traced in both Christian and Jewish literature from the second century after Christ back to the time of David the book has been attributed to

Moses (Spence-Jones 1909:vii). The book itself claims that it is the record of the words of Moses (Deut 1:1).

In more recent times other options for author have been given. Merrill (1994:33) outlines the view of De Wette that Deuteronomy was most likely the work of pious conservatives around the time of King Josiah, who were concerned about the apostasy of Josiah's predecessors. They would have attributed the book to Moses in order to give it weight and authority. The book was hidden and then found producing the desired effect in King Josiah's religious reforms.

Miller explains that when questioning authorship one must reformulate the question to ask "what circles or groups of persons might have been responsible for formulating, collecting, editing, and expanding the work before us" (1990:6). Miller then gives three major proposals for which circles may have been responsible for the authorship of Deuteronomy-Prophet, Levitical-Priestly or Wisdom-Scribal circles.

Space in this study does not allow for a full discussion on authorship, however due to the weight of internal evidence as well as historical acceptance of Moses as the author, Moses is taken as the originator of the addresses given in Deuteronomy. Later editors have most likely made some additions, such as the account of Moses' death, to the text. With Moses as the author, the date of the book can then be calculated to the 40th year after the Exodus just before the entry of Israel into the Promised Land. Merrill indicates that the date of the Exodus was possibly around 1447/1446 B.C and therefore the formation of Deuteronomy was about 1407/1406 B.C (1994:23).

2.2.2. Genre and Context

In the Jewish Torah the book of Deuteronomy is known by the name - *these are the words* - after the first words of the first sentence. The English title derives from the Septuagint, *τό δευτερονόμιον τοῦτο*, in Deuteronomy 17:18, "which reflects an incorrect understanding of the words "copy of this law" (Harrison 1969:635). Deuteronomy is more than just a repetition of the law already given in Exodus, but can rather be viewed as an "amplification and advancement of the covenant texts" (Merrill 1994:22).

Deuteronomy is hortatory in genre; it is a book of orations or discourses with the ultimate goal of insuring “that Israel will enjoy a long and prosperous possession of the Promised Land. The book emphasizes that God’s covenant is offered anew to each generation” (Smith 1993:np).

At the time of Deuteronomy, Israel is a newly formed nation. After just over 400 years of living under Egyptian rule, the end of which was in cruel slavery, God liberated the Israelites under the leadership of Moses. The Israelites then spent 40 years wandering around the desert until the generation born under slavery had all died and a new generation stood ready to take the Promised Land. Moses was addressing this new nation and “reiterates the covenant, but does so in a greatly expanded form and in terms appropriate to a new generation, one about to enter a new life experience and to engage in a new realm of responsibility” (Merrill 1994:26).

Deuteronomy can be divided into four main sections. The first, chapters 1-4 is a historical review from the time of the giving of the covenant at Mount Sinai to the time of the address. The second and longest section is chapters 5-26, this section expounds the laws of God given to the people for their daily living. The third section, chapters 27-30 is a renewing of the covenant and commitment with God. The final section, chapters 31-34 are the appendices, the close of the address, a song of Moses, a blessing and then the book ends off with an account of Moses’ death and Joshua’s taking up of leadership.

The passage of this study falls in the second section of Deuteronomy. In chapter 5 Moses first recounts the giving of the 10 Commandments. In chapter 6, Moses goes on to remind the Israelites that these laws came from God and are to govern their life in the Promised Land. Three principal commands are given in Chapter 6: Love the Lord, fear the Lord and teach the Grace of God (Smith 1993:np). The passage for this research is the first of these three commands.

2.3. Verse by Verse study of Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9, NIV¹)

This passage can be seen as the positive summation of the first part of the Decalogue. The passage can be divided into three parts, the first is a confession of who God is (verse 4), the second a command (verse 5) and the remainder of the portion (verses 6-9) shows us how these two things are to shape our lives.

Verse 4: Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

The first word of this passage in Hebrew gives the name to this famous passage, *Shema*, meaning *to hear*. This word does not mean simply the act of hearing what was to be said, but has a much boarder meaning including obedience. Israel was to hear and obey the words that were to follow. Merrill points out that the singular form of the verb shows that Israel was being addressed as a collective or corporate unit (1994:163).

The confession that follows lays a claim on Israel and gives them an identity as well as declaring who God is. Merrill (1994:163) and Hall (2000:136) give opposing views as to how the Hebrew words should be translated, for what the NIV translates as “The LORD our God”. Merrill states that the phrase is predicate nominatives and translated as, the Lord *is* our God. Whereas Hall feels that the terms Lord and our God in Deuteronomy when appearing together, the “our God” is always in apposition to Lord, it is always describing Lord and therefore can only be rendered as “the Lord our God”. The second half of the confession, the Lord is one; most scholars agree has some ambiguity to it. The Hebrew word can either mean a oneness that expresses unity, or uniqueness (Hall 2000:137).

Together the confession reminds us first that God is *our* God, there is a personal relationship with God, He is not just out there unconnected from His creation. Second

¹ All Bible quotes, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the New International Version.

the confession tells us that God is God alone, there is none beside Him, He is unique, but also He is undivided, He is a unity of purpose and character. As understanding of God's nature has expanded to the trinity this has not changed. God is still one and He is still a unity that is undivided.

Verse 5: Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

The confession then leads directly into the commandment. In light of the fact that God is our God and that He is God alone and unique in all that He is, His people must therefore love Him. In this context love can be commanded. Love is not just considered an emotion but rather it is a verb, an act of the will. Love encompasses obedience, loyalty and allegiance. "It is closely related to fear and reverence. It is expressed in loyalty and service. Its primary manifestation is in obedience to the demands of the law" (Miller 1990:103).

There are a few different interpretations for what is meant by loving God with all your heart, soul and strength. Hall explains that in Hebrew thought the heart would be equated with the mind, the intellect, will and intentions; Soul would encompass the emotions, desires and character and strength is an unusual translation for the Hebrew word that is more often translated as very or exceedingly so could stress a total commitment. Later Jewish thought interpreted strength as your wealth (2000:139). In early Christian thought, the three phrases were "complimentary aspects of the human personality" (Miller 1990:103). Another interpretation saw the phrases building up to a climax: semantically concentric, climatic parallelism, expressing a total commitment with the final expression accenting "the superlative degree of total commitments" (McBride 1973:304).

All these interpretations, no matter the exact meaning given to each phrase, explain that in this verse the love to be given to God is total and complete, as God is one and undivided so our love and devotion is for one, and is to be undivided.

Verse 6: These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

God is one and only and His people's commitment to Him is to be undivided and complete, but how is this to be done? The first thing is to take these commandments into our hearts. If a person is to truly love God as He has commanded the commands of God are to be more than just a rule book to be followed. His commands should always be at the forefront of a person's thoughts, they should always be part of a person's "conscious reflection" (Merrill 1994:168). God's commands are to be interwoven with the very fabric of a person's being. This God achieved in us under the New Covenant through the Holy Spirit

Verse 7: Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

The next thing is that God's commands are to be taught to the children. To impress on them Hall says is to repeat or recount for the children (2000:140), Merrill says it is a picture of inscribing God's commands with "indelible sharpness and precision" like an engraver (1994:168). When God made the covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, He was not just making it with those physically present at the time, but it was for all generations to come. He is "our God" and therefore all who are the people of God are a part of the covenant, and each generation is under obligation to ensure that the next generation also takes the commandments upon their own hearts.

Moses did not leave it to the people to figure out how they should do this, he tells them, talk about them all the time. Hall points out that this is the meaning of the double merism²; the commands were to be repeated and talked about wherever they were and went (2000:140). When the people were at rest, when they were at work, when they rose in the morning and retired at night, in all of human effort and all of the time the covenant truths should be communicated (Merrill 1994:168). Children (and adults for that matter) learn best through repetition and Moses knew this.

Verse 8 and 9: Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.

² A merism is an abbreviated way of expressing a totality. Two words or phrases are used to indicate a complete, larger idea (Hall 2000:141), eg – sit and walk = all of human activity, lie down and get up = all of the day.

These last two verses can either be taken literally as was done by the Jewish people at a relatively early stage in tradition (Miller 1990:105) or figuratively. The Jewish traditions will be discussed in further detail later in this paper and will therefore not be discussed now.

Wiersbe believes that the symbols are to be taken metaphorically and the emphasis is that God's people are to be obedient to the Word of God in all they think (foreheads) and do (hands), as well as governing who is permitted to enter the gates and the house. The home was to be a "sanctuary for the Lord and a place where the Word was loved, obeyed, and taught" (1999:48). Miller explains that these instructions function to emphasize that God's word was to completely control a person's behavior, conduct of their home and character of life in their community (1990:106).

In these six short verses Moses packs in a wealth of information, information that can help and guide Christians and especially parents wanting to ensure that the next generation, our children, follow in the ways of God.

2.4. Guidelines drawn from Deuteronomy 6:4-9

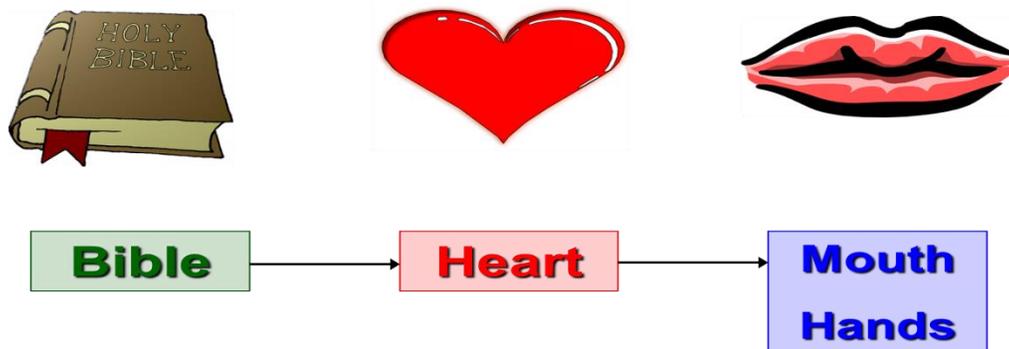
The passage teaches that a person first needs to know who God is. He is our God; there is a personal relationship and connection. Parents need to know that God is supreme, that He is unique, there is none like Him. A person also needs to understand that God is united in character and purpose, He is unchanging.

Once people understand who God is the next bit comes a little easier, because of whom God is a person is to love Him. When a person fully understands who God is, and that He is their God and accept him as their God, they understand that He deserves all their love, obedience and devotion. This process starts by accepting Christ as Saviour and the Holy Spirit aiding in keeping His word on our hearts. Parents must be in a right relationship with God. Learning, loving and obeying Him first, letting the Holy Spirit govern and lead their lives before they can teach their children to do the same.

Then a parent's responsibility is to teach God's word to their children. What are they to teach? Exactly what they have learnt, who God is and what our response should be. When are they to teach, always, in every situation and opportunity, through repetition

day and night. Children are also taught through symbols, this will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter. Through making our homes places of worship, places where God's word is respected, repeated and obeyed, children will come to know God for themselves.

Figure 1: The Model



2.5. Conclusion

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, a passage described as pivotal and central to both Judaism and Christianity, is the positive summary of the first part of the Decalogue, shared by Moses to prepare a new nation of Israel to enter the Promised Land. It taught the Israelites as well as all that followed that God is firstly *our* God, He is in a relationship with His people (Jews and then Christians), and secondly that God is one in unity and He is the one and only. The Christian responds to this knowledge about God with love that is wholehearted and undivided. Christians are to take the Words of God into their hearts, live by them and teach them to their children.

Thousands of years ago, this passage was given to the Israelites, and one might question should Christians still live by the principles taught in the passage, are they relevant to the Christian in the 21st Century? The historical perspective investigates how this passage shaped Jewish culture and how this passage has shaped Christian history.

Chapter 3

Historical Perspective - Jewish interpretations and traditions stemming from the Shema and the influence of the Shema in Christian History

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter paid particular attention to the historical grammatical interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The study found that this passage has a central place in the Deuteronomy teaching as the summary of the Decalogue. The chapter also revealed that Moses was preparing the people of Israel to enter the Promised Land as people with a new identity, the one and only God was their God. The Shema passage continues to teach that because God is unique and above all, He alone is worthy of wholehearted love in return. But not only does God deserve love; His words are to be hidden in the heart and passed down to the next generation.

The Shema was originally given to the Israelites in a specific historical context, but continued to shape Jewish culture and traditions long after. A study of how this passage has shaped the Jewish faith and traditions and subsequently also influenced Christian teaching and practice in history is important to see the full picture. This chapter investigates the Jewish interpretation of the Shema and the various traditions that developed from the passage. Followed by a survey of how the Shema continued to influence Christian history.

3.2. Jewish Interpretations and Traditions

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which has become a central creed in the Jewish faith has given rise to a few interesting Jewish traditions. The first tradition, based on the phrase “when you lie down and when you rise up,” is that the Shema is recited twice daily just after sunrise and just after sunset (Peterson 1995:20). Another two interesting traditions are the Tefilin and the Mezuzah, receptacles that contain portions of scripture that are attached respectively to hands and heads and the doorframes around the entrance to the house

(Peterson 1995:24-25). These traditions have arisen out of a very literal way of interpreting the Deuteronomy passage.

3.2.1. Jewish interpretations of Deuteronomy 6:4-9

The Shema is a central part of Jewish tradition and heritage. Lamm records a story that illustrates that even contemporary, non-observant and secular Jews still consider the Shema as a part of their heritage, and an attack on the Shema is tantamount to an attack on Judaism itself (1998:5).

In rabbinic times the first verse of the Shema declaring the oneness of God was seen as a revolutionary challenge to the prevailing culture of the gentiles where we see a plethora of deities. It was also a challenge to the Zoroastrian dualism and later to the Christian concept of the Trinity (Eisenberg 2004:418). This claim to exclude the Christian concept of Trinity however may not be that strong as the word used for one, *echad*, is also used to describe the one flesh of a husband and wife in Genesis 2:24 and the one cluster of grapes in Numbers 13:23, giving the idea of “multiple elements united in one entity” (Peterson 1995:21).

The Jewish understanding of the second verse has previously been outlined in Chapter 1, that the heart is to be equated with the mind; the soul would encompass the emotions and character; strength is an unusual translation for the Hebrew word stressing a total commitment. However in later Jewish thought strength was interpreted to mean your wealth.

The Shema (which in full also incorporates another two passages – Deuteronomy 11:13-21 & Numbers 15:37-41), is one of the first prayers taught to Jewish children and the last said by those who are dying. It occupies a central place in Jewish religious thought and liturgy (Klein 1992:18). Eisenberg (2004:417) notes that the Rabbis considered the three parts of the Shema as representative of the entire Torah and that the recitation of them fulfilled the command to study the Torah day and night.

There are many traditions and rules that govern the saying of the Shema, but the one that comes directly from the passage is that it is said twice a day, in the morning (when you rise up) and in the evening (when you lie down). This reveals a literal hermeneutic

in the Jewish interpretation of the passage, which we see again in the interpretation of the last two verses of this passage that gave rise to the custom of the Tefilin and the Mezuzah.

3.2.2. The customs of the Tefilin and Mezuzah

The Jewish traditions of the Tefilin and Mezuzah are ones that arose quite early on in the Hebrew tradition, although the history of the tradition is not clear. “Available evidence suggests that they were first used in Hasmonean times (early second century B.C.)” (Kalland 1992:66).

The Tefilin are small leather boxes that contain verses from the Torah and are attached to the forehead and the left wrist during prayer times (Cairns 1992:85). This is done to literally follow the command to tie the words as symbols to your hands and bind them to your forehead in Deuteronomy 6:8.

Similarly the Mezuzah are boxes, cylinders or reeds that contain parchments with verses from the Torah (especially the Shema passages) that are then attached to the right side of doorframes and gateposts (Freeman & Chadwick 1998:171). These literally fulfill the commands for the words to be written on your doorposts and gates in Deuteronomy 6:9.

The question raised by these traditions is should the instructions in these two verses of Deuteronomy be taken literally or metaphorically? As we can see the Jews have taken it literally and have the Tefilin and Mezuzah as literal symbols of God’s word on their person and their homes. Cairns says that the visualizing of symbolic language is acceptable, however it must not detract from “the all-embracing nature of the Torah’s demand by limiting it to specific chosen texts” (1992:85). Hall (2000:141) says that the debate is less important than the significance of the instruction. The law was to be constantly before them, deep in their hearts to remind all in the community of the covenant and love commitment to God. Merrill (1994:168) puts forward that the metaphorical nature of the instruction is clear from the surrounding context and the nonliteral meanings of the prior verses.

Both Hall & Merrill stress that this whole passage is showing a progression in the sphere and claim of the covenant: first in the individual, then to the children, then the household and then to the community. So do Christians need to take these verses literally or metaphorically? Wesley answers this so neatly “Thou shalt give all diligence, and use all means to keep them in thy remembrance, as men often bind something upon their hands, or put it before their eyes to prevent forgetfulness of a thing which they much desire to remember” (1999:np). We do not need to legalistically wear passages on our person or fix them in boxes beside our doors, but visual reminders of God’s word might go a long way to helping us remember.

Having looked at how the Shema has been understood in the Hebrew tradition, the research must also look at how the Shema influenced Christian history.

3.3. The Shema in practice in Christian history

Christ revealed that the One God of the Old Testament Israel is the One God of all people, Jews and Gentiles, all who would come to Him in faith. The Shema and its instructions now also govern those who come into the New Covenant. Two thousand years of Christian History is a long period to review, just a few highlights from history showing how the Christian Church has emphasized the Shema and parents as the major influencer and trainer for the passing on of faith are given.

Graham (2012:56-58) points out that early church fathers, such as Justin Martyr quoted the Shema in a call to parents and families to love and obey God, and John Chrysostom emphasized the importance of parents in the teaching of children the ways and commands of the Lord. Prominent writings from the third century, Didascalia, and the fourth century, Apostolic Confessions and Canons, contain instructions to parents and specifically to fathers, to teach their children the Word of the Lord (Bakke 2006:153). These examples reveal that the principles of the Shema were important in the early Church.

As Christianity became a state religion the world moved into the Middle Ages (500-1500 AD) and the focus shifted from family to Church as the center of Christian education. “The home’s place of spiritual influence was overshadowed by that of church and its

presence as the instructor and guide of biblical and spiritual teaching” (Graham 2012:59). However from around the 11th century various groups at various times and places began to rebel against the Catholic church on various differences in theology, such as the Waldensians, Hussites, Lollards and Albigenses. As these groups were persecuted by the Catholic church, they were forced to flee and as a result the home and the family once more became the center of instruction in spiritual matters within these groups, preparing the way for the Reformation (Graham 2012:60-62).

Osmer (2000:508) tells us that the reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli amongst others were advocates for the teaching ministry within the family. Luther wrote two catechisms, one focused on assisting the clergy to teach the parents and the smaller one aimed at the children and their spiritual training. Calvin also wrote two catechisms aimed at children in these he “called the congregation through its children and youth back to the scriptures, carefully instructing them in the ways of the Lord, until at length “they are able to give reason for the faith”” (De Jong 1967:196). This call back to the home being the centre for Christian education started by the reformers continued through the next few centuries with people such as Robert Raikes who pioneered what has become known as Sunday School and Alexander Campbell who emphasized the family with the parents as disciple-makers within the home (Graham 2012:67-68).

Christian history has continued the emphasis found in the Shema, Jesus’ teachings and Paul’s writings that parents are to teach their children about God and the ways of God so that they too might come to serve and worship Him.

3.4. Conclusion

The Shema, although an Old Testament teaching, is far from being a relic. As seen the Shema is a central tenet of the Jewish faith and practice, and its importance is very clear. From the Jewish customs it can be seen that reminders of God’s word are important and that teaching about faith needs to be a part of everyday life and traditions. Training should not be restricted to teachings at church but should be done throughout each day and through the family traditions.

As the research moved to look at the influence of the Shema passage on Christian history and teaching it is seen again that it is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that their children are taught the message and Word of God. The family setting is to be the major school for learning about God and learning to love God. In times when the family was central to the spiritual education of the next generation, Christianity flourished. Conversely in times where the Church was the center for Christian education, Christianity became ritualistic and lost the importance of loving God wholeheartedly and above all.

After looking at the historical influence of the Shema passage, the next step is to look at how the themes found in the Deuteronomy passage have influenced New Testament teaching. The next chapter will take a closer look at the systematic perspective.

Chapter 4

Systematic Perspective – The influence of the Shema in Jesus' teaching and the formation of New Testament theology

4.1. Introduction

So far, the research has looked at the biblical perspective and the historical perspective of the teachings of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The passage is a central teaching in Deuteronomy. The passage is central to the Jewish faith, daily life and teaching. The passage also continued to hold a central place throughout Christian history until the present. Now in the systematic perspective the research investigates how the themes of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (God is one, the command to love and the command to pass God's word to the next generation) are expanded on in the New Testament teachings and so affirms the importance of the Shema in the new covenant.

4.2. The Shema affirmed by Jesus: Mark 12:29-30, Matthew 22:37 & Luke 10:27

The three clearest uses of the Shema in the New Testament are found in the Synoptic Gospels. Janzen (1998:253) explains that in these instances the Shema serves the purpose of indicating our proper response to God. Looking at the three passages the Mark and Matthew accounts seem to be accounts of the same story, whereas the Luke story seems to be a different story.

The Mark passage is the only one that has the full version of the Shema command – that is the call to hear, the confession of God's oneness and the command to love God (Tan 2008:186). In all three passages the scenario involves someone asking Jesus a question. The answer is given using two Old Testament passages – Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. In the Matthew and Mark account, Jesus is asked which commandment is the greatest, whereas in the Luke story Jesus is asked what must a person do to inherit eternal life, Jesus then asks what the law says and the Shema is

given in reply. In his thesis, Ty (2011:23) notes that the Luke account “presents the Shema as the unifying commandment and the synthesis of the entire law”, the Matthew account emphasizes that this “command ranks highest among all the commands in the Law” and the Mark account brings across the preeminence of the command. The Shema is the “primary command which God’s people ought to aspire for above any other commands”.

Jesus in His ministry refers back to the Shema, giving this Old Testament passage a place of importance in the new covenant He came to bring. Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). The Shema has not lost its importance, but rather retains its cornerstone position in the ministry of Jesus. The next two sections look at the rest of the New Testament writings to see if this emphasis continues.

4.3. The Shema in the New Testament

Moving into the rest of the New Testament the Shema retains its centrality. Tan (2008:184) has done a study of the passages explicitly citing or referring to the Shema in the New Testament. In this study, Tan cites the following passages that fall into this category: Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 22:37, Galatians 3:19-20, Romans 3:27-31, James 2:19, Mark 2:1-13, Luke 5:21, Mark 10:17-22, 1 Corinthians 8:6. At the end of his study Tan (2008:205-206) notes that “we can conclude that the Shema was certainly not a relic to early Christian communities. In fact, the evidence points to it being a flashpoint of debate and controversy between the Church and the Synagogue ... This will inexorably mean that it was also a template for doctrinal development for early Christianity”.

Much of what Tan discusses is the influence of the first two verses of the Shema (Deut 6:4-5); however the New Testament does affirm the rest of the passage. In Ephesians 6:1-4, Paul is speaking to right relationships in the family. In this passage he reiterates the instructions of the Shema to pass on the law of God to the next generation, when he instructs fathers to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. “It is God’s plan for His Word to be passed on from one generation to the next. And His primary agent is the family (MacArthur 1986:309).

4.3.1. The Shema affirmed by New Testament Writers in Doctrine development

In New Testament it is seen that Paul uses the Shema as a base for some of his doctrinal teachings, and he uses the Shema in a very controversial way.

In Romans 3:29-31 Paul focuses on the first part of the Shema, that God is one, taking out the meaning that He is unique and above all. Paul does this to show that God is not just God of the Jews but also of the Gentile. Paul emphasised that unlike the gods of other nations who were national or territorial gods, the Lord God was more. He is God Almighty, the Most High and God alone above all. Paul is declaring that the one true God was also the God for the Gentiles. Tan (2008:197-196) points out that in Greek the Shema is identified by the phrase εἷς ὁ θεός that translates the Hebrew phrase *Adonai Echad* (God is one), which he says is often the “shorthand way of referring to the Shema”. Later he says that Paul’s use of the Shema in Romans 3 may be “regarded as an appeal to the concept of the one Creator, which was already sounded in Romans 1”.

In 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 Paul take a very controversial stand to include Jesus into the concept of one God. In Romans 11:36 Paul uses a very standard doxology “For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things”. When he uses the familiar doxology pattern here in 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul now inserts the name of Jesus with the ‘through’ preposition. Janzen (1998:254) explains that it looks like Paul has split the phrase ‘The Lord your God’ so as to identify ‘God’ with ‘the Father’ and ‘Lord’ with Jesus. He goes on to say by doing this Paul affirms the oneness “both of God the Father and of Jesus Christ as Lord, to set a precedent for worship and an agenda for theological reflection which in succeeding centuries among Christians has found Trinitarian expression”.

Paul is not the only New Testament writer to have used the Shema as a basis for theology, Tan (1998:197-198) shows that the book of James has a clear reference to the Shema in James 2:19, and that it is alluded to and influences the teaching in many other places in James. In James, the author is trying to show his readers that faith without works is no faith at all. He, like Jesus in the gospels, connects the Shema’s

command of loving God with loving one's neighbour. The outworking of loving God is seen in the way we treat our neighbour.

There are other New Testament passages that also refer back to the Shema, but space does not allow for more investigation. However from what has been looked at it can be concluded that the Shema, and especially Deuteronomy 6:4 & 5, was an important factor in the shaping of New Testament theology. But the Shema did not just shape doctrine; the instructions in the second part of the Shema were also influential.

4.3.2. The Shema in the teachings on family relations: Ephesians 6:4

The Shema's influence, although not overt, is also seen in the teachings to the Ephesians. Paul is teaching the church about right family relations and in Ephesians 6:1-4 focuses on the Parent-Child relationship. First instructing the child to honour and obey his parents, second Paul addresses the parents. Paul exhorts fathers not to exacerbate or provoke his children to anger, but to rather bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Discipline refers to the "systematic training of children" (MacArthur 1986:320) and includes correction of wrongdoing as well as the teaching and training in the correct way.

Instruction of the Lord refers back to the Shema. Parents are to teach their children about who God is and what our response to that should be. Children do not naturally know who God is or how to love and obey Him; our sinful nature has impaired this knowledge and ability. "A child must be taught about God, His nature, His care, His love, His will. And when he is old enough, he must be taught his need to trust in Jesus Christ as his own Savior and Lord" (MacArthur 1986:316). Paul affirms that the Shema is not obsolete, the church is not taking the place of the parents when it comes to teaching children about God, the parents still hold this responsibility. It is still the parent's responsibility to pass on the faith to the next generation, just as the Shema taught that parents are to teach their children.

4.4. Conclusion

As the research moved into the New Testament, it revealed that Jesus affirmed the Shema as important and still relevant for the new covenant believer. Jesus places

loving God as the most important command. Love for God must still be the central tenet in the Christian's life. In the New Testament, the Shema received new, broader and deeper meaning in New Testament theology. The Shema concept of one God is expanded to include Jesus, without losing the essence of one God. It is also expanded to include all people and not just the Jews. God's message was now for all people from all nations. He is God to all people and not just the Jew. And Jesus is one with God and therefore deserves the same love as God commanded in the Old Testament.

In the New Testaments teachings Paul also re-iterates that parents are still responsible for teaching their children the ways and word of God. Passing on the faith to the next generation is still the responsibility of the parents. Parents are to train up their children in the ways of the Lord.

The New Testament continues the themes given in the Shema passage and confirms that this passage is still relevant and important for the New Covenant Christian. In the next Chapter the research moves into the practical perspective – how the Shema can be implemented practically in the context of the 21st Century Christian family.

Chapter 5

Practical perspective - Implementing the guidelines from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 in everyday Christian family life

5.1. Introduction

The Shema has played a central role in Old Testament times, in Jewish tradition, the New Testament and throughout Christian history. In light of this could 21st Century Christian parents learn something from the Shema, Jewish traditions stemming from this passage and Christian history to enable them to be better equipped to share their faith successfully with the next generation?

Statistics shared by Brewster (2005:1) from Myers and Barna show that a vast majority of Christians make their decision for Christ between the ages of 4 and 14. This only goes to strengthen the argument that the family needs to play a major role in teaching children about God and faith. Much of a child's moral and value foundation is laid in the home during this phase of life, if faith is not an integral part of this, then the chances of the child coming to faith later in life is greatly diminished.

In this chapter I look at what has been learnt from the Shema, New Testament passages, Jewish Traditions and Christian history and how they can be applied to Christian family life now in the 21st Century.

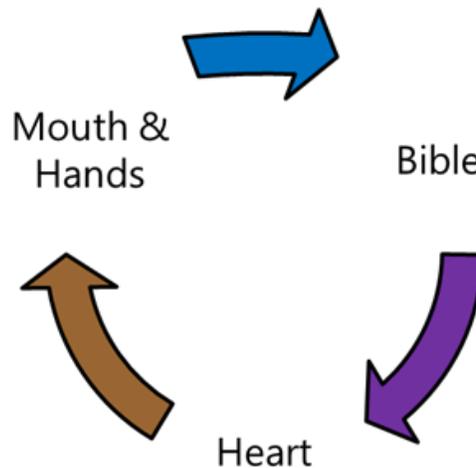
5.2. Principles drawn from Deuteronomy 6:4-9

From the study of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 in chapter two it was discovered that the model given through Moses was:



First a person learns about who God is from His Word, the Bible. In response to what is learnt a person is to love God with all their heart. Then a Christian is to use their hands (what we do) and mouth (what we say) to teach the next generation about who God is, and the cycle then starts again with them.

Figure 2: The cycle for passing on faith



5.2.1. Step 1: The Bible

The first step in the model for passing on faith is God’s Word. In order for parents to teach their children they first need to know God themselves, this starts with a personal relationship with God. This step requires effort on the part of the parent as they are need to spend time studying God’s word in order to get to know Him better. Personal study and prayer time with God is important. Psalm 119 is a beautiful picture of what God’s word should mean to Christians, and how we are to study God’s word. Psalm 119 shows Christians the “excellence of God’s Word and its effects, and the strength and happiness it gives to those upon whose hearts it is engraved” (Brooks1990:10). Personal study time in God’s Word should be an essential part of every Christian parent’s life if they truly want to bring up their children in the ways of God.

This step may also require parents to spend time with other parents studying God’s word together. In our modern world the extended family is often spread so far apart and families no longer have the presence and support of the extended family in the raising

of children. Having a group of like-minded parents to share in the journey fills this gap. Parents grow in their knowledge of God through the sharing ideas, learning from others, studying God's word together, spending time together as parents and as families. The writer of Hebrews tells Christians to encourage one another and not neglect meeting together (Heb. 10:24-25), fellowship is an important part in learning about God.

This step also includes Church. Parents need to be spiritually fed and nurtured and this can be done through the Church. Parents need a time when they can be taught from God's Word. Parents need to be part of a Bible-based Church where God's Word is expounded and taught. The Church is also a place where the teaching that the parents are doing in the home is built upon and affirmed in their children's lives through the children and youth ministries.

But learning about God is not enough. If a Christian does not allow the Holy Spirit to use God's word to impact the heart then all they have is head knowledge. What the parent learns about God has to become personal before the parent can pass it on to others. The parent must rely on the Holy Spirit to teach and empower them.

5.2.2. Step 2: Our Hearts

As a Christian comes to know more about God and all He has done for them, the heart is changed and the relationship with God deepens. A Christian learns that they are to love God and as Deuteronomy 6:5-6 points out this loving God needs to include the person's whole being and that God's Word is to not only be in their head as knowledge but in their heart as a relationship.

Christians are in a covenantal relationship with God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and their acceptance of that sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. As part of the covenant, God has demanded our love and as He is God and God alone, He has every right to demand our complete devotion and love. The Holy Spirit in us is the source of this love we are to give.

Kinzer (2008:7 & 10) explains that when a Jew recites the Shema he is re-enacting and re-appropriating the encounter with God at Sinai and reaffirms the covenant. As Messianic Jews continue the tradition of reciting the Shema it has a greater meaning

than just the Sinai covenant, it also serves as a “memorial of Yeshua’s loving obedience unto death, which completes the covenantal encounter at Sinai and raises it to a higher level”. Christian parents may not necessarily need to recite the Shema each day, although that might be a good start, but they do need to spend time each day contemplating God, loving God and getting to know Him more. Scripture memorization is a good way to daily remind ourselves of God’s goodness and love for us. As a person is reminded of God’s love and character through meditation and memorization, their love for God can only increase.

Loving God is not just a feeling or sentimental expression, it is also action. Loving God includes keeping His commandments and loving others. Our lives should reflect our love for God in the way that we live it out in accordance with God’s commands and in obedience to His word.

Christian parents may not always get this right, but this is no reason to despair, loving God is our goal (Nelson 2006:18). Even parents are still learning and growing; this is a life-time journey. As parents teach their children what they should be doing the child will see the parents trying to do the same. It is this modeling that will also teach them the right way to go. As they see their parents mess up and seek forgiveness, as they see their parents studying and learning God’s word, as they join their parents in attending Church and Home groups they are being shown the right way to go. Then as the parent uses words to teach them, they already see the model of the working out of what is being taught. Children should see in their parents the true meaning of Christian love and living.

5.2.3. Step 3: Our Hands and Mouth

The over flow of love for God should be seen in our teaching and actions. Our relationship with God is personal, but it should not be private. God has not saved people just to hide away and commune with Him in private, He has called people out and saved them to live as salt and light in the world (Mat 5:13-16). Our relationship with God is to be shared. Our knowledge of God must be taught, as Deuteronomy 6:4-9 so clearly shows, first to our children.

Reading through the Bible stories such as Eli's wicked sons (1 Sam 2:12-25) and Samuel's sons (1 Sam 8:1-5) and King David's sons (2 Sam 13 – 18) stand out, then stories of pastor's and missionary's children who have rejected the God of their fathers, show a similar trend, what went wrong? Why did the children not follow the example of their parents? Granted, people have to choose for themselves and parents are not completely responsible for the choices of their children. Nevertheless, one does wonder if just maybe the fathers (and mothers) got so busy with God's work outside the home that they neglected the command to teach their children, or maybe they were just unsure as to how to go about teaching God's way. Christian parents need to watch and be careful that they do not get so busy with God's work outside the home that they do not do God's work inside the home. Our children should be top of the priority list of God's work.

Deuteronomy 6:7 instructs us to teach our children. Not just to tell them once, but repeatedly "until the pupil learns what is being taught" (Nelson 2006:19). The earlier a parent begins the better the chance that children will grasp and understand all that is being taught. Teaching is done through dialogue, both formal deliberate sessions of teaching and in everyday conversations as opportunity arises. Teaching is done through family and church traditions. Teaching is also done through modeling – children should see their parents reading and studying God's word, they should hear their parents praying, and they should see their parents loving God and loving others. Deuteronomy 6:7 shows that the teaching must be done at all times and at every opportunity.

Deuteronomy 6:8-9 goes on to speak about tying God's word to the forehead, hand, doorposts and gates. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2 and 3 this may be taken metaphorically, but a Christian must heed the lesson – God's words must govern all that is thought and done, it must govern homes and communities. All should see the Christian family and know whom they serve. They should know them by their love for God and their love for others. Having some physical reminders of this, such as a cross around your neck or a verse on the wall might be beneficial, especially in teaching children, as long as they do serve as reminders and don't just become decorations with no purpose.

The principles of Deuteronomy are still relevant to the 21st century Christian family and should still be lived out in everyday life. But how does the Christian parent go about fulfilling the command to teach their children?

5.3. Faith formation in Children

Many Christian parents want to follow the command to teach their children, but are unsure as to how to go about this. As Miller (2008:45) explains “Teaching is a complex endeavor that involves far more than “learning the rules” though that is a part of it. Coming to know the faith involves questioning, knowing the story behind the rules, and engaging in a range of familial and communal rituals and activities.”

Teaching faith is not something that can be taught in a purely academic setting, faith is a living relationship and needs to be shown in life and deed as well as word. “When we teach about God, we need to do it naturally and regularly” (Peterson 1995:24). Collins (2006:216) shares four ways to teach – diligently, repeatedly, naturally and personally. Parents should also take into account the age and development of their children and tailor the teaching to their level.

In mathematics, a child is taught to count first, then how to add and subtract then taught multiplication and division and only much later are they taught more complicated mathematics such as geometry and trigonometry. The same is needed for spiritual knowledge and teaching, it needs to start off with the simple and follow a progression to the more complicated. Teaching a three year old about justification and redemption and sanctification is just not going to stick, but learning an action song about how Jesus loves them and hearing the stories about creation and about baby Jesus is. Benner & Hill (1999:1024-1025) outline the major developmental theories in relation to spiritual development, specifically those theories of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erikson and James Fowler. Parents would be wise to read up on and learn more about the developmental stages of children to understand how their child learns and develops so that the teaching may be more appropriate for the child’s developmental level.

Teaching children about God can never be started “too early” as Nelson (2006:19) rightly states “if we start soon after our children are born, we have ample opportunity to instill in them a reverence for God and an understanding of what God expects of us.”

Developmental stages are always just a guideline as each child will develop at their own pace. There are four main developmental stages until adulthood.

Infancy: This stage is from birth to about two years of age. At this stage a baby is cramming in so much new information about their surroundings and their place in it. Their understanding is very limited, but what they do learn at this age is trust. A child’s trust in God builds upon the foundation of trust that develops between parents and child. “If young children do not develop trust in this crucial human relational period, it is possible that later on in life they may have some difficulty trusting God” (Benner & Hill 1999:1024). At this stage teaching about God is more about providing a loving stable home for children, praying for them, providing for them, caring for them, developing a trust relationship. This is also a good time to develop a ‘quite time’ routine. Babies thrive on routine and so adding a bible story and prayer into the bed-time routine is a fun way to start a good habit for the future.

Early Childhood: this stage is the two to seven year age range. This age is a great age for teaching as a child’s brain is in learning gear. They are learning language, they are learning how things work and their favourite question is ‘why?’ At this age a child’s imagination and creativity is a great tool for teaching spiritual truths – stories and crafts around spiritual matters are perfect for teaching. Benner & Hill (1999:1024) point out that biblical material should be related to a child’s experiences in life and biblical stories with moral connotations are best at this age. A child’s natural curiosity at this age lends itself to teaching and parents should not shy away from their child’s questions, but rather take time to teach them about God and if the child asks a question they can’t answer it just creates an opportunity for the family to learn together.

Middle Childhood: this stage ranges from seven until twelve years old. At this stage of development children are more capable of putting facts together. The child “is concerned with concrete people, actions and situations. Factual information pertaining

to Jesus and to sources and people of the Christian faith would be appropriate to stress at this time” (Benner & Hill 1999:1025). This age is a good time for the child to start reading biblical accounts from the Bible and not just story books and to be introduced to more formal Bible study material. Spiritual conversations can be more in-depth and begin to explain more complicated spiritual ideas. As they learn to read at this age, being able to read the Bible stories for themselves is a great source of pride and joy.

Adolescence: this stage can overlap with the last few years of the previous stage and goes on until adulthood. It is during this stage that a child truly takes on faith for themselves. It is during adolescence that a child develops their own identity apart from their family and determines their own values and faith. Adolescents are answering four important questions, Identity: “who am I?” Relationships: “How do I get along with others?”, Future: “Where will I fit?” and Ideology: “What do I believe?” This is often a rocky road of questioning and challenging all they have been taught, but in the process they develop values, religious beliefs and life philosophies, and often these end up not being too far off from those of their parents (Collins 2006:239). Christian parents who have laid good foundations earlier on and developed a good trust relationship with their child can ease this process by helping their teenager find the answers to these questions by studying together what the Bible and God have to say about these questions. Parents can prepare themselves for the challenges against faith in God that their teenager might bring by knowing what they believe and why so that they have answers ready. Again just like in the early childhood phase a parent should not be afraid of the tough questions and be prepared to learn with their adolescent to find answers to their questions.

The stages of development help to better tailor teaching correctly to the developmental stage of the children, what is important to remember is the goal of teaching is to teach children to love God as the Shema instructs us to love God. Therefore, the next thing to consider is the ‘how’ of teaching.

5.4. The ‘how’ of teaching children

From my own experience and through conversations with Christian friends, I think one area Christian parents really struggle in, is not knowing HOW to pass on their faith to

their children. They know that they should but are either not confident in their own knowledge or do not know how to go about it. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 gives much guidance for how to teach children. It starts with our own relationship with God and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. As we develop our relationship, we can then start to teach our children.

Miller (2008:54-57) gives nine components in teaching faith to children.

- 1) **The family context:** Deuteronomy 6:7 instructs parents to teach their children. Learning happens in a family context, as parents are learning so the children are learning. “Peers and teachers are important, but the most significant teaching and child-rearing occurs at home” (Collins 2006:217). This necessitates that families spend quality time together.
- 2) **Hearing and reading:** Deuteronomy 6:4 starts with the word ‘hear’. Learning happens through hearing and understanding and leads to obedience. Incorporating opportunities into family life to hear God’s word is important. This could include family devotions, regular Bible reading and story time, regular attendance at Church and Sunday school, regular discussions around God’s word in formal and informal settings. Ingram (2009:73) encourages parents to develop a time for systematic instruction to teach children obedience to God, specific set times as a family and one-on-one with each child, giving children more structured times for hearing and reading the Word of God.
- 3) **Remembering:** “recall of the story is fundamental to the learning process” (Miller 2008:55). Just hearing a story once will not necessarily mean you will remember it the next day. I have heard many sermons but the number I can still recall, including the one I heard just a few days ago at Church can be counted on one hand! When teaching children you need to help them remember the stories. Asking questions about the story after can help in the remembering process, creating reminders – like the Jewish phylacteries (Deut 6:8-9), could also aid in remembering.
- 4) **Answering questions:** children are naturally inquisitive and, as noted above, ‘why?’ is a favourite question. Parents respond to children’s questions as they

come up in daily life and use them as teaching opportunities to share God's story in everyday life (Deut 6:7). Questions can also be initiated by the parents to stimulate spiritual conversation. Ingram (2009:74-75) stresses using the 'teachable moment', moments and situations that come up in everyday living that can be used to teach spiritual truths or apply spiritual truths to a situation. Things such as TV programmes, problems or things that came up at school can all lead to teachable moments.

- 5) **Cultic context:** various traditional and spiritual activities in family and church life often spark the questioning in children. Children should not be excluded from these activities as they are perfect opportunities to teach children the story behind various rituals and traditions. Baptisms, communion, Christmas and Easter celebrations are all good teaching moments.
- 6) **Recitation and meditation:** Deuteronomy 6:6-8 emphasizes that the words are to be on our hearts, that we are to impress them on our children and to talk about them all day. There is a message of repetition here, something is not on our hearts until we have heard it many times and dwelt upon them. Impressing implies making sure everything sticks in the memory of the child, and talking about God's word all day definitely gives the impression of repetition. I often marvel at my children and how even though they cannot read they can recite their favourite story or song by heart and remember that this has come after hearing the story read over and over to them first. So we should do this with the Word of God, reading passages over and over, learning memory verses together as a family and spending time really meditating on the word of God together.
- 7) **Doing:** learning also requires doing. "Observing or doing the law is thus both the aim of the teaching and a process for learning" (Miller 2008:57). Involving children in obedience to God helps them to learn. This can be done in many ways, through tithing, partaking in communion, being involved in community outreach, giving children opportunity to pray and read the Bible and showing them ways to put God's Word into action.
- 8) **Motivation:** we all need a bit of motivation when it comes to learning and so when teaching you also need to motivate by pointing out the positives of the

learning. “One should not overlook the importance of urging and motivating ... by indicating the value and gains that come from learning what is being taught in all this instruction” (Miller 2008:27).

- 9) **Learning for future catastrophe:** teaching should also prepare children for the consequences of future failure. Just as there are positives to learning God’s ways, there are also consequences to not following; these consequences also need to be included in the teaching. This Bible highlights this principle. God, through the biblical writers, did not exclude the ‘bad’ stories, but included the failures of His people so that Christians can learn from their mistakes.

These are all very practical ways to teach children in everyday life about God as life is lived. All these things contribute to an atmosphere of learning within the home. They are things that don’t need to be forced or formalized, but can happen naturally in day to day living. This need not be a daunting task, and parents are not in this alone. The Church should be there equipping and supporting parents in their teaching task.

5.5. The role of the Church

Although the task of passing on of faith to the next generation has primarily been given to parents, they should not be alone in the task. The Deuteronomy instructions were given to the nation of Israel as a whole, passing on of faith is a community task. The church has the task of building up and equipping the people of God for every good work (Eph 4:12). These good works include the bringing up of children in the ways of God.

Through the preaching and teaching of the Church the parent should have the knowledge and confidence to be able to pass on God’s word to their children. Through the various programmes offered by the church, “Parents can be guided into becoming exemplary believers. They can learn to teach their children in accordance with the approach outlined in Deuteronomy 6” (Collins 2006:232). As was seen in the Christian history review in Chapter 3, there were various church leaders, such as Luther, who specially wrote material to train parents for the task of teaching their children and material for the parents to use to teach their children. The church’s ministry supports parents in their role as Christian educators of their children.

Sometimes churches have such good programmes for the children and youth that it can become easy for the parent to leave it up to the church to train their children in the ways of God. The example of the church during the dark ages, who took away the task of spiritual teaching from the parents with disastrous results, is a warning. The church needs to make an effort to make sure that it does not take over the primary role of spiritual teacher in the children's lives, but must rather come alongside the parents and encourage their involvement in their child's spiritual education. One way my church does this is to send home a 'take home sheet' each week telling parents what story was taught in Sunday school, and giving some suggested questions for the parent to ask the child to aid in the remembering process. The sheet also suggests activities the family could do together during the week to re-enforce the message of the story.

Churches could do workshops and seminars to train parents firstly in what they believe so that they are more confident in their knowledge and secondly in how to teach children about God in the home. The Church needs to provide opportunities for families to serve and worship God together, not always separating out the age groups. I enjoy taking my daughter along to the preparations for community outreaches. We can't always attend the outreach, but I know that she is learning something about the responsibility God has given us in the community. As she helps me in preparing the food for the outreach, or packing the stationery packs for disadvantaged school children, it gives me the opportunity to talk to her about all the blessings God has given us, that we need to share with those in need and teach them about God too.

The church should be a partner with parents in the task of bringing their children up in the ways of the Lord and bring them towards a personal relationship with Christ. The church can do this by being a resource centre, providing quality materials on the basics of faith, on child rearing, on teaching children about faith. The church can also assist parents by recommending quality materials for home family devotions and children's bibles and quiet time materials. All the things needed to help develop a child towards Christian maturity.

5.6. Conclusion

The instructions given by Moses to the Israelites recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 may have been given thousands of years ago, but the principles outlined in this passage are timeless and relevant to the 21st century Christian family. First the Christian is to study the word of God, second the Christian is to love God and third the Christian is to teach others and live out their love for God amongst others.

When it comes to teaching children these principles instructed in the Deuteronomy passage, parents take into consideration the developmental stages of the child, and how this relates to spiritual understanding and formation. Parents can then tailor the teaching to the child's learning capabilities. The research outlined nine components to teach faith to children in the home formally and informally as part of daily living as outlined by Miller (2008:54-57). Then role of the church to coming alongside the parents, to teach, support and assist parents in the task of passing on faith to the next generation was also outlined.

The research has used the four integrated theology perspectives to examine what Deuteronomy 6:4-9 teaches Christians regarding the passing on of faith to children within the context of the family. In the next chapter will recap the process and the findings of this study.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Research Objective

The research set out to answer the question, what is the significance and implications of the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, for the 21st century Christian family?

The primary question was answered by investigating the following key secondary questions –

- a) **Biblical Perspective:** What is the meaning and importance of the Shema in its original context?
- b) **Historical Perspective:** What was and is the significance of the Shema in Jewish tradition and Christian History?
- c) **Systematic Perspective:** In what way does Shema influence Jesus' teachings and the development of New Testament theology?
- d) **Practical Perspective:** How is the Shema relevant for today's family and how can it be implemented?

The aim of the study was to identify and contextualize biblically based guidelines from the Shema (Deut 6:4-9) for the passing on of faith to the next generation specifically within the family context.

6.2. Research Design

The research loosely follows the integrated theology approach as outlined in Chapter 5 of Smith (2013:123-146).

The research started in chapter 1 with the background that sought to bear the question of passing on faith to the next generation and the proposed research methodology and strategy to answer the question. In chapter 2 the Biblical perspective investigated an in

depth study of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to discover its background, importance and meaning in the original context. General principles were extracted from the passage relevant to the study.

The research then moved to look at the Historical perspective in chapter 3. Here the study focused on Jewish interpretations and traditions stemming from the Deuteronomy passage and what they teach 21st century Christians. A cursory survey of Christian practice through history was also undertaken to see the Shema's importance through the ages in encouraging the passing on of faith to the next generation within the family context.

Chapter 4 looked at the Systematic perspective through a brief survey of the influence of the Shema in teachings of Jesus and Paul and the development of New Testament theology. The research revealed that the Jesus' teachings used the Shema, as did Paul by using it as a significant basis for some major doctrinal teachings.

Chapter 5 looked at the Practical perspective through a recap of the principles discovered in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The research also briefly looked at faith formation within the developmental stages of children. The research concluded with Miller's nine components on how to teach faith to children within a family context and a look at the role of the church in supporting parents in the task of passing on faith to the next generation.

6.3. Research Findings

As the research progressed the following findings to the secondary questions were discovered:

- a) **Biblical Perspective:** What is the meaning and importance of the Shema in its original context?

The research discovered that Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is a key passage within the Deuteronomy discourse. The passage outlines who God is and what the response to that should be. God is unique, alone and above all, and the response to this should be to love Him with our whole being, with all our hearts, minds and strength. The passage

goes on to say that God's Word should be on our hearts, guiding us and leading us through life. Then we are to teach God's word to our children, this is to be done all through the day and in all activity of life. The passage concludes with the instructions to keep God's Word tied about our foreheads and hands and written on our doorposts and gates. Many scholars agree that this instruction is metaphoric, meaning that God's word is to govern our thought life (forehead) and our actions (hands), to govern our homes (doorposts) and our communities (gates).

The model discovered within Deuteronomy is: God's word – Heart – Hands & Mouth. Knowing God's Word influences our hearts to love God which in turn governs all we do and say. Part of the doing and saying is to teach the next generation God's word so that they too come to love God.

b) Historical Perspective: What was and is the significance of the Shema in Jewish tradition and Christian History?

As the research looked at the Shema in Jewish tradition, it noted that the passage holds a place of great importance as a statement of faith. It was also noted that it is interpreted with a more literal hermeneutic. So where the passage mentions that we are to talk about God's word when we get up and when we lie down, the Jewish tradition has arisen that the Shema (the Deuteronomy passage under question plus a further two passages) is recited twice daily, when a Jewish person gets up and again before they go to bed. The final instructions to tie the words and write them are also taken literally. Christians can learn from these traditions that ritual and reminders are useful in teaching children God's word, taking caution that these do not lose their meaning and are used wisely in teaching.

In Christian history it was discovered that there was a great emphasis on the fact that faith formation and education was to take place within a family context. It was taught by the early church fathers. This emphasis was then lost during the Middle Ages as Christian education became the sole responsibility of the Church and the clergy. However in the build-up to the reformation and in the reformation there was a resurgence of the teaching that parents need to be the primary spiritual educators of

their children. They need to be the ones teaching their children the way of the Lord and teaching them what it is to love God.

c) Systematic Perspective: In what way does Shema influence Jesus' teachings and the development of New Testament theology?

The Systematic perspective looked at the influence the Shema on the New Testament teachings. Jesus held up the teaching and doctrine highlighted in the Shema but took it a bit further by including himself in the teaching that God is one in unity. Jesus also affirmed that the correct response to God is to love Him and that the result is seen in what we do (love your neighbour).

The research also noted that the New Testament continues the theme of God is one found in the Shema teaching. However, the New Testament expands this teaching to show that God is one in the sense that He is unique and above all and therefore, He is God of the Jew and the Gentile. The New Testament also expanded on God is one to show that this included Jesus as one with God and did not exclude Him as God.

Other New Testament teachings that continued the themes found in the Shema were in James, highlighting that loving God is seen in what we do and say, and cannot just stop at the Heart. Another in Ephesians emphasizes the role that parents have in the teaching of the next generation.

d) Practical Perspective: How is the Shema relevant for today's family, and how can families implement it in daily living?

The Practical perspective took a more in-depth look at the model outlined in the Shema by showing how it could look lived out in the Christian everyday life in the 21st century. It focused in on the passing on of faith to the next generation by looking at the developmental stages in children to see how they would influence the teaching of God's word. Miller's (2013:54-57) nine components for teaching children was then explained and shown how they could be used within the family context to teach God's word to children. The last component in the practical perspective was a look at the role the church plays in aiding and assisting parents in the task of faith formation.

6.4. Conclusion

The Shema holds a place of great importance in the Old Testament, in Jewish history, in Jesus' teachings and the theology of the New Testament. It continued to hold a place of great importance throughout Christian history and is therefore still relevant and important for the Christian in the 21st century.

The Shema teaches that God is one, He is unique and above all and He is one in unity. It goes on to teach that the correct response to God's revelation of His character is love. Christians are to love God wholeheartedly and above all. Our love for God should then lead to God's word governing all of our lives, all we say and do.

What we say and do should include the teaching of God's word to the next generation. This can and should be done within the family context. God's word should be taught at all times and in all of our activity. Parents are responsible for teaching children about God and teaching how they should love and obey Him. This teaching is not done in isolation, the church should be there to assist and support parents in this task. The Shema was not given to just a family, it was given to a community and therefore applies to the community just as much as it applies to the individual family. The Shema is important for the 21st century Christian family.

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