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Perspectives on Theological Education from the Old Testament

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Introduction

In his book, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, Robert Banks bemoans the fact that more recent significant publications on theological education give little serious consideration of the Bible as a potential source for insights into its method, goals, and content.[1] Sadly, Banks' observation is in the main correct. On the other hand, a perusal of evangelical textbooks on teaching, as opposed to theological or ministerial training, does reveal attempts to appeal in some measure to both the Old and New Testaments for guidance; at the same time, such a survey also demonstrates that the expertise of this appeal can be quite varied.

For example, Lois LeBar's *Education that is Christian* searches the wilderness narratives of Exodus and Numbers for practical lessons for pedagogy and finds support for the importance of real-life situations, the use of the senses, and the value of repetition, questions, and testing.[2] Gangel and Benson's brief survey of the Old Testament material is more detailed. Their chapter highlights the theistic focus of education in Israel and points out the various agencies (the family, the sanctuary) and agents (parents, priests and Levites, and the prophets) of theological education throughout the nation's

1 Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missiological Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 73-82. His review of the biblical material is found on pp. 83-126 (for the Old Testament, see pp. 83-89).

2 Lois E. LeBar, *Education that is Christian* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1989), pp. 107-125.

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history.[3] Pazmiño cites just a few passages that demonstrate God's desire to encounter his people in order to teach them about his person.[4] Some authors appeal to older works of a more scholarly vein, but these sources can be quite dated.[5]

The purpose of this essay is a modest one. The goal is to offer three different perspectives from different facets of Old Testament studies that might be useful in reflecting upon the multiple dimensions of theological education. We will not try to summarise all the possible material related to education in ancient Israel in the Old Testament.[6] The discussion is divided into three parts. The first, and longest, presents a summary of archaeological data that can illuminate the issues of literacy and formal education in ancient Israel. These are two pertinent topics for anyone today interested in theological education in an institutional sense.

With the second section, this essay shifts from archaeology to the biblical text. That section will suggest that each of the three major parts of the Hebrew Bible can contribute in its own way to a better understanding of the nature of theological education. Lastly, on the basis of Deuteronomy 6, a favourite passage for many, the third section emphasizes that theological education in the Old Testament ideally needs to be connected to the mission of the people of God.

New Dimensions from Old Testament Studies

Educational Realities in Ancient Israel

It is not uncommon for studies on theological education that deal with the Old Testament to concentrate on a few central theological foundations and on one specific social institution. Theological emphasis, for example, is placed on the person of Yahweh as the centre of what was to be taught to the people of God while the social institution that often receives attention as the most important setting for theological training is the family. These observations, of course, are helpful and important but they are, however, *textual* arguments—that is, they are based primarily, if not exclusively, on biblical passages. What can be overlooked are data dealing with the actual state of education in Israel. Theological education today must deal with pragmatic, fundamental issues, like the level of literacy of students and pedagogical strategies. Similar challenges would have been important in their own way in the ancient world as well.

Scholars have debated the extent of literacy in Israel for the last two decades. There are those who would claim that the level of literacy was relatively low, since supposedly the cul-

3 Kenneth O. Gangel and Warren S. Benson, *Christian Education: Its History and Philosophy* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), pp. 19-32.

4 Robert W. Pazmiño, *God Our Teacher: Theological Basics of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), pp. 22-27, 162f.

5 E.g., William Barclay, *Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), pp. 11-48.

6 Helpful introductory surveys include André Lemaire, 'Education (Israel)', *ABD* 2:305-12; Gerald H. Wilson, 'Education in the OT', *NIDOTTE* 4:559-64.

ture at that time would have been largely oral and based on an oral mentality. In addition, writing on some media, such as inscribing stone and metal, as well as the skills required to master complicated scripts probably would have been too difficult for the common person. In such an oral context writing may even have been thought to have had magical and symbolic power. Literacy, therefore, would have been confined to scribal, governmental, and priestly circles.[7]

The epigraphic material, however, can be interpreted in a different manner.[8] Evidence for the wide diffusion of writing is actually quite substantial and can be charted both geographically and chronologically. Findings range from sites in the north to fortresses and a caravan centre in the southern regions of the United Kingdom and later Judah and from the twelfth and eleventh centuries (Iron Age I) through to the sixth century B.C.E. (Iron Age II)—that is, from the time of the judges to the fall of the Southern monarchy. Several discoveries merit special mention.

In Samaria, the capital of Israel, numerous ostraca,[9] which appear to be government records registering the deliveries of produce from the interior of the country, and clay bullae[10] with diverse figures and writing have been found that substantiate the role of writing in different strata of government and for commercial activity. Less has been uncovered in Judah's capital, Jerusalem, but that is not surprising in light of the multiple destructions and layers of rebuilding that the city has experienced over millennia.[11] In addi-

7 Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), pp. 39-59; Ian M. Young, 'Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence, Part I', *VT* 48, no. 2 (1998): 239-52; idem, 'Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence, Part II', *VT* 48, no. 3 (1998): 408-22; James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1998), pp. 29-49. For a balanced critique, see William M. Schniedewind, 'Orality and Literacy in Ancient Israel', *RSR* 26, no. 4 (2000): 327-32. Because of the large bibliography on this topic, in these notes we cite only a few of the more recent important sources.

8 Allan R. Millard, 'The Knowledge of Writing in Iron Age Palestine', *Tyn Bul* 46, no. 2 (1995): 207-17; idem, 'Books in the Late Bronze Age in the Levant,' in *Past Links: Studies in the Languages and Cultures of the Ancient Near East*, ed. S. Izre'El, I. Singer, R. Zadok (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), pp. 171-81; Aaron Demsky, 'Literacy', *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. M. Meyers (New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 362-69; Richard S. Hess, 'Literacy in Iron Age Israel', in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of 'Biblical Israel'*, ed. V. P. Long, D. W. Baker, and G. J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 82-102. Cf. the detailed historical reconstruction of literacy in William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

9 An ostracon is a fragment of pottery (a sherd), which has some sort of inscription.

10 A bulla is an oval or round clay seal (with the name or symbol of the owner). Bullae were usually used to seal papyrus documents and were attached to a string that tied the papyrus scroll.

11 Climate also has had an effect. Very little of what was written on perishable material, like papyri, survived the natural elements.

tion to the ostraca and bullae found there, the most famous archaeological discovery undoubtedly has been the Siloam Tunnel inscription, which chronicles the securing of a water source around 700 B.C.E., as the city awaited a siege by the Assyrians (2 Kgs. 20:20; Isa. 22:9-11). The forts at Lachish and Arad also have provided finds that establish reveal governmental literary activity of various kinds.

Evidence for writing is not limited either to these administrative centres or to government documents and notations by merchants. For example, the Gezer Calendar is very likely a schoolboy exercise or a farmer's notes about annual planting and harvest times (tenth century); there are the well-known graffiti of the travel stop at Kuntillet 'Ajrûd (ninth to eighth century) and of the tomb at Khirbet el-Qôm (eighth or seventh century); Lachish Letter 3 is a mid-ranking officer's protest that his senior commander has questioned his ability to read (early sixth century).[12]

These occasional inscriptions, and seals and other inscribed artifacts from many areas of Palestine, even from its more remote and outlying regions, all argue for a broader distribution of the ability to read and write than some are willing to admit. These data do demonstrate a range in the aptitude to write scripts (paleo-Hebrew and Aramaic) well and according to proper grammatical and syntactical rules. The question then, of course, is how did people in such diverse places acquire at least some degree of literacy? Where did they learn to read and write?

It is here that the issue of the existence of schools surfaces. There were schools in Mesopotamia and Egypt for functionaries and the aristocracy as early as the mid-third millennium, but scholars disagree as to when and for what purpose schools might have appeared in ancient Israel. At the familial and clan levels and in towns and cities there would have been apprenticeship-type training in basic skills and trades, such as farming, animal husbandry, pottery, and leather working, but schooling for literacy has a different focus and would require other kinds of organization and resources. For those who are of the persuasion to restrict writing and formal education to a circumscribed set of scribal, governmental and mercantile classes, schools would have been concentrated in major urban centres.[13] If there were to be a strict analogy to the academies of Mesopotamia and Egypt, schools in Israel would have been of this sort and directed to the same kind of target audience. These would have housed the chief training centres for governmental, military, and religious personnel.

The preponderance of evidence mentioned above does not support

12 William M. Schniedewind, 'Sociolinguistic Reflections on the Letter of a "Literate" Soldier (Lachish 3)', *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 13, no. 2 (2000): 157-67; idem, *How the Bible Became a Book*, pp. 101-3.

13 Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, pp. 69-77; Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel*, pp. 85-113; Menahem Haran, 'On the Diffusion of Literacy and Schools in Ancient Israel', in *Congress Volume, Jerusalem 1986*, *VTSup* 40, ed. J. A. Emerton (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), pp. 81-95.

such an exclusive educational reality. Although the view that there was a significant school system early in the history of the monarchy may overstate the evidence,[14] the epigraphic data found in small towns, fortresses, and villages is hard to explain if there was schooling only for specific circles of people who resided in important cities and a few administrative posts.[15] This fact would in no way deny the existence of special schools for professional scribes and royal bureaucrats, the probability of corresponding degrees of literacy or changes in the extent of literacy over time, but it does raise the possibility of what might be understood as more popular, or lay, literacy.

The innovation of an alphabetic script of a relatively few symbols, as opposed to the hundreds of more complex pictographic and syllabic signs of cuneiform and hieroglyphics, would have greatly facilitated such a 'democratization' of education; no longer would someone have to dedicate years to mastering the art of writing. The alphabet was already developing in Syro-Palestine before the arrival of the Israelites in the latter half of the second millennium, and by the eighth and seventh centuries alphabet systems were being used throughout the ancient Near East.

Along with the simpler script, more accessible and easier-to-use writing materials (such as papyrus, wooden tablets covered with wax, and tanned skins) and socioeconomic and political developments would also have aided the spread of literacy. Archaeology has discovered abecedaries that exemplify efforts by students to learn to read and write.

There is no passage in the Old Testament that explicitly mentions schools, but several verses make good sense against a background of schooling experiences. Isaiah 28:9-13 seems to base its mockery of Judah's leadership on repetitive school exercises for children. A number of other passages appear to allude to the teacher-student relationship (e.g., Ps. 119: 97-100; Prov. 5:12-13; 22:17-21; Isa. 50:4). What is more, the biblical text assumes a degree of literacy and literary production among the people of Israel from the earliest times.[16] A brief sampling must suffice.

Yahweh himself writes with his finger on tablets, which were to be deposited in the ark of the covenant for all the people (Exod. 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1; cf. Exod. 32:32). The Torah on several occasions is

14 Lemaire, 'Education (Israel),' pp. 307-11; idem, *Les écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l'ancien Israel*, OBO 39 (Göttingen: Vendenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981); E. W. Heaton, *The School Tradition of the Old Testament: The Bampton Lectures for 1994* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

15 G. I. Davies, 'Were There Schools in Ancient Israel?' in J. Day, R. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (eds.), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 199-211; Demsky, 'Literacy,' pp. 365-67.

16 Even those who hold that widespread literacy was a late phenomenon acknowledge this textual expectation, but their negative assessment is largely determined by assumptions about dates of composition and by whether later cultural realities have been inserted into those accounts.

described as a 'book' (*sēfer*), that contains the laws that Israel is to know and obey (Deut. 29:20; Josh. 1:8; 1 Kgs. 2:3; 2 Kgs. 14:6; Jer. 25:13; Dan. 9:11, 13). Moses is told to write down an account of the battle against the Amalekites (Exod. 17:14); husbands could produce certificates of divorce (Deut. 24:1-3); different people are said to compose documents of various kinds (e.g., Judg. 8:14; 2 Sam. 11:14-15; 1 Kgs. 21:8-9; 2 Kgs. 10:1, 6-7); genealogies were created and consulted for various sundry purposes (Num. 11:26; Neh. 7:5-64); and narrative accounts mention other contemporaneous written sources, like the Book of Jashar (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18) and the annals of the kings of Israel and of Judah (e.g., 1 Kgs. 11:41; 22:39; 2 Kgs. 1:18; 20:20; 24:5), to which readers or listeners can go for more historical information.

By the eighth century at least some of the kings (Isa. 38:9; cf. 1 Kgs. 4:32) and prophets (Isa. 8:1; 30:8; cf. Jer. 36:2; Hab. 2:2) could write literary compositions. Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiles in Babylon (Jer. 29:1) and signs a deed of sale for property in Anathoth (Jer. 32:10). Nehemiah and others write and seal an agreement (Neh. 10:1 [Eng. 9:38]); Mordechai and Esther send letters to Jews throughout the Persian Empire to announce the celebration of Purim (Esther 9:20-23, 29-30). The Old Testament mentions secretaries and scribes throughout the history of the monarchy (e.g., 2 Sam. 8:17; 20:25; 1 Kgs. 4:3; 2 Kgs. 18:18; 22:3; Jer. 36:4, 12). These passages attest to many kinds of writing, from the administrative and political to the mundane.

Probing the extent of literacy in Israel serves to situate the textual data about theological education in the Old Testament more realistically within the life world of that ancient socio-cultural setting. There would have been theological education going on within the family under parental tutelage at the sanctuaries during the festivals as people of all ages rehearsed historical traditions and participated in sacrificial ceremonies; in formal training programs for religious personnel (Levites and priests); with some of the prophets as they gathered disciples (e.g., 2 Kgs. 2:3, 5, 7, 15; Isa. 8:16); and as part of the development of young students under certain wise men. Multiple kinds of theological education would have been going on simultaneously all over Palestine and at various levels of schooling. The increase and spread of literacy over time would have continually modified the picture of theological education as well. By the time of Ben Sira, two centuries before Christ rabbinic schools (*bêt-midraš*), centred around the synagogue, had come into being (Ecclus. 51:14-28).[17]

Theological education in Israel occurred and developed *within and as part of a broader educational context* in specific times and places and for diverse groups of people. Although the circumstances differ today, the challenge to provide access to theological education of multiple configurations and with varying degrees of formality and academic rigour continues. The Old Testament is a witness, then, to important educational realities; it is

17 See Barclay, *Educational Ideals in the Ancient World*, pp. 23-48; Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, pp. 90-93.

not simply a divine depository of disembodied principles for the grand enterprise of training the people of God. Theological education is also about pragmatics.

The Educational Significance of the Old Testament Canon

Another manner in which the Old Testament illuminates theological education can be found in the canonical shape of the Hebrew canon itself.[18] At first glance, this might seem to be an odd way to approach the topic at hand. Each part of the canon, however, does tend to utilize a certain set of genres and exhibit its own unique tone and orientation. Each part can help theological educators appreciate in fresh ways dimensions that should be integral to all theological education. It is not uncommon for educators and theological systems (whether consciously or not) to be drawn to one of the three to the exclusion of the other two, but together they provide a holistic view of the educational task.

The Protestant Old Testament typically is divided into four parts: the Pentateuch, the Historical Books (Joshua—2 Chronicles), the poetic and wisdom literature (Job—Song of Songs), and the Prophets (Isaiah—Malachi).[19] In contrast, the Hebrew Bible is a tripartite collection. It consists of the Torah (the Pentateuch), the Prophets (Former and Latter Prophets), and the Writings.[20] We will take a brief look at each in turn.

For many, the Torah is simply the assembly of laws of ancient Israel. A more narrative approach, though, corrects such an understanding. The Law is given to Israel at Sinai (Exod. 19ff.) and repeated before the crossing of the Jordan River into the Promised Land (Deut.)—that is, after the Exodus (Exod. 14). The Law, in other words, was never intended to be the means of attaining redemption; that had come with the miracle at the Sea. Instead it details how to live as the redeemed people of God and in so doing presents a comprehensive framework of an alternative culture and society to what they had left behind in Egypt and to what they would encounter in Canaan.

Accordingly, Torah deals with a host of issues, like family (whom to marry, how to raise children, relationships between family members, etc.), food and dress codes, parameters for selecting leaders (the king, judges, prophets, religious personnel), legislation for dealing with the unfortunate (the poor, widows, orphans, and the alien), the handling of property and debts, and the proper administration of justice. The Law is designed to produce a community that will be Yahweh's instrument to bless the nations of the world. It provides a model of how to incarnate the values that God desires for all humankind in every sphere of life, and the goal is that they

18 Note esp. Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

19 Roman Catholics, of course, would add the Apocrypha.

20 The Former Prophets consist of Joshua to 2 Kings, except for Ruth; the Latter Prophets, of what are called the Major and Minor Prophets, except for Daniel. The Writings include the rest of the Old Testament.

recognize this contribution of this unique people (Deut. 4:5-8; cf. Gen. 12:1-3).[21]

Interestingly, there are some similarities between the laws of Israel and others in ancient Near Eastern law codes. This should not be surprising, since all are dealing with common human concerns. Nevertheless, what makes Israel's laws special is their grounding in the Exodus and in the very character of God.[22] From this perspective, to obey Torah is to construct a different kind of existence as a testimony of a life of holiness and obedience under the sovereign providence of Yahweh.

The lesson for today is that theological education must consider its role in the creation and the nurturing of a lifestyle, both as individual believers and as gathered communities, that is separate *from* the world—even as it is *for* the world as witness. The Christian church does not do this in imitation of the Law in the twentieth-first century, but the challenge is to know how best to incarnate God's ideals for our time in various settings around the globe.[23]

If Torah is designed to establish the identity of God's people in a broad sense, the Former and Latter Prophets examine how well they actually accomplished that task. Were the United and Divided Monarchies truly different in their ideology and practices from the surrounding countries? Did they fall into that ancient theological trap of conceiving of Yahweh like every other national deity, as the one who above all would protect their government and society? Was the Yahweh of the historical writers and prophets the same god who was being worshipped at the national shrines? The answers to these questions are obvious to anyone who knows the Old Testament. A few passages from the book of Amos illustrate this critical stance.[24]

The prophetic book begins with the Oracles against the Nations (chaps. 1-2). Each nation is condemned for cruelty in warfare. The Judah and Israel oracles (2:4-16) do not cite those same atrocities, but the shared opening formula ('for three transgressions, no four…') inexorably connects them to the other peoples (cf. 9:7). Israel, Amos's principle target, is unique because of its calling, and so its society is more damnable before Yahweh (3:1-2). What is worse, Egypt and Ashdod are called to view Israel's sin and judgment (3:9)… no 'light to the nations' here! The denunciation of Israel's religion is especially sharp.

21 Note Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics and the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); cf. M. Daniel Carroll R. 'Blessing the Nations: Toward a Biblical Theology of Mission from Genesis', *BBR* 10, no. 1 (2000): 17-34.

22 Leviticus 19 is a good example of how these motivations for ethics are utilized.

23 Though not everyone will agree with his critical positions, John Rogerson's interaction between natural morality, imperatives of redemption, and structures of grace (his labels) is helpful at this point. See his *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics*, edited and with an Introduction by M. Daniel Carroll R. (JSOT Supplement Series, 405; London: T. T. Clark, 2004).

24 Cf. M. Daniel Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos: Prophetic Poetics in Latin American Perspective* (JSOT Supplement Series, 132; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

Israel is full of religious activity, but Yahweh detests it because it is disconnected from justice (5:21-24). Their ceremonies of celebration have nothing to do with the national realities of hunger, drought, harvest failures, and war. They do what they like at the sanctuaries; now they must get ready to meet him as he truly is (4:4-13). In fact, his judgment would begin with the temple and its personnel; Yahweh will not allow himself to be manipulated as the divine guarantor of the policies and reigning ideology of this sinful state (7:10-17; 9:1). Beyond that judgment lay the hope of another society, which would be based upon the 'fallen tabernacle of David' not upon the house of Jeroboam (9:11-15).

This kind of message is repeated throughout the prophetic books: denunciation of the government and society of that time and the announcement of a new beginning beyond that disaster. The lesson for theological education today is that it must be relevant to the modern world, teaching students to be aware of the sin in their societies in all of its manifestations and destructive perversions in social structures, economic arrangements, policy decisions, political ideologies, and religious practices. At the same time, they must see that the redemption of God through Jesus Christ, in its final and fullest manifestation, will be as broad and all-encompassing as that sin. World realities make it imperative that theological education provide helpful tools to enable students to analyse their context and to proclaim a message of comprehensive hope to a lost humanity.

For their part, the Writings offer many different windows into human existence. There we find the joys and sorrows of the soul and worshipping community (Psalms), deep questioning of our sufferings (Job, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations), the ways of romance (Song of Songs, Ruth), the call to discern the moral fibre of daily existence (Proverbs), the trials of rebuilding a culture (Ezra-Nehemiah), and much more. These books provide many opportunities to probe the meaning of every dimension of human life before Yahweh.

In sum, the Old Testament *as canon* is a largely untapped mine of truth for theological education. It is a tangible reminder that theological education must be intricately connected to all of life so that the people of God might fulfil their calling in the world.

Theological Education within a Missional Context[25]

Educators from around the globe have argued that evangelical theological education should be based on and train for the church's mission.[26] A favourite passage for Old Testament theological education, Deuteronomy 6:1-9, also substantiates this point. These verses have often been used to emphasize the

25 This section is based on my longer article: 'La Ética y la educación teológica: Fundamentos y sugerencias', *Vox Scripturae* 10, no. 1 (2000): 29-49.

26 E.g., C. René Padilla, *Nuevas alternativas de educación teológica* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Creación; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Pieter F. Thieron, 'Theological Training for Social Transformation in Africa', *Missionalia* 23, no. 1 (1995); 45-56; Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*.

function of the family and the importance of the confession of faith. With this, of course, we readily agree, but they also hint at other crucial issues for theological education.

This passage neatly divides into two parts, vv. 1-3, 4-9. The first begins with Moses stating that he has been commanded to teach the people 'the commands, decrees, and laws' (v. 1). These terms link this passage to earlier ones, such as the Ten Commandments (5:1; cf. 4:1-2, 5:27-33, etc.).[27] But the connections are not limited to the immediate context. The lexical links go back as far as Genesis. The verbal root in v. 3 'go well' (*ṭôb*) echoes the term 'good' (*ṭob*) of the creation account, and 'increase greatly' (*rābâ*) echoes the command of Genesis 1:28, 8:17, and 9:7. The 'land flowing with milk and honey' is another paradise that will be graced with the presence of God (Gen. 2-3).

This correlation with the opening chapters of Genesis reveals that the life of Israel in the Promised Land is to be a microcosm of God's intentions for humanity. What he would have wanted of all peoples is to be modelled by this chosen people. Deuteronomy 6:1-9 is related to the broader history of humankind and God's plan for the world. It explains how Israel is to fulfil its mission: for generation after generation to fear Yahweh in order to enjoy his hand of blessing before the nations (once again note Deut. 4:5-8).

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 begins with the *Shema'*. This call to 'hear' involves more than the physical act of hearing; it assumes obedience.[28] It is not a passive reception of the word of God, but rather a call to commitment to the demands of the covenant. This call is followed by the proclamation of the uniqueness of Israel's God: 'Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.'[29] A proper understanding of the person of God is the basis of faith and obedience. Verse 5 reveals that Israel is to love him.

'Love' (*'āhab*) in Deuteronomy describes Yahweh's commitment to his people and what he desires of them (5:10; 7:9, 12-13; 10:12, 19; etc.). It is a word that in the ancient Near East was used to express a vassal's obedience to his sovereign[30] and complements the verb 'fear' of the first part (yārē', v. 2); both terms communicate willing and total (note the repetition of 'all' in v. 5) submission to the covenant

27 For more structural details, see the commentaries. For the placement of ch. 6 within the narratival movement of the book, note J. Gary Millar, *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 67-98.

28 For the vocabulary of learning in the Old Testament, see Wilson, 'Education in the OT,' pp. 562-63; Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel*, pp. 115-203; Nili Shupak, 'Learning Methods in Ancient Israel', *Vetus Testamentum* 53, no. 3 (2003): 416-26.

29 For interpretive options, in addition to the commentaries, see S. Dean McBride, Jr., 'The Yoke of the Kingdom: An Exposition of Deuteronomy 6:4-5', *Int* 27, no. 3 (1973): 273-306; Daniel I. Block, 'How Many Is God? An Investigation into the Meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4-5', *JETS* 47, no. 2 (2004): 193-212. Both articles provide a wealth of bibliographic data on this and other issues related to the passage.

30 W. L. Moran, 'The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy', *CBQ* 25, no. 1 (1963): 77-87.

relationship.[31] These demands of the covenant are not to be a dead letter but rather a part of the innermost being ('on your heart', v. 6). It is only from this depth of relationship and understanding that one can communicate the divine truth to others across generations, who also will need to make a decision for Yahweh.[32] Theological education, therefore, must focus on the person of God and proper responses to his person and demands.

Four other principles flow from vv. 7-9. The verb 'repeat' (*šānan*) in v. 7 means that this teaching should be a continuous exercise (cf. 11:19).[33] This also is emphasized structurally with two merisma: all day and in every place. Second, to use educational terminology, the process will have informal aspects. While other passages delineate what would be done more formally in the structured times in the home and at the sanctuaries, this verse points to more spontaneous teaching moments during a day's activities. A related third point is that, therefore, theological education should naturally deal with every sphere of human existence into which students will come into contact.

Fourth, to educate in Deuteronomy is to learn to express an identity. The binding on the forehead and the mark on the doors of the home and the gates of their towns were clear covenant markers before others. In other words, the internal reality that these verses seek to inculcate is to be a reality that all could see as well. Deuteronomy 6:20-25 demonstrates that part of that identity was an historical consciousness of what God had done in the past in their forefathers' pilgrimage of fulfilling their mission. This law is even for Israel's kings. Note that the strictures placed on them contradicted the prevailing political ideologies regarding the manifestations of power (war chariots, harems, and extravagance) with the call to have and read his own copy of the Law (Deut. 17:14-20). The king, above all others, was to exemplify what it would mean to incarnate in visible ways the ideals of God (note the allusion to Deut. 6:5 in the evaluation of Josiah in 2 Kgs 23:25). The king of Israel was to be different, because of

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31 'With all your heart and with all your soul' (NIV) appears several times in Deuteronomy (4:29; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2,6,10). The final phrase ('with all your strength'—NIV) is used only here, thereby emphasizing the uniqueness and force of this command. For its possible meanings, note the references in supra, n. 30. This fuller series of phrases appears again only in 2 Kgs. 23:25 in an evaluation of Josiah.

32 Note the constant importance of 'children' and 'today' throughout the book.

33 Based on a homonym, some versions translate this verb as 'impress'. See the discussion in *NIDOTTE* 4:195-98 (cf. NJB, NRSV). This verse is the basis of the Jewish tradition of reciting the *Shema'* twice daily. The recitation actually includes Deut. 6:4-9, 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41, and several benedictions. See Louis Jacobs, 'Shema, Reading of', in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), vol. 14, cols. 1370-74 (cf. Mishnah *Berakot* 1:1-3:6).

his unique identity as the leader of the chosen people.[34]

This final point reinforces, as does this entire passage, that theological education plays a part in the complex process of shaping the people of God—their identity, character, and way of life—before and within the world. Deuteronomy 6 teaches that this education ultimately is for mission.

Conclusion

This essay has had as its goal to introduce the reader to a few of the many possible contributions that Old Testament studies can make to theological education. There is much to learn from archaeology, the canonical shape of the Hebrew scriptures, and the exposition of key texts. Each of these sources can help inform the purposes, content, and method of the educational process so that it might empower the Christian church in fresh ways to fulfil the daunting, but rewarding, task of being the people of God in the world today.

34 J. G. McConville, 'Law and Monarchy in the Old Testament', in *A Royal Priesthood: The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically*, ed. C. Bartholomew, A. Wolters, and J. Chaplin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 69-88; cf. Walter Brueggemann, 'The Case for an Alternative Reading', *Theological Education* 23, no. 2 (1987): 89-107.