DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Doctor of Philosophy in Religion
Emphasis in Old Testament

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF DISCIPLESHIP IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

Researcher: Opeyemi Tunbosun Oladosu

Primary Advisor: Melak A. Tsegaw, PhD

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The Old Testament discipleship theme is entrenched and expressed in covenantal terms. However, studies on discipleship in the Old Testament have been scarce. This happens because of the assumption that the Old Testament has little or no contribution to the theme of discipleship and the presumed absence of the discipleship terms in the Old Testament canon. This research studied some theological dictionaries, encyclopedia entries, and Old Testament literature. This helped to examine the previous studies relating to the concept of discipleship in the Old Testament. From this literature, it was observed that the Old Testament canon has not been fully engaged in the discussion on discipleship.

Consequently, this dissertation analyzed how the concept of discipleship is developed throughout the book of Deuteronomy and examined its contributions to the

development and understanding of biblical discipleship. To achieve this, the discipleship language in both the Old and New Testaments were examined to extract the discipleship terms and themes in both Testaments. By employing the Qualitative Content Analysis method, a coding frame was developed and applied in analyzing the entire book of Deuteronomy.

Findings revealed that the foundation of Old Testament discipleship is the covenant, where God initiates a relationship with Israel, calling them into his divine plan of salvation. The covenant people, who are Yahweh's disciples, are called to learn and teach Yahweh's ways, making sure that God's instructions are transmitted through generations. This learning brings about a commitment to obey and keep their Master's commandments, manifesting faithfulness to his will. As they grow in obedience, it results in walking after and following Yahweh, harmonizing their lives with his will. This faithful walk affirms their membership and election, revealing that they are chosen by grace and set apart as the LORD's people. This status confers on them a profound sense of responsibility to fear God, which means living in reverence and awe of God's holiness, guiding every aspect of life.

Consequently, the fear of God leads to worship, as covenant people respond to God's faithfulness with adoration and devotion. True worship propels love for the LORD and others, as obedience is expressed via unswerving affection. This love strengthens fellowship and encourages one another in faith. As the community grows in love and obedience, they begin and continue to bear witness, proclaiming Yahweh's truth to the world around them. In this way, discipleship becomes a ceaseless, interconnected journey where each item strengthens the other, establishing a complete and faithful walk with God.

The study further showed that mission and discipleship are interrelated. Yahweh's plan involves his followers playing active parts in his mission to redeem and restore the fallen creation. Hence, he called them into a life of service. The book of Deuteronomy thus serves as a practical guide for Yahweh's disciples. The covenantal principles derived from the book present deep perceptions of how individuals and communities can incorporate and communicate Yahweh's redemptive purposes to the world. Also, training individuals to know and live out Yahweh's covenant equips them to participate in his mission. Apart from teaching, other strategies include living out the covenant faithfulness, following or walking after God, promoting love and worship, building strong communities, and keeping God's commandments. So, the covenant relationship is not only about personal faithfulness but also people bearing witness to Yahweh's glory among the nations.

The research concluded that the book of Deuteronomy contributes to the understanding and development of the concept of discipleship not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. Therefore, the lexical terms and themes of discipleship found in every structure of the book of Deuteronomy should guide modern disciples of Christ in their relationship with him and help them understand what it requires to be a genuine disciple.

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

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A dissertation

presented in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Religion

by

Opeyemi Tunbosun Oladosu

2025

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE

Primary Advisor:
Melak Tsegaw, PhD

Program Coordinator,
Davidson Razafiarivony, PhD

Committee Member
Feliks Ponyatowsky, PhD

External Examiner
G. Ojwang, PhD

Committee Member
Michael Onyedikachi Akpa, PhD

Dean, Theological Seminary,
Feliks Ponyatovskiy, PhD

Internal Examiner
Sampson M. Nwaomah, PhD, PGDE

Adventist University of Africa, Kenya

Date: April 2025

This dissertation is dedicated first to the Almighty God, The Giver of life and knowledge and to my late, loving, kind, and selfless sister, Mrs. Yemisi Oyeniyi. I wish she was alive to see her desire fulfilled.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Discipleship in the Old Testament is a significant and multifaceted concept that can be established through various Old Testament texts. Whereas the term "discipleship" is not explicitly used in the Old Testament (OT), the principles and practices seem obvious in the relationship among the people in the biblical narratives. However, existing literature indicates that the theme of discipleship in the Old Testament has received limited attention. Research on discipleship is mostly focused on the New Testament, especially the Gospel.[1] This suggests that the Old Testament books have made limited contributions to the theme of discipleship. Previously, articles, projects, dissertations, and dictionary entries either discuss the Old Testament terms for disciple/discipleship or give a brief survey of the concept in the Old Testament writings. However, a few of the Old Testament scholars have made contributions to the discussion on the concept of discipleship in the Old Testament.

[1] Examples of such studies are; Tom Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (SPCK, 1994); Marianus Pale Hera, *Christology and Discipleship in John 17*, vol. 342 (Mohr Siebeck, 2013); D. Francois Tolmie, *Jesus' Farewell to the Disciples: John 13: 1-17: 26 in Narratological Perspective*, vol. 12 (Brill, 1995); Sookgoo Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress* (Brill, 2018); Warren Carter, "Matthew 4:18-22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (1997): 58–75; Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Celia Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom and the Easy Yoke: Wisdom, Torah and Discipleship in Matthew 11.25-30*, vol. 18 (A&C Black, 1987); Paul Hertig, "The Great Commission Revisited: The Role of God's Reign in Disciple Making," *Missiology* 29, no. 3 (2001): 343–53.

These are contained in books, dictionary entries, encyclopedia articles, and journal articles. The following are the synopsis and an overview of their contributions:

Dictionary/Encyclopedia Entries on Discipleship in the Old Testament

Dictionaries. In the *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, Michael J. Wilkins notes a marked scarcity of disciple-related terminology in the Old Testament, in contrast to its abundant presence in the New Testament, where it appears 262 times. However, he concedes that "the roots of biblical discipleship penetrate deeply into the fertile soil of God's calling." This calling is encapsulated in the foundational concept of covenant, characterized by a pattern of divine initiative and human response. This idea is expressed in the recurrent promise, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." He notes that Jesus' command for people to "come to him" in the New Testament mirrors this summons from Yahweh.[2]

Wilkins further elucidates that the Old Testament's discipleship model lies in the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. God's call extended not only to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob individually, but also to their progeny (Gen 13:15).[3] According to him, the nation in covenant with God served as the ultimate discipleship model for Israel. As the prophets anticipated the time when Israel would fully realize this relationship, they articulated this ideal in their powerful expressions. Isaiah, for instance, portrays the intimate nature of this relationship in his predictions of the new covenant (Isa 30:20 21; 31:31–34).[4]

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[2] Michael J. Wilkins, "Disciple, Discipleship," in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996); Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel, Second Edition* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 175.

[3] Ibid., "Disciple, Discipleship," 176.

[4] Ibid.

Also, Wilkins suggests that by "following God" and "walking in his ways," individuals can actualize their abstract covenantal relationship with God. He clarifies, "When the nation upholds its covenantal commitment, it is said to be following God (e.g. Deut 4:1-14; 1 Sam 12:14) and walking in his ways (Deut 10:12-13). Conversely, when the nation breaches the covenant, it is accused of following heathen gods and adopting their ways (Deut 6:14; Judg 2:10-13; Isa 65:2)."[5] It is noteworthy that Wilkins establishes the connection between the Old Testament discipleship and covenant. However, the idea is not fully developed.

Katharine Doob Sakenfeld acknowledges that while the term "discipleship" does not appear in the Bible, and words like תַּלְמִיד and לִמֵּד are scarce in the Old Testament, a master-disciple relationship was nonetheless present in various contexts in ancient Israel. This dynamic is evident among those who rallied around a prophet to learn from him and perpetuate or evolve his teachings posthumously, as seen with Israel (Isa 8:16; 50:4), and notably with Elisha and Elijah (1 Kgs 19–2 Kgs 13). Sakenfeld emphasizes that the infrequency of the terms does not negate the existence of a master-disciple concept in the Old Testament.[6]

Moreover, Sakenfeld underlines that the relationship dynamics between Elijah and Elisha parallel those between Jesus and his disciples. Therefore, the prophet-disciple relationship can provide significant contextual insights for

[5] Ibid.

[6] Katharing Doob Sakenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 128; See also; Luther H. Martin, "Disciple," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1979), 947; Martina Gracin and Ervin Budiselić, "Discipleship in the Context of Judaism in Jesus' Time Part I," *Evangelical Journal of Theology* XIII, no. 2 (December 2019): 207. Gracin and Budiselić argues that whereas in the Hebrew Bible the term 'disciple' occurs rarely, Hebrew Bible is the starting point for analysis of discipleship which existed in that period.

understanding discipleship to Jesus in the New Testament.[7] It is observed that the author proves that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. That is, even though discipleship terms are not evident in the Old Testament, it does not suggest the absence of the concept. Although the author affirms that the idea of the Old Testament form of discipleship could provide an insight into the understanding of discipleship to Jesus, he does not show how.

Encyclopedia. Geoffrey W. Bromiley points out that μαθητής, which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew תַּלְמִיד, has several implications in the context of ancient Greece. It could refer to an apprentice learning from a mentor, a student in a specific philosophy school (e.g., a disciple of Socrates), or a follower adhering to the teachings of another, even if the latter was geographically or temporally distant. Disciple groups often persisted even after the death of their teacher, with their commitment leading to the preservation and transmission of the teacher's wisdom and teachings. In the ancient world, the role of a disciple could be in philosophical or cultic spheres, such as in mystery religions.[8]

Bromiley observes that while there are numerous similarities between discipleship to Jesus and the rabbis, significant differences also exist. In contrast to rabbinic students, who could choose their teacher, disciples of Jesus were personally chosen and called by him (Mark 1:6ff par). Jesus extended an invitation to them to leave everything behind and follow Him (Mark 10:28; Luke 9:11f, 14:25f). In the end, the disciples were even challenged to embrace martyrdom (Mark 8:34f). There were also differences in the formal settings of learning. Unlike traditional classrooms,

[7] Ibid., 128.

[8] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 947–48.

Jesus' disciples convened in open fields or secluded places, reflecting the variety of situations and locations characteristic of Jesus' ministry.[9]

In the *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Moisés Silva and Merrill Chapin Tenney affirm that the concept of discipleship has ancient roots and was prevalent among the Greeks. They equally note the rareness of the terms "disciple" or "student" in the Old Testament and assert that discipleship became a significant feature in later Judaism, which implies a teacher-student relationship. Discipleship signified not just the learning process (the terms originate from verbs meaning "to learn," in Greek μανθάνω and Hebrew למד), but also adopting the teacher's philosophy, practices, and lifestyle. Though physical proximity between teacher and student was typically implied, there were instances when discipleship encompassed students separated from their masters by centuries, as illustrated in John 9:28 when Jews contemporary with Jesus labelled themselves disciples of Moses.[10]

In addition, they explain that discipleship is also a critical concept in the New Testament. Not only Jesus but John the Baptist (Matt 9:14), the Pharisees (22:16), and even Paul (Acts 9:25) had disciples. However, the term disciple in the New Testament most often signifies the relationship between Jesus and His followers. Broadly, it includes all who believed in Him (John 8:30-31), or who sought to learn from Him (Matt 5:1-2). All disciples of Jesus were learners expected to "abide" in His word (John 8:31–32), implying not just hearing His teachings, but also integrating them into their lives (Luke 6:40; John 15:7–8). While Jesus' teachings spanned various topics, they could all be encapsulated in one commandment - Love (John 13:34). Likewise,

[9] Ibid., 947–48.

[10] Moisés Silva and Merrill Chapin Tenney, "Disciple/Discipleship," in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 145.

the multifaceted nature of discipleship was summarized in a single principle—obedience to this command (13:35).[11]

The concept of physical proximity inherent in discipleship also applied specifically to Jesus' followers. Given that Jesus was an itinerant Rabbi, to be His disciple was literally to follow Him. This required every disciple in the strict sense to abandon their occupation (Mark 1:18–19), their family (10:29), everything (10:28), bear their cross, and be willing to follow Jesus even unto death (Matt 10:38).[12]

Theological Dictionaries. E.H. Merrill points out that the Hebrew verb למד, translated as "learn" in the Qal form, occurs 86 times throughout the Old Testament. However, it is crucial to mention that within the Pentateuch, this verb only appears in the book of Deuteronomy.[13] Given the covenantal nature of Deuteronomy, it seems that למד primarily pertains to learning and instruction in the context of the divine-human relationship and the subsequent lifestyle that emerges from that relationship. Merrill observes that the verb למד in its Qal form only applies to human subjects. It is self-evident that while God teaches (in the Piel form), He does not learn (in the Qal form). The fundamental lesson one often learns is the fear of God, which forms the basis of the covenant relationship (Deut 4:10; 14:23; 17:19; 31:12-13). Besides this, people learn Yahweh's laws, decrees, and statutes (Deut 5:1; Pss 119:7, 71, 73). The ultimate impact of this learning is a transformation in life.[14]

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[11] Silva and Tenney, 145; See also, Gary E. Tangeman, *The Disciple Making Church in the 21st Century* (Fort Washington, Pa: Christian Literature Crusade, 1996), 36–37.

[12] Ibid., 146.

[13] E.H Merrill, "למד," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1997), 801.

[14] Ibid.

Additionally, Merrill explains that the verb in its Piel form, which translates to "teach," appears approximately 57 times. Teaching the Torah and all its associated truths was regarded as a significant honour in Israel. Moses himself embraced this role and shared Yahweh's Law with Israel (Deut 4:1, 5, 14, 5:28, 6:1). According to Deuteronomy 11:19–21, it is the parents' responsibility to always educate their children. The Old Testament frequently uses למד to underscore the fact that Yahweh is a teacher.[15] Further, the verb in piel means "teach" (ca. 57x). In Israel, teaching Torah and all its derived truths was an unfathomable honor. Moses himself accepted this responsibility and imparted the Law of Yahweh to Israel (Deut 4:1, 5, 14, 5:28, 6:1).[16]

In the same vein, Ernst Jenni adds that the verb למד in its qal form denotes "to be accustomed" or "to learn." In the piel form, it signifies "to accustom, train, or teach."[17] He explains that in theological contexts, it is specifically used in ancient hymns to depict Yahweh leading the king into battle (2 Sam 22:35; Pss 18:35; 144:1), and in later prophecies and select Psalms passages where Yahweh is referred to as a "teacher" (Isa 48:17) who imparts knowledge (Jer 32:33; Pss 71:17; 94:10, 12).[18]

Deuteronomy, along with a few Psalms, frequently employs the piel form with either human or divine subjects and expressions related to God's will, such as "statutes and laws" and the "fear of Yahweh." In Deuteronomy, Moses instructs Israel in the statutes and laws commissioned by Yahweh, and the Israelites, in turn, teach these to their children (Deut 4:1, 5, 10, 14; 5:31; 6:1; 11:19). In the Psalms, God is

[15] Merrill, 802.

[16] Ibid., 802.

[17] Ernst Jenni, "Lmd," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Claus Westermann and Ernst Jenni (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2004), 646–47.

[18] Jenni, 646.

often portrayed as the teacher (Pss 25:4f., 9; 119:12, 26, 64, 66, 68, 108, 124, 135, 171; 132:12; 143:10), while occasionally the worshipper is depicted as a recipient of instruction (Ps 34:12, in the role of a wisdom teacher; 51:15). Finally, Ezra is portrayed as a teacher of statutes and laws to the cities of Judah (2 Chr 17:7, 9).[19] Whereas Merril and Ernst trace the meanings of למד in different Hebrew stems, the contexts are not fully expounded to establish the discipleship concept.[20]

Old Testament Background to New Testament Concept of Discipleship

Some New Testament scholars have engaged the Old Testament texts as a background in their study of the concept of disciple/discipleship in the New Testament. These scholars examine the Old Testament terms for discipleship and their relationship to the New Testament concept of discipleship. Below are the representatives of such scholars:

First, concerning the Old Testament terms for disciple, Michael J. Wilkins explains that the Hebrew word תַּלְמִיד seems to be a translation of the Greek word μαθητής which means "learner" or "disciple" and comes from the verb "learn". It is noted that in the Hebrew OT, תַּלְמִיד is only mentioned once (1 Chr 25:8) where the term is used to distinguish between different types of musicians, such as a student and a teacher, or a novice and a master. The most straightforward interpretation of the word תַּלְמִיד in 1 Chronicles 25:8 is that it refers to someone who is actively studying

[19] Ibid., 648.

[20] E.H Merrill, "למד," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1997), see also, Ernst Jenni, "Lmd," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament,* ed. Claus Westermann and Ernst Jenni (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2004).

something, such as an apprentice learning a trade.[21] Although the word "disciple" appears infrequently in the Old Testament, Wilkins claims that the use of the terms תַּלְמִיד and לִמַּד implies at least some proof of master-disciple relationships in Israel.[22] The term לִמַּד also means, "to acquire knowledge or skill through instruction from one who is experienced."[23]

On the other hand, David Noel Freedman outlines that in the New Testament, the idea of a disciple is expressed not only through the term μαθητής but also, the verb ἀκολουθέω, which means "to walk behind" or "to follow," is frequently used in the New Testament to denote following Jesus and encapsulates the quintessential aspect of being a disciple. Hull posits that the evidence of faith is following the Lord.[24] And a person becomes a disciple through a direct call from Jesus (e.g., Mark 1:17; 2:14). This initiative rests solely with Jesus; without His summons, there is no discernible reason to become a disciple and follow Him.[25] In the same vein, the Old Testament phrase, וְאֵלְכָה אַחֲרֵיךְ which literally means "go behind" (in 1 Kgs 19:20) such as where Elisha wants to follow Elijah as his servant, is considered as the

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[21] Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel, Second Edition*, 46; See also; Bobby Harrington, *Discipleship That Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help Us Grow* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016), 20.

[22] Ibid., 20; See also; Rand J. A. Du, "Perspectives on Johannine Discipleship According to the Farewell Discourses," *Neotestamentica* 25, no. 2 (September 1991): 314, https://doi.org/10.10520/AJA2548356_884; Du reasons that even though the Old Testament lacks any overt vocabulary related to discipleship, Moses and Joshua's relationship as well as Elijah and Elisha's relationship are likely equivalent. He buttresses that it is also possible that Elisha's relationship with the sons of the prophets in 2 Kings reflects some sort of 'discipleship' (2 Kings 6:1–7); See also; Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012), 30.

[23] Jeff A. Benner, 'למד', in *Ancient Hebrew Dictionary: 1000 Verbs and Nouns of the Hebrew Bible* (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc, 2009), 37.

[24] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Spring: NavPress, 2006), 118.

[25] Hans Weder, "Disciple/Discipleship," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, Doubleday: Yale University Press, 1992), 207. cf. David Charles Cuningham Watson, *Discipleship* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 20–21.

equivalent of the Greek verb, ἀκολουθέω. This Greek verb could mean, go somewhere with someone, accompany; go behind someone, follow, (with hostile intentions), and pursue. However, there are no Old Testament precedents for the more specific New Testament usage of ἀκολουθέω.[26]

Instances exist in the synoptic tradition where an individual initiates discipleship, but such attempts invariably fail, and there's no proof that successful discipleship would have resulted. For instance, in Mark 10:17–27, a wealthy young man approaches Jesus, but when faced with the call to discipleship, he departs sorrowfully. Jesus' call necessitates a complete severance from the past. Disciples immediately abandon their families and occupations (e.g., Mark 1:16–20; 2:14) to follow Jesus, leading to the stringent condition that only those willing to forsake their families qualify as Jesus' disciples. Discipleship is typified by forging an essential life relationship with Jesus himself, not just his teachings.[27]

Freedman points out that the prophet's vocation offers the closest parallel to the form of discipleship instituted by Jesus. In this context, God is the caller, underscoring the theological nature of discipleship. Jesus assumes the role of God; His call is perceived as God's call, resulting in the unhesitating and absolute nature of discipleship.[28]

It is established that the term "disciple" (μαθητής) is found at most in three instances in the LXX (possibly at Jer 13:21; 20:11; 46:9, though with different readings in each case in important manuscripts). The Hebrew equivalent of "disciple'

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[26] Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: Transl., with Additions and Revisions, from the German* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, Zondervan, 19), 481.

[27] David Noel Freedman, "Disciple/Discipleship" (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 208–9.

[28] Ibid., 210.

(תַּלְמִיד, meaning "pupil" or "learner," derived from the verb למד, "to learn") is only found once in the Old Testament (1 Chr 25:8, referring to a student among the temple musicians). The related substantive participle "one who is taught" (לִמֻּד) appears only a few times, at best, such as in Isa 8:16 and probably also in Isa 50:4; 54:13.[29] Interestingly, the words for "disciple," "pupil," or "learner" (whether תַּלְמִיד, לִמֻּד, or their cognates) have not been discovered so far in the Aramaic or Hebrew texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, despite the significant emphasis on instruction and various levels of learning within that community.[30]

More so, in Greek philosophical institutions during the classical and koine periods, the term "disciple" was often used to denote someone who learned from and followed a specific teacher. Notably, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon rejected the title of "teacher" and discouraged others from identifying as their "disciples" due to philosophical and sociological considerations. However, in philosophical groups like the Sophists, Cynics, Stoics, Epicureans, where Socrates' influence was less pronounced or his innate knowledge theory was dismissed, mentor-disciple relationships evolved. These relationships emphasized learning, companionship, and imitation, even bordering on a quasi-religious reverence.[31] Similarly, in the Talmud, which includes the Mishnah and the Babylonian Gemaras, as well as other rabbinic texts such as the Tosephta, the Palestinian Gemaras, the Midrashim, and the teachings of various individual rabbis, the Hebrew word for

[29] Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, McMaster New Testament Studies (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 1996), 2; See also, Jeff A. Benner, 'למד', in *Ancient Hebrew Dictionary: 1000 Verbs and Nouns of the Hebrew Bible* (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc, 2009), 37.

[30] Ibid., 2.

[31] Longenecker, 2–3.

"disciple" (תַּלְמִיד) is often used. Even though these texts were composed later, they essentially encapsulate the Oral Torah from earlier periods, and therefore, they are likely to mirror largely the thought and language of the Jewish society during Jesus' era. The term תַּלְמִיד is commonly used to denote someone who receives teachings from and is a follower of a specific rabbi.[32]

The phrase "to follow" (akolouthein) is infrequently found in a religious context in the LXX. More often, it is used in the ordinary sense of physically trailing someone (as seen in Num 23:20; 1 Kgs 16:22; Ruth 1:14; Isa 45:14; Hos 2:5; also, Sirach prologue 2 and Judith 12:2), or accompanying someone as a servant (as in 1 Sam 25:42; also Judith 15.13). However, in 1 Kgs 19:20, there is a depiction of Elisha expressing his intent "to follow after" (*akoloutheso opiso sou*) his predecessor Elijah, which is understood in a religious sense as becoming his disciple.[33]

It is noteworthy that the terms "disciple" and "follower", despite their common secular use, were also part of the religious vocabulary during Jesus' era, as seen in the rabbinic writings of that period. The increasing use of these terms in the canonical Gospels and Acts, as compared to their fewer appearances in Paul's earlier letters, suggests a growing trend of religious usage when the New Testament was being written.[34]

The term הלך, which appears 1,547 times in the Hebrew Old Testament, is another word seemingly connected to the concept of discipleship. This term can be interpreted either literally or figuratively. In a literal context, it represents the ability

[32] Ibid,. 3.

[33] Ibid,. 3.

[34] Longenecker, 3.

to move autonomously (seen in Gen 12:4; 13:5; 14:24; 33:12; Exod 14:29; Josh 14:10; 24:3; Judg 11:16, 18). Metaphorically, it may refer to one's life journey (Josh 8:35; 1 Sam 12:2), the conclusion of one's journey, signifying death (Gen 15:2; Josh 23:14), or even following a teacher.[35] The term is also used symbolically in connection with one's covenant relationship with God (Deut 26:17; 28:9; Josh 22:5). Instances of apostasy are often described as following or going after false gods (Exod 32:1; Jer 5:23), a usage that is significantly more frequent than the few references to following God in covenant loyalty.[36]

Discipleship and Holiness

Jeffrey Weima opines that holiness is truly the core theme of discipleship in 1 Thessalonians. This recurring focus on holiness in 1 Thessalonians sheds light on an essential truth about the theological lens through which Paul perceives the Thessalonian believers and provides them with guidance. Indeed, holiness was the characteristic that defined Israel, God's covenant people, and it was the goal they were to strive for. It was the feature that was meant to set God's people apart from all other nations. This is openly affirmed by God when he establishes the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai as his chosen covenant people, saying, "And now if you indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you will be to me a distinctive people out of all the nations. For the whole earth is mine. You will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy (*hagios*) nation" (Exod 19:5-6 LXX).[37]

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[35] Keith T. Marriner, *Following the Lamb The Theme of Discipleship in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 23.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Jeffrey A.D Weima, "How You Must Walk to Please God: Holiness and Discipleship in 1 Thessalonians," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 101.

The divine directive for Israel to adopt holiness as its identifying trait is reiterated during the renewal of the Sinai covenant. It states: “And the Lord has chosen you today to be his unique people, as he promised, so that you may follow his commandments and that you may excel all the nations, as he has made you famous and a source of pride and glory, so that you may be a holy (*hagios*) people to the Lord your God, as he pledged” (Deut 26:18-19 LXX).[38]

Similarly, the book of Leviticus constantly urges Israel to mirror the holiness of their God (Lev 11:44 LXX; see also 11:45; 19:2; 20:7; 22:32). At the heart of this appeal to holiness is the concept of “separation” - implying the necessity for Israel to “withdraw” and “distinguish” itself from the neighboring nations. Therefore, holiness serves as the defining boundary that sets God's people apart from all other nations (Lev 20:23-26 LXX).[39]

Remarkably, Paul extends the criterion of holiness, which was previously exclusive to Israel, to the largely Gentile believers in Jesus at Thessalonica. These believers, having turned from idolatry to serve the true and living God, now also embody the holiness that once distinguished Israel from other nations. This same characteristic now marks the difference between the Thessalonian Gentile believers and those Gentiles who don't know God, signifying their inclusion among God's holy people.[40]

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Weima, 101–2.

Old Testament Literatures on Discipleship

The following section covers some discussions on discipleship in the Old Testament literature.

Discipleship and Home Education. In the Old Testament, the idea of discipleship seems to begin with the parents teaching their children the way of the Lord. This parental responsibility is well established in the Wisdom literature, especially the book of Proverbs. For instance, James L. Crenshaw affirms that the responsibility of teaching children at home rests with the parents. Proverbs' principal use of the words "father" and "son" must undoubtedly refer to a family context. Every father-son relationship described in Proverbs appears to be a father training his son, rather than using the formal terms for teacher and pupil. Therefore, it is likely that most of the education took place in the home, where boys and girls received practical training in daily life in accordance with the options available to them.[41] Father and mother are considered agents of discipline the children. This establishes the family as a crucial setting for children's discipleship.[42]

In the same vein, O. Larry Yarbrough posits that the home was the setting for the earliest education.[43] Whereas the parental education of the children focuses on the commandments and moral education, yet they also include other educational materials.[44] Likewise, it is observed that Israel has a similitude of parent-child

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[41] James L. Crenshaw, "Education in Ancient Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 4 (1985): 614, https://doi.org/10.2307/3260674.

[42] Fernando A. Cascante Gomez, "Between Text and Sermon: Proverbs 1:1-19," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 52, no. 4 (October 1998): 410.

[43] O. Larry Yarbrough, "Parents and Children in the Jewish Family of Antiquity," in *The Jewish Family in Antiquity*, ed. Shaye J.D. Cohen (Brown Judaic Studies, 2020), 42, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvzgb9cp.6.

[44] Ibid.

relationship with God. J.W. McKay proposes that the relationship between Israel and God can be compared to the bond between a father and a son (Deut 6:4-9). Consequently, Israel is obligated to accept the teachings imparted by the LORD, the Father, and live according to His commandments. McKay argues that obedience is the cornerstone of Israel's successful relationship with the Father.[45] He posits that Israel, as the son/pupil of Yahweh, the father/teacher, can only adopt an attitude of filial obedience and reverential love.[46]

Discipleship and Covenant. Old Testament discipleship in the context of God's covenant with Israel has been attested to[47]. Such discussion is based mostly on the book of Deuteronomy, as it is considered a book of religious teaching. J.A. Thompson opines that there is probably no other book in the Old Testament that expresses the covenant idea more profoundly and consistently than the book of Deuteronomy. The covenant that the Lord of the covenant, Yahweh, made with his people Israel (Deut 4:23, 31; 5:2-3; 9:9; 29:1,12) was one that he would remember and uphold as well as show "covenant faithfulness" or "steadfast loyalty" (חֶסֶד, 5:10; 7:9, 12) to them. The people's adherence to the covenant's requirements, often known as "the law," would serve as a manifestation of their commitment to Yahweh and his covenant.[48] Jonathan Sacks also agrees that Deuteronomy is a book about covenant.

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[45] J. W. McKay, "Man's Love for God in Deuteronomy and the Father/Teacher -- Son/Pupil Relationship," *Vetus Testamentum* 22, no. 4 (1972): 432, https://doi.org/10.2307/1517193.

[46] Ibid., 435.

[47] See; Wilkins.

[48] J.A Thompson, "Book of Deuteronomy," in *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 274.

Covenant language in the book of Deuteronomy includes listen, love (Deut 6:5; 7:7-9; 10:14-19), joy, remembering, and not forgetting.[49]

Susan Haber studies the covenant between YHWH and Israel. She explains that the Hebrew term for "covenant," בְּרִית, also means "commandment" and "law," and it denotes a duty. The LORD chooses Israel from among the nations to be His special people and gives her the gift of His covenant; and Israel replies by accepting the covenant and committing to be solely faithful to the LORD by abiding by His commandments. Israel is continuously reminded to follow the law and warned against breaking the commandments.[50]

Further, it is observed that the book of Deuteronomy shows that "the connection to future generations of Israelites is facilitated through the teaching of the children" (Deut 6:7). Parents have the responsibility of passing on tradition to their children. Hence, the connection to future generations is attained through a programme of religious instruction in which every individual, including children, is educated on the stipulations of the covenant.[51] According to Haber, YHWH has the duty within the framework of the covenant to fulfill his promises while Israel accepts the covenant and have the obligation to keep YHWH's command and remain loyal to him.[52]

Likewise, Rekham M. Chennattu asserts that the covenant metaphor is the principal image used in the Old Testament to define the distinctive relationship

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[49] Jonathan Sacks, "Deuteronomy: Covenant Society," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 51, no. 3 (2019): 10–12.

[50] Susan Haber, "God, Israel and Covenant: Unity in the Book of Deuteronomy," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 32, no. 1 (1999): 132.

[51] Haber, 135; see also, Ben Phillip, 'From Biblical Origin to Practical Application'. *The Journal of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary*. He asserts that Deuteronomy contains numerous texts regarding passing along one's faith to the next generation more than any other book of the Pentateuch.

[52] Ibid., 138.

between the YHWH and the people of Israel.[53] She stresses that the covenant between Yahweh and Israel suggests that Israel has a new position as God's prized possession. This entails obligations in regard to God, people, and the cosmos: obligations to worship only Yahweh (Deut 6:4-5), to uphold justice for the widow and the orphan (Deut 10:18), to care for the needy and the poor (Deut 15:11; 24: 12–15), to be fair in legal matters (Deut 16:18–20), and to be mindful of nature and the environment (Deut 20:19–20).[54] As a result, the covenant relationship not only reminds people of God's promises but also demands that they love God and obey His rules to receive His love.[55]

While the research efforts on the theme of discipleship in the Old Testament have been on the terminologies, forms and cost of discipleship in the Old Testament corpus, it seems that only a few works concentrate on the book which appears as the foundation of the discipleship theme in the Old Testament - the book of Deuteronomy. Whereas it is observed that most scholarly works on discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy are focused only on Deuteronomy 6:4-9.[56]

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[53] Rekha M Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2006), 50.

[54] Ibid., 65.

[55] Ibid., 66.

[56] Examples, Josiah B Andor and Ebenezer Quaye, "Wholistic Adventist Education and the Shema Creed (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)," *Valley View University Journal of Theology* 3 (2014): 21–32; Sue Lowcock Harris, "Deuteronomy 6: 4–9," *Interpretation* 70, no. 3 (2016): 329–31; S. Dean McBride Jr, "The Yoke of the Kingdom: An Exposition of Deuteronomy 6: 4–5," *Interpretation* 27, no. 3 (1973): 273–306; Christopher M. Mullennix, *Developing a Strategy to Equip Parents at Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, Blackville, South Carolina to Lead Their Children in Family Discipleship through Deuteronomy 6: 4-9* (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016); Nathan MacDonald, "The Date of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6: 4–5)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 4 (2017): 765–82; Loina Hellen Samuel, "The Shema as Foundational Verdict for God's People: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6: 4–9," *ShahidiHub International Journal of Theology & Religious Studies* 2, no. 1 (2022): 123–40; Judah Kraut, "Deciphering the Shema: Staircase Parallelism and the Syntax of Deuteronomy 6:4," *Vetus Testamentum* 61, no. 4 (2011): 582–602.

In 2022, a scholarly article published by Richard Floyd recognized the book of Deuteronomy as a rich source for the development of the theme of discipleship but has been ignored by the researchers.

Floyd analyzes the Deuteronomy book's literary structure and some lexical indicators to identify a concept of discipleship. He shows that the literary organization of the book of Deuteronomy indicates that it is a covenant guide for Israel's discipleship of YHWH. Lexical analysis of the use of לִמַּד, "to teach/learn," and "to walk after" or "to follow" in Deuteronomy supports the idea that discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy entails learning YHWH's word to maintain exclusive covenant devotion to him.[57]

He notes that most academic studies on discipleship concentrate on the New Testament. He contends that the Old Testament texts were ignored since there was no word for "disciple" in the Old Testament, leading some scholars to believe that discipleship was only a New Testament idea. Floyd argues that the principles presented in the Jewish Scriptures of Jesus' day form the foundation of his discipleship strategy. As a result, the author concludes that there are parallels between Jesus' method of making disciples and YHWH's in the Hebrew Bible, particularly the book of Deuteronomy.[58]

Floyd's article seems commendable as it recognizes the book of Deuteronomy as a book which is good for the development of the theme of discipleship. He

[57] Richard Floyd, "The Concept of Discipleship in Deuteronomy: Literary and Lexical Insights into Following YHWH," *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 7, no. 2 (September 2021): 37–71. Floyd makes use of a linguistic comparison between the Deuteronomy and the New Testament as well as the literary structure of Deuteronomy. Examining Deuteronomy's literary structure reveals indications of a master-servant connection or an educational relationship between the two, with the book serving as a guide for YHWH's discipleship. Discipleship is viewed as a covenantal activity, with YHWH summoning Israel to it, according to the literary setting of Deuteronomy.

[58] Ibid.

establishes the fact that learning and following are embedded in the covenant relationship with God. Whereas Floyd, in his article, examines the literary structure of the book of Deuteronomy on the theme of the discipleship with his focus on two key words, “learn” and “follow” in the context of Israel’s covenant relationship with YHWH, the contextual analysis of the book of Deuteronomy reveals more words and phrases which establish the ideology of discipleship either in the context of family or God and the nation of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy. Also, the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy could be developed not only on the word level but also in the context of the narratives which this research intends to do.

The book of Deuteronomy frequently makes use of words and phrases such as; “learn” (Deut 4:10; 5:1; 14:23; 17:19; 18:9; 31:12-13); “walk” (Deut 5:33; 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 13:4-5; 28:9; 30:16); “teach to observe” (Deut 4:1, 5, 9-10, 5:31; 6:7; 11:19; 31:19); “observe his commandment” (Deut 4:6; 14; 5:31; 6:3; 6:24-25; 8:1; 11:32; 12:1, 28, 32; 26:16; 28:10); “serve” (Deut 6:13; 8:12; 10:20; 11:13; 13:4); “obey the voice of the Lord” (Deut 11:13; 12:28; 13:4; 27:10; 28:1; 30:20); “follow” (Deut 1:36; 7:4; 12:30; 16:20; 17:20); “keep” (Deut 4:40; 5:29; 6:17; 7:11-12; 8:6; 10:13; 11:1,8,22; 13:4; 19:9; 27:1; 30:16); “hear” (Deut 5:1; 6:3; 6:4; 9:1); “covenant” (Deut 4:23; 5:2-3; 7:12); “take heed” (Deut 4:9, 15, 19, 23; 12:3, 19; 12:30); “fear” (Deut 6:2, 13; 8:6; 10:12, 20; 13:4)“love” (Deut 11:1; 13, 22; 30:16, 20); and “command” (Deut 4:2, 5, 14; 5:32; 6:24; 8:1). The contexts of these words indicate the idea of Israel’s discipleship which is fully expressed in the LORD’s relationship with his children and between Israel and their children which ultimately aims at preservation of faith.

As the foregoing literatures reveal, the discussion on discipleship from the Old Testament has focused on the meaning of the Hebrew word,למד [59] discipleship as divine initiative of YHWH,[60] the cost of discipleship,[61] discipleship and covenant,[62] form of discipleship,[63] life of a disciple,[64] and the language of discipleship[65].

The survey shows that the concept of discipleship from the Old Testament perspective has not been given thorough attention probably because of the presumed absence of the disciple's terms in the Old Testament canon. Consequently, much effort on discipleship is directed to the New Testament books for the understanding of discipleship because of the obvious instances and clear terms used. Hence, this study will carry out a detailed study on the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy.

Statement of the Problem

From the literature reviewed, it appears that much of the research work conducted have not fully explored the rich contributions of the Hebrew Bible to the discussion of the concept of discipleship. Emphasis seems to be placed on the New Testament's perceptions of the theme of disciple and discipleship as some scholars even submit that the concept of discipleship is absent altogether in the Old

[59] See; Merill; Ernst; Bromiley.

[60] See; Brueggemann.

[61] See; Pederson; Bonhoeffer.

[62] See; Wilkins; Thompson; Sacks; Haber; Rekham; Floyd.

[63] See; Sakenfeld; Wilkins; Crenshaw; Larry.

[64] See; Silva and Tenney.

[65] See; Freedman; Brown.

Testament.[66] Consequently, there is just a handful of literature dealing with the subject.

As earlier noted, the book of Deuteronomy is a rich source for the development of the theme of discipleship. The literary structure of the book reveals indications of a master-servant relationship especially in the context of covenant between YHWH and the nation of Israel. Thus, the book serves as a guide for YHWH's discipleship.[67]

Thus, the book of Deuteronomy, which contains some instructions related to discipleship is worthy of studying. Apart from למד and הלך אחר which Floyd discussed in his article, what are the other key linguistic and conceptual markers of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy, and how do these markers inform our understanding of the discipleship dynamics and formation processes within the Old Testament context? Beyond the word level, are there discipleship motifs in some narratives in the book of Deuteronomy? What is the nature of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy? What contributions does the book of Deuteronomy provide to the understanding of the concept of discipleship? And what is the contemporary significance of the understanding of discipleship language in the book of Deuteronomy?

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[66] E.g., Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1997), 947; Katharing Doob Sakenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 12; Karl H. Rengstorf, "μαθητής," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 415; See also, Keith Marriner, "Discipleship Lessons from the Old Testament," 2016, https://iphc.org/discipleship/2016/10/07/discipleship-lessons-old-testament/.

[67] See; Floyd, "The Concept of Discipleship in Deuteronomy: Literary and Lexical Insights into Following YHWH," 39.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation was to analyze how discipleship concept develops throughout the book of Deuteronomy.

Justification of the Study

Previous studies have not given a deserved attention to the Old Testament contribution to the theme of discipleship. The earlier mentioned studies seem to limit the concept of discipleship in the Old Testament to the occurrences of the terms, למד and תַּלְמִיד while other studies focus on the שׁמע (Deut 6:4-6). In 2021, Richard Floyd makes a commendable effort to examine the contribution of the book of Deuteronomy to the theme of discipleship. He discovers that the literary structure of the book of Deuteronomy shows that the book as a covenant manual for Israel's discipleship to the LORD. Despite this effort, there is a lacuna in the work. Floyd analyzed only the literary structure of Deuteronomy and did a lexical study of only two terms - למד and הלך אחר. He however leaves out other terms in the book which shed light on the concept of discipleship.[68]

The book of Deuteronomy deserves a comprehensive study in order to exhaust contextually the discipleship terminologies which will help to establish the theme of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy. Hence, this dissertation will make a further detailed inquiries beyond the terminology level to investigate the various contexts of the book in order to bring out in full the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy.

Thus, the approach that was used in this present dissertation has not been applied to the study of the concept of discipleship in the previous studies. A

[68] Floyd, "The Concept of Discipleship in Deuteronomy: Literary and Lexical Insights into Following YHWH."

Qualitative Content analysis was used to extract the coding frame from the contexts of the book and the coding frame will be analyzed. This required an objective and systematic study of the texts in their respective contexts in order to achieve the aim of the study.

This study provides a biblical basis, from Old Testament perspective for the theme of discipleship. It establishes the concept of discipleship from the book of Deuteronomy. This will be a reference material in the scholarly world and teaching material for the Christian Church.

Delimitation of the Study

This study was limited to the book of Deuteronomy. It is not the intention of this research to trace the theme of discipleship in all the 39 books of the Old Testament. References were made to other texts as they are needed to help in achieving the aim of the study.

Methodology

Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)[69] was employed in this study. This method is used to identify and understand themes, or concepts, patterns, and relationships within the textual data. Inferences were made about the messages within the text. In QCA, a concept is chosen for examination, and the analysis involves quantifying and counting its presence. The main goal was to examine the occurrence of selected terms in the data. The terms may be explicit or implicit. With the use of

[69] For the definition of Qualitative Content Analysis, see; Kimberly A Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, Second Edition (Sage Publications, 2017), 39.

coding in the QCA, there was a reduction of the amount of textual data to that which is relevant to the research question.[70]

With systematic text analysis, this research method helps to give attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text. The concept of discipleship is not explicitly expressed in the book of Deuteronomy. So, the method was used to analyze the context of the implied words. The analysis was done on the level of words, word sense, phrases, sentences and themes. This helped to discover how the concept of discipleship develops throughout the book of Deuteronomy.

It is observed that QCA is intended to be systematic and objective. This technique seems to be appropriate in analyzing textual data or documents. Data is categorized in qualitative content analysis using terms that are at least somewhat inductively generated (i.e., derived from the data), and are typically applied to the data through careful reading.[71] Coding frames were developed. Codes provide the classification system for the analysis of qualitative data. They can represent topics, concepts, or categories of events, processes, attitudes or beliefs that represent human activity, and thoughts. They are used by researchers to organize and retrieve data by categories that are analytically useful to the study.[72]

Besides, coding the data allows the researcher to rearrange the data into analytically meaningful categories.[73] It reduces the amount of raw data to that which is relevant to the research question, breaks the data down to manageable sections, and

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[70] Mojtaba Vaismoradi et al., "Theme Development in Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis," *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice* 6, no. 5 (2016): 104.

[71] Jane Forman and Laura Damschroder, "Qualitative Content Analysis," in Empirical Methods for Bioethics: A Primer (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2007), 40.

[72] Forman and Damschroder, 'Qualitative Content Analysis,' 48; See also, Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 3E, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles ; London: SAGE, 2016), 4.

[73] Ibid, 49.

takes researchers through the transformation of raw data to higher-level insights or abstractions as the development of theme.[74]

One of the advantages of the QCA is that the text is always interpreted within its context, i.e. the material is examined regarding its origin and effect.[75]
The content analysis is a very transparent research method. The coding scheme and the sampling procedures can be clearly set out so that replications and follow-up studies are feasible. It is this transparency that often causes content analysis to be referred to as an objective method of analysis.[76] It is a highly flexible method. It can be applied to a wide variety of different kinds of unstructured textual information.[77]

In addition to the QCA, the lexical-syntactical analysis was applied in order to complement the QCA method. As the coding frames are established through the QCA technique, there was a lexical-syntactical analysis which helps to determine various meanings of words or group of words and arrive at the authorial intended meaning.[78] This helps to prevent arbitrary interpretation of words. The text was engaged as its grammar and contexts are studied.

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[74] Vaismoradi et al., 'Theme Development in Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis,' 104.

[75] Philipp Mayring, 'Qualitative Content Analysis: Theoretical Foundation, Basic Procedures and Software Solution,' 2014, 39.

[76] Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 304.

[77] Ibid., 304–5.

[78] Henry A. Virkler and Karelynne Gerber Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: The Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 98; See also, Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis,* Revised and Expanded Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 69.

Procedure

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one examines the previous studies on the theme of discipleship and provides the background and justification to the study. In Chapter two, there will be a survey of biblical discipleship languages. This will help in developing coding frames which will be used to study the concept of discipleship in Chapter three as the chapter will focus on the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy. Chapter four will examine the impact and implications of discipleship on the mission and contemporary believers. The last chapter covers the summary of the study and findings of the research.

Definition of Term

The term "discipleship" has a denotative definition as well as various general definitions. There seems to be no general definition of the term discipleship. However, from the New Testament's perspective, the term has been described as the process of becoming like Jesus Christ.[79]

[79] Marriner, *Following the Lamb The Theme of Discipleship in the Book of Revelation*, 16.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP LANGUAGE

The idea of discipleship is not articulated in the same way in the Hebrew Bible as it is in the New Testament, notably with the specific name "disciple." However, the Old Testament is replete with concepts and expressions that allude to following God, learning from Him, and passing on knowledge to others. In this Chapter, efforts will be made to highlight a few major expressions and ideas from the Old Testament pertaining to discipleship. This includes specific and general terms used in the Old Testament Canon.

Additionally, since the discipleship concept seems to be clearly developed in the New Testament, examining terms related to discipline in the New Testament will be insightful. Many scholars have highlighted these terms in their research. Thus, by comparing these recognized disciplinary terms from the New Testament writings with the Old Testament, this study aims to find similar or synonymous terms, whether directly stated or implied.

Further, discipleship language will be examined in the context of Yahweh's covenant with his people. As such, vertical and horizontal dimensions of discipleship will be studied with focus on fellowship, worship, ethical conduct, and witnessing among other relevant concepts of biblical discipleship language. This will help in developing the coding frame which will be employed to study the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy. The next section examines the definition of biblical discipleship.

Definition of Biblical Discipleship

The concept of discipleship has received the attention of Christian writers. This concept has been defined and discussed from different perspectives. Thus, this section explores the meanings of the term. Since the concept of disciple/discipleship is expressed and explicit in the New Testament, some of the definitions are based on the New Testament's understanding of the term. This knowledge aids the development of the coding frame which the analysis of the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy is centered on.

In the first instance, the term "disciple" denotes an individual who serves as an apprentice, student, or adherent to a teacher (Matt 4:19; 9:9; Luke 9:23; Mark 1:17-21; 10:28-31). In the role of an apprentice, the disciple actively acquires knowledge and understanding from their teacher (John 1:35; Luke 5:33). The disciples steadfastly adhere to the teachings of their mentor with the aspiration of emulating the teacher's qualities (John 8:31; 15:4-6; Luke 6:40).[1]

According to Bobby Harrigton and Alex Absalom, "a disciple is someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and is committed to Jesus' kingdom mission."[2] To them, being a disciple involves being Christlike and assisting other people to be like Jesus Christ. Similarly, the term disciple is described as a learner and the object of this learning is Jesus Christ.[3] In his own view, Aubrey Malphurs affirms that a disciple is "simply a believer" stressing that "committed believers are

[1] Roger E. Dickson, *Dickson Biblical Research Library* (Cape Town, South Africa: Africa International Missions, 2012), 255.

[2] Harrington, *Discipleship That Fits*, 16.

[3] A. Charles Davis, *Making Disciples Across Cultures: Missional Principles for a Diverse World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 32.

committed disciples. Uncommitted believers are uncommitted disciples."[4] He cites the example of Luke who uses the term disciple for believers notwithstanding their commitment to Christ (Acts 6:1-2, 7:9:1, 26; 11:26; 14:21-22; 15:10; 18:23; 19:9).[5] Gary E. Tangeman shares a similar view. He states that "a disciple is a believer, who at the moment of conversion is on the road to attaining a greater and greater likeness to Jesus Christ."[6] This definition puts the beginning of discipleship to the point of believer's conversion. From another point of view, Jonathan K. Dodson perceives the term disciple as "an identity" buttressing that every other thing is a role. He maintains that while the role is temporary, the identity will last forever.[7] Summarily, the above definitions describe the term disciple as a student, apprentice, learner, servant, believer, or a follower.

Having defined the term "disciple" it is crucial to examine the term discipleship. First, it is noteworthy that the term discipleship does not appear anywhere in the Holy Bible while the term disciple appears about 260 times in the New Testament and once in the Old Testament.[8] However, scholars have defined the term from the perspective of the meaning of the word disciple. Below are some of the definitions:

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[4] Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2009), 30.

[5] Malphurs, 30.

[6] Tangeman, *The Disciple Making Church in the 21st Century*, 36.

[7] Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 29.

[8] "Disciple, Discipleship," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 128.

The term discipleship is described as "the process through which Jesus turns us into people who trust and follow him."[9] Dunavant Del notes that "discipleship is a lifelong process."[10] Wilkins, who shares a similar view, describes this process as a "process of growth and development as a disciple."[11] Likewise, Bill Hull opines that discipleship is not for a while. He says,

> Discipleship isn't a program or an event; it's a way of life. It's not for a limited time, but for our whole life. Discipleship isn't for beginners alone; it's for all believers for every day of their life. Discipleship isn't just *one* of the things the church does; it *is* what the church does. It's not part of the advancement of God's kingdom; the existence of serious disciples is the most important evidence of God's work on earth.[12]

In his own view, Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains that "discipleship means adherence to Christ, and, because Christ is the object of that adherence, it must take the form of discipleship."[13] Also, Wilkins asserts that discipleship can be narrowly comprehended as a technical exploration of the historical master-disciple relationship. Moreover, it can be understood in a broader context as Christian experience - encompassing what such a way of life demands, signifies, and involves.[14]

The foregoing discussion reveals that the concept of discipleship has received considerable attention from theologians of different orientations. Thus, the next section considers the discipleship's terminologies from the Scriptures point of view.

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[9] Harrington, *Discipleship That Fits*, 16.

[10] Delbert Wayne Dunavant, *From Membership to Discipleship: A Practical Guide to Equipping Members for Ministry* (Lincoln, Neb.: AdventSource, 2006), 54.

[11] Michael J Wilkins, "Disciples and Discipleship," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 202.

[12] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 24.

[13] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The Macmillan Company1949, 1949.), 51.

[14] Wilkins, "Disciple, Discipleship," 51.

Terminologies of Discipleship

Various terminologies have been used in both the Old and the New Testaments to describe the term disciple/discipleship. These terms are studied here beginning from the terms used in the Old Testament.

Old Testament's Terminologies

תַּלְמִיד. The word תַּלְמִיד denotes a scholar or pupil.[15] It occurs in 1 Chr. 25:8 and refers to a student or apprentice in musical instruction.[16] The selection of the twenty-four divisions of priests includes "the small and the great, the teacher and the scholar." In rabbinical days, the law's instructor was referred to as the תַּלְמִיד, Rabbi and his students as תַּלְמִידִם, that is, apprentices. Meanwhile, all of Israel was תַּלְמִידִם, or apprentices to God's Torah. From this root, the Jewish Talmud derives its name.[17] This term continued to be used in rabbinic literature, where it took on meanings akin to those that the gospels describe about Jesus and his disciples: a common life of teaching and learning that is defined by a pupil's submissive regard for a teacher.[18] It should be noted that תַּלְמִיד is the equivalent of the New Testament Greek word for

[15] F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic; Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible = The Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 13. Dr., reprinted from the 1906 ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010).

[16] Gracin and Budiselić, 'Discipleship in the Context of Judaism in Jesus' TimePart I,' 207.

[17] R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 480.

[18] A. K. M. Adam, 'Discipleship, Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics,' 1, accessed 29 January 2023, https://www.academia.edu/37675445/Discipleship_Oxford_Encyclopedia_of_the_Bible_and_Ethics.

disciple, μαθητής, which gives the same idea of a pupil-teacher relationship.[19] In essence, תַּלְמִיד is an Old Testament word for disciple.

למד **.** In Ugaritic writings, the verb *lmd* is used to imply "study, practice," or "instruct." למד (qal) occurs 24 times in the Old Testament.[20] What follows is the qal and piel usages of למד:

Qal Usage of למד: It is noted that "the Hebrew verb למד means "learn" in the qal. The underlying meaning appears to be "have experiences," perhaps also 'accustom oneself to something, become familiar with something."[21] The Psalms, Deuteronomy, and prophetic books are where the verb appears the most frequently, as may be expected. It is infrequently mentioned in historical sources because ancient Israel lacked a formal educational system.[22] On the other hand, the regular mention of learning in the poetic writings and Deuteronomy is since these writings understand it from religious perspective.[23]

So, the semantic concept "learn" is particularly evident in the qal. The people are urged to "learn to do good" in the admonition found in Isa l: 17. Later chapters of the book have terms that are similar. The people will "learn righteousness" through God's judgment, meanwhile the wicked do not (Isa. 26:9f.). The wayward will come

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[19] Donnieval Walker, 'Developing a Discipleship Strategy for the Dunamis Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Brooklyn, New York' (DMin diss., Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 2012), 16, https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin/144.

[20] Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds., 'Lmd', in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 831.

[21] Kapelrud Kapelrud Oslo, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament Volume 8 by G. Johannes Botterweck - PDF Drive," in *Lmd*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 5, accessed December 19, 2022, http://www.pdfdrive.com/theological-dictionary-of-the-old-testament-volume-8-d187734177.html.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

to their senses, "learn (RSV 'accept') instruction (לֶקַח), and fear the God of Israel (Isa. 29:24).[24]

Piel Usage: The religious interpretation still dominates in the piel, where the word למד is frequently employed to indicate "teach someone something." The Psalms and Deuteronomy provide the most instances of this, just like the qal. Only Jeremiah among the prophets makes frequent use of the verb; otherwise, it hardly ever appears in the works of the prophets.[25] In Deut 4:1, the piel form of the term למד is used.

> And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that *I am teaching you*, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you" (Deu 4:1 ESV, emphasis mine).[26]

The negative form of the verb is noticed in Deut 20:17ff. The Bible says you must destroy them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as Yahweh your God commanded, in order to prevent them from teaching you to do all the repugnant things that they do for their gods and you sinning against Yahweh your God in the process (paraphrase). In summary, the term למד alludes to various forms of learning and instruction and has been a common word for such experiences since ancient times. A young individual might gain knowledge from their parents about essential life skills or specific abilities like warfare tactics. Even animals, such as a young lion learning from an older or a calf from a human, are perceived to have the ability to learn. However, this general

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[24]Ibid.

[25] Ibid, 6.

[26]The same word occur in some texts in the book of Deuteronomy. Examples; "See, I have taught you statutes and rules… (Deu 4:5). "…Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth (Deu 4:10) And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you (*that you might be taught*)statutes and rules (Deu 4:14, emphasis mine); "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, (Deu 6:1).

interpretation of the word does not fully capture its primary significance in the Old Testament. The overarching idea suggests God as the supreme teacher. In earlier times, He was seen as the teacher of any special skill.[27]

Nominative derivatives are לִמֻּד "student, disciple," מַלְמָד "cattle prod," etc. (Judg 3:31), and, as an Aram loanword, and תַּלְמִיד "student" (1 Chr 25:8).[28] Although instruction and all levels of learning were highly valued in their community, the terminology for "disciple," "student," or "learner" (whether תַּלְמִיד or לִמֻּד or their cognates) have not been discovered in the Aramaic or Hebrew texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls.[29]

אחר הלך **(walk after, follow).** In Deuteronomy, the Hebrew word אחר has three major meanings in addition to a few minor ones. Its main use is as a preposition with plenary, temporal, and geographic meanings. The usage of אחר as an adverb, "to walk after," is the most crucial aspect of this study. Temporal: "after," as in "after he had defeated Sihon" (Deut 1:4; 12:30; 21:13; 24:4, 20, 21; 31:27, 29); spatial: "west" or "behind" (11:30; 25:18). Additionally, in Deut 23:14, the auxiliary word שׁוּב, which means "to turn from/ after you or "turn from following you," could be used to allude to YHWH following Israel, most likely in an overwatch or protection (or "behind") sense. Deuteronomy uses both הלך and אחר to urge exclusive devotion to YHWH and not to "other gods" (cf. Deut 4:3; 6:14; 8:19; 11:28; 13:2, 13:4; 28:14).[30]

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[27] Oslo, '*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. 8, 9.

[28] Jenni and Westermann, 831.

[29] Walker, 'Developing a Discipleship Strategy for the Dunamis Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Brooklyn, New York,' 17.

[30] Floyd, 58.

Also, the verb הלך is cited in the Old Testament 1,547 times. This term has both literal and metaphorical interpretation. Literally, it signifies "self-movement" (Gen 12:4; 13:5; 14:24; 33:12; Exod 14:29; Josh 14:10; 24:3; Judg 11:16, 18). When viewed metaphorically, it might represent a person's life path (Josh 8:35; 1 Sam 12:2), the conclusion of one's life, suggesting death (Gen 15:2; Josh 23:14), or seeking instruction from a mentor. It also metaphorically relates to one's relationship with God under a covenant (Deut 26:17; 28:9; Josh 22:5). Interestingly, many references equate apostasy with the act of following false deities (Exod 32:1; Jer 5:23), which is more common than the occasional references to steadfastly walking with God in a covenant.[31] For instance, the Bible says, וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים "And Enoch *walked* with God…." (Gen 5:24). In the same vein, the biblical record shows that "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah *walked* with God." (Gen 6:9, Emphasis mine). Based on this, Walker reasons that the text "highlights the relational aspect of discipleship with the use of the terms "friends" and "walked with."[32] Commenting on Gen 5:22, Utley explains that the Hebrew term וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ is the Hithpael stem denoting intimate fellowship almost to the point of "to live with."[33] So, the use of both אחר and הלך are significant in the study of the concept of discipleship.

אהב. The Hebrew word for love is אהב and appears about 250 times in the Hebrew Bible in different forms.[34] It appears that the Hebrew idea of love is both relational and covenantal, often showing Yahweh's love for His people and the love

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[31] Marriner, *Following the Lamb The Theme of Discipleship in the Book of Revelation*, 34.

[32] Walker, 'Developing a Discipleship Strategy for the Dunamis Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Brooklyn, New York,' 21.

[33] Robert James Utley, *How It All Began: Genesis 1-11, Study Guide Commentary Series*, vol. 1A (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2001), 82.

[34] G.A. Turner, "Love," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 173.

expected between individuals. So, love is used "both for human and for divine-human relations."[35]

The root אהב basically means to love, have affection for, or to befriend. It is found in different contexts such as human Love for God. For example, in Deuteronomy 6:5, God commands man to love him.[36] It says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." It is also used for the relationship between Yahweh and Israel or his goodly ones (Deut 7:7-8; 10:12; 11:13, 22; 19:9; 30:6; Josh 22:5; 23:11; Jer 2:2)[37]. אהב is also used in the context of parental love (Gen 22:2); romantic love (Song 3:1); and love among neighbors (Lev 19:18).

There are other terms used to express Yahweh's love for humanity. The basic one is אהב (Deut 7:8; Prov 3:12; Isa 43:4; Hos 11:1). Another synonymous word is חֶסֶד emphasizing the covenant relationship (Ps 36:7; Isa 63:7; Gen 19:19), and רָחַם which often expresses Yahweh's solicitude for humans (Ps 103:13).[38]

Also, the covenant was founded on Yahweh's love for Israel. The Bible says, "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers…. (Deut 7:7-8; cf. 9:4-6). Israel should be motivated to obey their God because of their love for him, just as love led God to make a covenant with them. According to

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Robert L. Alden, "אָהַב," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Volume 1*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 14.

[37] Gerhard Wallis Halle, "אָהַב," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 104.

[38] Turner, "Love," 174.

Deuteronomy, the foundation of religion and the main reason for following His instructions is love for God. Man's right response to God's love is loving obedience.[39]

Concerning discipleship, אהב is not just an emotion but a covenantal commitment that forms the fundamental of a faithful relationship with the Lord and others. First, love is a Covenant Requirement (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The Shema calls Israel to love God with all their heart, soul, and might. This stresses a total devotion and an exclusive loyalty to God. Also, love relates to Obedience (Deut 10:12-13). Moses says,

> And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? (Deut 10:12-13)

This text implies that loving God means keeping His commandments (cf. John 14:15). In addition, love functions as a reflection of Yahweh's Character (Exod 34:6-7). God is described as abounding in steadfast love. So, discipleship entails reflecting God's loyal, steadfast love.

Besides, the injunction in Leviticus 19:18 emphasizes love in the community. The Scripture says, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." (Lev 19:18) The command to "love your neighbor as yourself"' calls for ethical and relational commitment.[40] Later, this principle is affirmed and established by Jesus in the New Testament as the second greatest commandment.

Thus, in the Old Testament, love seems to be the foundation of discipleship. It involves covenant fidelity, obedience to the commandments, mirroring God's

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[39] C.W. Scudder, "Ethics in Deuteronomy," *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 1964, 36.

[40] Halle, "אָהַב,"11.

character, and living in community. It is interesting to note that in the New Testament, Jesus Christ affirms this theme as the distinguishing mark of His disciples (John 13:34-35). So, the next discussion will examine the New Testament's discipleship terminologies.

New Testament's Terminologies

Both the Old and New Testaments are connected and seem to be in dialogue. Thus, examining the Greek concept of discipleship proves beneficial to the ongoing study. It helps to show the relationship and distinctive nature of the concept of discipleship in both Testaments. Since the concept seems to be well developed in the New Testament, its understanding in the New Testament sheds light on the study of the discipleship concept in the Old Testament. Hence, the following brief examination of the discipleship term in the New Testament is done with a view to examining how the concept is expressed in the New Testament.

The word μαθητης denotes individuals who acquired knowledge in various fields, such as philosophy or any other art, including medical art, under the tutelage of a specific master. The main sense of the use of μαθητης is that of a pupil, someone learning under a teacher. While the sense of being a student or pupil remains fundamental in the Hellenistic period, a disciple was no longer only someone who had physical contact with the master but included followers of the ideas or ideology of one specific master. This is the sense found in later Christian writings. Thus, Eusebius could refer to good disciples taught by the Holy Spirit[41] and Gregorius Nazianzenus refers to disciples of the Gospel.[42] In the first case, there is a witness that Christian

[41] Eusebius, *Commentaria in Psalmos*, 23:365

[42] Gregorius Nyssenus, *De Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, 46:901.

discipleship links the disciple to the teaching of God through the Holy Spirit, in another instance, Christians follow God's ideology contained in the Gospel.

Strangely, the Hellenistic Greek witnessed in the Septuagint (LXX) does not display the words of the family of μαθητεύω. One importance occurrence is the word μάθημα in Jer 13:21 where the Greek text reads "καὶ σὺ ἐδίδαξας αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ σὲ μαθήματα" (and you taught them lessons over you). This word refers to "that which is learnt, lesson,"[43] a lesson or teaching, and it originates from the verb μανθάνω the same as the verb μαθητεύω and its derivatives.[44] While μάθημα in Jer 13:21 does not have a specific equivalent in the Hebrew sentence, it betrays the translator's practice wherein he translated the verb למד with διδάσκω and provided with a direct object (μαθήματα) which was not in his original. Now, this association of διδάσκω and μάθημα in the OT offers a window of understanding how teaching works and gives a clue that the verb למד can be crucial in understanding discipleship in the OT.

In the NT, several words convey the notion of discipleship. The most prominent words are of the family of μαθητεύω. This verb itself appears only four times in the NT. On the one hand, the verb means "to be a pupil, with the implication of being an adherent of the teacher."[45] In this sense, the emphasis is on the role of the person learning from a master and it parallels the verb μανθάνω (to learn). On the other hand, the verb refers to the process that causes one to become a pupil. In later Christian times, the verb μαθητεύω, following Matt 28:19, was used in the baptismal

[43] Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. and augm. (1996), s.v. "μάθημα."

[44] See Robert Beekes, *Etymological of Greek* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010), s.v. "μανθάνω."

[45] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), trans. and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 3rd ed., rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (2000), s.v. "μαθητεύω."

formula indicating the process of becoming a disciple. Thus, Grogorius Nazianzenus reports the formula "βαπτίζω σε μαθητεύων, εις ὄνομα Πατρὸς, καὶ Υἱοῦ, καὶ ἁγίου Πνευματος"[46]

The word μαθητής occurs 261 times in the NT. This Greek substantive refers to a pupil, an apprentice "one who engages in learning through instruction from another"[47] or a disciple, an adherent, "one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views."[48] In the first-century Christian setting visible in the book of Acts, the word μαθητής functions technically as an indicator the followers of the Christian way and the adherents to this way are understood as the μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου (the disciples of the Lord." (Acts 9:1). This group of believers that would be called Christians (Acts 11:26) comprises both men and women, and the feminine form μαθητρια is specifically applied to Tabitha (Acts 9:36). These disciples are characterized by both their adherence to the doctrine of Jesus Christ and their imitation of his actions.

It is further explained that in the New Testament, the verb *mathētēuō*, meaning "to make someone into a disciple," is infrequently used in the active voice. Instead, the verb *akolouthein*, which means "to walk behind" or "to follow," is more commonly employed, particularly in the context of following Jesus. This verb encapsulates the essential characteristic of living as a disciple. It is noteworthy that all 261 references to "disciple" in the New Testament are concentrated in the Gospels

[46]Grogorius Nazianzenus, *In Sanctum baptisma (orat. 40),* vol 36:424.

[47] Bauer, *BDAG*, s.v. "μαθητης." See also; Jeannine K. Brown, "Apostle, N.T." and "Disciple, Discipleship, N.T," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, January 1, 2013, 887, https://www.academia.edu/10439783/Apostle_N_T_and_Disciple_Discipleship_N_T

[48] Ibid. Rand J. A. Du, "Perspectives on Johannine Discipleship According to the Farewell Discourses," *Neotestamentica* 25, no. 2 (September 1991): 315.

and Acts.[49] The situation is akin to the term *akolouthein*, meaning "to follow after." Out of 90 occurrences, 79 are in the Gospels, while the remaining instances are distributed in Acts (4), Revelation (6), and 1 Corinthians (1). This finding suggests that discipleship is a phenomenon closely linked to Jesus himself.[50]

Having considered the Old and New Testaments' terminologies of discipleship, there is the need to focus more on how discipleship is understood in the context of covenantal relationships in the Old Testament. Hence, the next section.

Discipleship and Covenant Relationship in the Old Testament

Having discussed the marks of the discipleship from the perspectives of the Old and New Testaments and discipleship in the family setting, there is the need to understand the relationship between discipleship and covenant. It is noteworthy that "the ideal form of discipleship for Israel was the nation in covenant relationship with God."[51] This began with God and Abraham. The covenant relationship between Abraham and God can be traced back to Genesis chapter 12 when God called Abraham to leave his country and go to a land that He would show him.[52] The LORD says, "…. Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Gen 12:1). It is observed that God's call to Abram is followed by obedience which is required by Yahweh's followers. God's call to Abraham begins

[49] Freedman, "Disciple/Discipleship," 207.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Wilkins, "Disciple, Discipleship," 176.

[52] Illnam Kim, "The Question of Conditional Features in the Abrahamic Covenant" (Ph.D., United States -- Tennessee, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary), 49, accessed June 28, 2024, https://www.proquest.com/docview/913400968/abstract/FD0C5A4EDF0F4FF0PQ/2.

with a Hebrew imperative לְךְ־לְךָ (v.1) and in response to this imperative, Abram went in obedience (וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו) (Gen 12:4).[53]

In verse 2, God promises Abraham, "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." (Gen 12:2). It is at this moment that the covenant is initiated. The covenant between God and Israel continues with the Exodus generation, confirmed at Mount Sinai. The covenant at Mount Sinai with Moses included the giving of the Ten Commandments and the Law as a guide for righteous living (Exod 19-24). It was later renewed by Moses on the plains of Moab and by Joshua, emphasizing exclusive loyalty to Yahweh. Throughout their history, the Israelites experienced cycles of disobedience and repentance. This leads to covenant renewals. Subsequently, Josiah establishes a covenant committing to walk in Yahweh's ways. These renewals, documented in Deuteronomy 28:69, Joshua 24, and 2 Kings 23:1-3, signify a continuous process rather than introducing a new covenant. They underscore that the covenant relationship is dynamic, involving repeated summons for the people to choose Yahweh.[54] The doctrine of election takes shape and evolves in the book of Deuteronomy, with Deuteronomy 7:6 being a key text. This verse underscores three aspects of an election theology. Firstly, Israel is described as "a people holy to God" (עַם קָדוֹשׁ), a phrase also found in Exodus, emphasizing Israel's privileged status (Exod 19:5-6). Deuteronomy expands on this concept, making the state of being holy the foundation for Israel's responsibility to fulfill Yahweh's commands (Deut 7:6-8).[55]

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[53] Kim, 51.

[54] Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship*, 59.

[55] Ibid.

Later, the prophets reinforced the covenant relationship, emphasizing obedience, justice, and fidelity to God's commands.

Chennattu explains that the idea of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel revolves around decisions: Yahweh's choice of the people of Israel and their reciprocal choice of Yahweh. Israel's choice highlights their voluntary commitment to be obedient and loyal to God. The selection of Israel is not contingent on the virtue or strength of the people; instead, it is rooted in God's love and faithfulness to the promises made to their forefathers (Deut 4:37; 7:7-8; 9:4-6; 10:15; 23:5).[56]

Furthermore, it is observed that the discipleship in the Old Testament often entailed devoted adherence to the terms of the covenant, showcasing allegiance to God. In Deuteronomy 4:1, the Bible instructs, "And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live…." (Deut 4:1). This exhortation is reiterated in Deuteronomy 5:1, "… Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully." As a covenant people, Yahweh expects unwavering obedience to the covenant's stipulations. Moses reinforces this unequivocal truth, stating, "All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your forefathers. (Deut 8:1; cf. 1 Sam 12:14; Deut 10:12-13). Their distinctive characteristic as followers of God lies in their obedience to the commands of the Lord their God.

More so, the covenant people are expected to learn from the word of Yahweh to keep being faithful to the terms of the covenant. Thus, discipleship included

[56] Ibid., 60.

studying and meditating on God's Word. This is established in the Psalms and the emphasis is on the Law. The Psalmist says, "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day." (Ps 119:97). He further says, "I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. (Ps 119:15; cf. Pss 119:23, 78, 148).

Because of the significance of adhering to the stipulations of the covenant, the Prophets usually call the people back to the covenant, urging them to live according to God's commands. For instance, the prophet Isaiah reminds the people that they are God's chosen nation, but they have turned against Him and forgotten their covenant responsibilities (Isa 1:2-3).[57] Prophet Jeremiah equally emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's commands as the foundation of the covenant relationship (Jer 7:23).[58] Similarly, Hosea calls the people to repentance and returning to God as their only hope for restoration and salvation. He says, "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity." (Hos 14:1) The record also shows that prophet Joel appeals to the people to turn from their outward show of religious practices and instead repent with a true heart (Joel 2:12-13). In Malachi 3:7, the prophet points out the people's history of straying away from God's laws and invites them to turn back to Him, promising that God will also turn towards them. In a nutshell, the prophets repeatedly called the people back to God's covenant and reminded them of their covenant responsibilities of obedience, repentance, and returning to God.

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[57] Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1977), 95.

[58] Michael Brown, "Jeremiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 168.

The above discussion reveals that the covenant entails Yahweh's relationship with his people and their relationship with Yahweh and with one another. In other words, there are both vertical and horizontal dimensions of this relationship.

Vertical Dimension of Discipleship in the Old Testament

The vertical dimension of discipleship involves how Yahweh's followers relate with him, that is, how they respond to his divine initiative. The following items shed light on the subject matter.

Worship and Reverence

Worship is described as one's active response to God.[59] Based on "who God is and what He has does, we attribute to Him the glory that is due His name" (Ps 96:7-8 cf. Rev 5:12).[60]

In the Old Testament writings, the exclusive worship of Yahweh is emphasized. At Sinai, the Lord states, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. (Exod 20:2-3). Haber explains that "according to the terms of the covenant, the suzerain, YHWH, is the exclusive God of His vassal, Israel. Although other nations may worship other deities, Israel recognizes YHWH as her one and only God."[61]So, God prohibits the Israelites from worshiping the gods of the surrounding

[59] Ronald Allen and Gordon Borror, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1982), 16.

[60] Ibid., 17.

[61] Haber, "God, Israel and Covenant," 136-137.

nations (Deut 6:4). Beale notes that the people resemble what they worship.[62] Since Yahweh desires that his followers resemble him, he alone deserves to be worshiped.

In addition, in the Decalogue, the children of Israel are forbidden from worshiping other gods because the Lord is "a jealous God" (Exod 20:5). This idea of God being jealous implies that he is unique requires a unique and single-minded dedication.[63] So, discipleship involves acknowledging God's supremacy and avoiding the worship of other gods.[64] The vertical dimension is seen in the reverence and awe shown towards the one true God.

Centralization of Worship

The Old Testament underscores the centralization of worship, where God chose a certain place for the Israelites to converge for worship. This centralization aimed to maintain purity in worship practices. Deut 12:5-7 says,

> But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

It is God's intention that his followers should worship him in the place he has chosen and at the time he has chosen for them.[65]

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[62] G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 82, https://z-library.se/book/2189361/b0dc6e/we-become-what-we-worship-a-biblical-theology-of-idolatry.html.

[63] Phillip McMillion, "Worship in the Old Testament," *Leaven* 6, no. 1 (1994): 8–9, https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol6/iss1/4.

[64] See, Jer 35:15;Exo 15:11; 20:23; Deut 5:7; 13:10; 2 Kings 17:35; Ps 81:9; Exo 34:14; Deut 13:11; Ps 44:20; Isa 43:10; 48:8; 45:21-22; 46:9; Matt 4:10; Rev 19:10.

[65] William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 146–47.

Community Worship and Festivals

Another key element is community worship and festivals. Leviticus 23:3 says, “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places.” (cf. Exod 20:8-10; 23:12; 34:21; 35:2). The communal aspects of discipleship are expressed in shared worship experiences, festivals, and Sabbaths that bring the community together.

Summarily, the horizontal dimension of discipleship in the Old Testament underlines the significance of ethical living, communal responsibility, social justice, care for the less-privileged, restitution, forgiveness, and shared worship experiences. It reflects the mutuality of one’s relationship with God and the relationships within the community.

Individual and Family Worship

Whereas corporate worship was significant and required by the followers of God, individual and family worship were also encouraged. Joshua challenged the Israelites and made a public declaration to serve the Lord with his family. (Josh 24:14-15). Likewise, Elijah on Mount Carmel made a call to the people to choose to worship God individually (1 Kgs 18:21 cf. Deut 30:19). Meditating on God's Word and teaching it to the next generation were vital aspects of discipleship. Also, in family worship, parents could pass to their children the faith of their fathers. Instructions are numerous in Proverbs on the parental role for discipline their children.

Tabernacle and Temple Worship

The construction of the Tabernacle and later the Temple in Jerusalem were critical moments. "The primary function of the temple is the worship of YHWH."[66] Worship was conducted in these sacred places, highlighting the importance of a designated space for encountering God. The Lord instructed, "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it." (Exod 25:8-9) King Solomon later built a magnificent temple for the worship of God." (2 Chr 7:1-3) Roy Gane's point is noteworthy. He posits that "at the heart of Israelite worship, the sanctuary and its services expressed the central concept of YHWH's religion: The awesome Creator desires an intimate relationship with His created beings."[67]

Sacrificial System

The sacrificial system was an essential part of worship, representing repentance, dedication, and gratitude. It was a means by which God's followers expressed their commitment to God (Lev 1:1-4; 7:38). Roy Gane explains that one of the most important ways to approach, worship, and communicate with the LORD was through sacrifice. It was believed that God established sacrifice as a potently evocative, multifunctional way for flawed humans to show their faith in him, get closer to him, accept his covenant to become his holy people, stay in his presence, be

[66] Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 207.

[67] Roy E. Gane, "Temple and Sacrifice," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, December 31, 2000, 362, https://www.academia.edu/126191147/Temple_and_Sacrifice.

cleansed of sin, regain their purity, and rejoice in his acts of salvation on their behalf.[68]

Sacrificial Offerings and Worship Practices

The Old Testament includes various rituals and sacrifices as acts of worship. The vertical dimension is demonstrated through these offerings, symbolizing devotion, humility, and acknowledgment of God's holiness (Lev 1:3-4; Ps 51:17). In the Old Testament, sacrifices are essential elements in the worship, they form a part of their service which Israel is required to render to their God.[69] Further, "the Old Testament sacrificial laws teach in their own way that there can be no relationship between God and sinful man without previous atonement for sins."[70] Also, "man can only deal with sin through the sacrificial offerings coupled with confession and turning from sin to God."[71]

In addition, sacrifice serves as a means of approaching God by the covenant people. According to David Hinson, the sacrifices enabled the children of Israel to express their relationship with God in three ways; 1. When they want to thank God for his goodness to them as individuals and as a community (Lev 7:12); 2. When they wished to share fellowship with God (Lev 3:1-5); and 3. When the people were moved to make atonement for their sins both as individuals and as a nation (Lev 5;

[68] Roy E. Gane, "Sacrifice and the Old Testament," *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, 2022, 1, https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/SacrificeandtheOldTestament.pdf.

[69] Johann Heinrich Kurtz, *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament* (T. & T. Clark, 1863), 17.

[70] Sylvain Romerowski, "Old Testament Sacrifices and Reconciliation," *European Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (2007): 22.

[71] G. Herbert Livingston, "Hatta't," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 278.

6).[72] Summarily, "the sacrificial system was a part of God's means for creating a people who would hear his voice and follow him."[73]

Call to True Worship

Most times, God's prophets challenged empty rituals and pointed out the importance of true worship accompanied by righteous living (Isa 1:11-17). God through the prophet Amos says,

> I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:21-24).

It is noteworthy that true discipleship involved more than outward observances; it required a sincere and pure heart.

Covenant Renewal through Worship and Following God's Precepts

Worship often involved the renewal of the covenant between God and His people. King Hezekiah's actions in restoring proper worship highlight this connection (2 Chr 29:10-11). Hence, in the lives of Old Testament disciples, worship was not merely a ritual but a strong expression of faith, gratitude, and commitment to God. It entailed communal gatherings, rituals, sacrifices, feasts, and personal devotion - all contributing to a holistic discipleship centered on a relationship with Lord Almighty.

Discipleship in the Old Testament necessitates unwavering obedience to God's statutes, precepts, and commandments. Deuteronomy 11:1 underscores this requirement: "You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his

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[72] David F. Hinson, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 2013), 97.

[73] Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, 156.

statutes, his rules, and his commandments always." As individuals in a covenant relationship with the Lord, wholehearted obedience is an integral part of their connection with God. The specificity of this mandate is evident in the scripture. Moses says, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut 10:12). Israel is urged to learn how to fear the Lord and obey his will.[74] The Psalmist echoes this sentiment, stating, "You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently" (Ps 119:4). The vertical dimension of discipleship becomes apparent through the commitment to follow God's instructions, a tangible expression of recognizing His authority and wisdom.

Prayer and Communication with God

The Old Testament underscores the importance of prayer and seeking God's guidance. The vertical dimension encompasses consistent communication with God, conveying dependence, gratitude, and a longing for His guidance. The Scripture is filled with examples of Yahweh's followers who communicated with him through prayer. As a matter of fact, intercession seems to be prominent in patriarchal prayer.[75] For instance, on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham intercedes with God, praying that the cities be spared if righteous people could be found there (Gen 18:23-33). Also, after the children of Israel make the golden calf, Moses prays to God, pleading that he changes his mind from destroying the people (Exod 32:11-14). Not

[74] Verlyn D. Verbrugge, ed., "μαθητής," in *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 350.

[75] E.R. Bernard, "Prayer," in *A Dictionary of the Bible: Dealing with Its Language, Literature, and Contents Including the Biblical Theology*, ed. James Hastings (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 39.

only that, but he also prays to God to stop the fire that was consuming the camp as a result of God's anger (Num 11:2).

Bible also records personal prayers.[76] For example, Hannah prayed for a child (1 Sam 1:10-20), Samuel (1 Sam 12:18-19), David (2 Sam 7:18-29), Solomon (1 Kgs 3:5-14; 8:22-53), Elijah (1 Kgs 18:36-37; 19:4), Hezekiah (2 Kgs 19:14-19; 20:1-6), Daniel (Dan 2:17-23; 6:10-11), etc. These examples show the diverse ways in which Old Testament people communicated with God through prayer, seeking guidance, deliverance, forgiveness, and expressing praise and gratitude.

Walter Brueggemann explains opines that the state of the covenant, that is, whether it is working well or not, can be used to interpret Israel's prayer. Israel praises YHWH when the covenant is working properly. However, Israel also turns to YHWH when the covenant is in disorder and not working properly, or when there is some estrangement between the parties. Then, prayer is an effort to bridge the gap caused by the covenant's malfunction.[77]

The assurance of the Lord is clear: "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth" (Ps 145:18). Fabio Giardini asserts that "prayer has a primary importance for the Christian, because the essential meaning and ultimate concern of all Christian life is intimate union with God, which can be achieved on earth only by prayer."[78] Disciples and followers of Yahweh are urged to maintain a continual connection with their Master through the practice of prayer.

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 147.

[78] Fabio Giardini, "Prayer, Prayers and Prayerfulness," *Angelicum* 62, no. 1 (1985): 70.

Trust and Faith in God

Another crucial element in discipleship involves placing trust in God and having faith in His promises. The vertical dimension is evident in the unswerving belief that God is trustworthy and faithful to His covenant. The basic term in Hebrew for expressing the concept of "faith" comes from the root אמן and it basically implies "to be firm, reliable, faithful, and trustworthy; to endure, to be permanent."[79] On the other hand, the Hebrew word בָּטַח denotes trust or to have confidence. The term implies to put one's trust in the LORD. This is a phrase typical for prayers and 52 out of 182 occurrences of the root are found in the Psalms (about 29 percent). For example, "Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD." (Ps 4:5). Also, the Psalmist says, "In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them." (Ps 22:4). It seems that the main idea is to depend on someone or something, to trust in someone, usually in the Lord.[80]

Also, when God chose and called the nation of Israel to be his own special treasure and people, he assured them of his presence, guidance, good health, provisions and the favour before the nations. The only thing the Lord required of them was to trust him and put him first. Meanwhile, Israel often does the opposite. They lived in disobedience and demonstrated lack of trust in their God.[81]

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[79] Thomas Hieke, "Faith (Old Testament)," n.d., 1, https://www.academia.edu/download/58093878/Hieke_Faith_OT_academia_edu.pdf.

[80] Hieke, 1.

[81] Henry Fernandez, *Faith, Family & Finances: Strong Foundations for a Better Life* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2012), 23–24.

Solomon says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Prov 3:5-6). The prophet Isaiah further emphasizes this call to trust: “Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock” (Isaiah 26:4, cf. Ps 62:8; Isaiah 50:10; 12:2; Deut 32:4). The LORD himself keeps faith forever (Ps 146:6) and his followers are expected to trust him and live by faith (Hab 2:4 cf. Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).

In the New Testament, the Bible equally affirms the importance of faith. Hebrew 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Heb 11:6). Thus, it seems impossible to have a good relationship with God without a complete faith in him.[82] God requires a relationship with his followers that is based on absolute trust and faith.[83]

Repentance and Turning to God

Discipleship involves acknowledging one’s sins, repenting, and turning back to God. The vertical dimension is seen in the contrite heart that seeks forgiveness and restoration with God. The Hebrew term שׁוּב means “to return,” or “turn back.” It appears that in the Old Testament, the fundamental theme is the call of God to his erring children to forsake or turn from evil and instead, do which is noble and good.[84]

It seems obvious from the pages of the Scriptures that God desires that his followers who sin should repent and come back to him. For instance, through prophet

[82] Fernandez, 33.

[83] Ibid., 83.

[84] Theodore M. Burton, *Meaning of Repentance* (Brigham Young University Media Services, 1985), 3, https://speeches-dev.byu.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Burton_Theodore_1985_03.pdf.

Joel, the Lord calls the people to return to him with all their heart (Joel 2:12-13 cf. Hos 12:6). Ezekiel also proclaims, “Therefore say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols and turn away your faces from all your abominations (Ezek 14:6). They are called to return to God to have a heart-allegiance to him.[85]

This implies that the covenant people may fall into sin but the Lord who is abounding in grace (Eze 33:11) and he is willing to forgive and accept his erring children back (Hos 14:1-2; Deut 4:30; 1 Sam 7:3; Jer 4:1; 1 Sam 7:6; 2 Chr 7:13-14; Ps 51:10; Jas 4:8).

Seeking God’s Presence

The vertical dimension entails a sincere desire to seek and abide in God’s presence, encompassing moments of intimacy and a yearning for communion with the Divine. This fervent pursuit characterizes the disciples of God. The Psalmist articulates this longing in prayer: “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.” (Ps 27:4) At the plain of Moab, Moses conveyed to the generation entering the Promised Land, “But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul” (Deut 4:29, cf. Prov 8:17; Ps 27:4; Isa 55:6; Jer 24:7).

It becomes necessary for Yahweh’s followers to seek his presence. The Bible says, “Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually! (1Chr 16:11). This injunction emphasizes the need to constantly seek God’s presence. God also

[85] Brown, “Jeremiah,” 715.

longs to be with his people. His word says, "… If you seek him, he will be found by you…, (1Chr 28:9).

Fear of the Lord

The fear of the Lord is a recurring theme in the Old Testament. The term יָרֵא denotes "fear," "terror," "fear (of God), - "respect," or "reverence." Evidence from the scriptures indicate that the fear of the LORD does not imply fear in its primary sense or being afraid of him.[86] Moses told the Israelites, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you that the fear of him may be before you that you may not sin." (Exo 20:20)

The vertical dimension is characterized by a deep respect and reverence for God, acknowledging His authority and wisdom. This is well articulated in the Scriptures. Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." Also, King Solomon encapsulates, "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (Eccl 12:13). Thus, "in most occurrences, the 'fear of God' is a virtue that is encouraged and leads to right behavior and good results."[87] In line with this view, Burrows asserts that "the Lord fears to hate evil" (Prov 8:13).[88]

Summarily, the vertical dimension of discipleship in the Old Testament is marked by a personal, spiritual connection with God. It incorporates worship,

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[86] Bernard J. Bamberger, "Fear and Love of God in the Old Testament," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 6 (1929): 40.

[87] Tremper Longman III, "Fear of the Lord," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2008), 201.

[88] W.O. Burrows, "Fear," in *A Dictionary of the Bible: Dealing with Its Language, Literature, and Contents Including the Biblical Theology*, ed. James Hastings (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 858.

obedience, prayer, trust in God, repentance, worship, and a deep yearning to be in God's presence. The Old Testament provides rich perceptions of the vertical aspect of discipleship, illustrating the intimate relationship between individuals and their LORD.

The Horizontal Dimension of Discipleship in the Old Testament

Having examined the vertical dimension of discipleship in the Old Testament, the effort will also be made to highlight the horizontal dimension of discipleship. The horizontal dimension of discipleship refers to the relational and communal aspects of people's commitment to God and their ethical conduct towards their fellow human beings. It is observed that the concept of following God's ways, learning from His teachings, and living a life of faith and obedience is established in the Hebrew Bible. The following are some key aspects of the horizontal dimension of discipleship in the Old Testament:

Fellowship

The concept of fellowship in the Old Testament seems to be based on the understanding of the essence of the relationship between God and human beings, and also the dynamics within the covenant community. Fellowship, in its widest perspective, refers to the sharing of life, purpose, and identity in the context of communal and divine relationships. [89]In other words, fellowship entails the act of participating, sharing, and communing with other members of the community in a spirit of love, unity, and mutual support. It is noted that one's relationship with God

[89] Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 502.

influences one's fellowship with others.[90] Fellowship among God's people is aimed at building and strengthening relationships. Hence, it is horizontally oriented.

Ethical Conduct

Another horizontal dimension of discipleship has to do with ethical conduct. Barnette Henlee asserts that "Hebrew ethics is radically theocentric, being grounded in the Hebrew concept of the nature of God himself."[91] In the light of this, God's word becomes the guiding principle for ethical conduct. It is worthy of note that "the Holy Bible reveals God's will for how His creatures are to live with Him and with each other here in this world."[92] Thus, God has a universal moral/ethical standard through which all people of every age are to live[93] but it is however noted that there are ethical discrepancies brought about by sin.[94] For instance, the Old Testament gives principles for right ethical behavior which are expected of the followers of Yahweh. This becomes crucial since it matters to God how his children behave to one another. Barnette explains that "God is righteous and demands righteousness of his children (Isa 45:21; Amos 5:24).[95] For example, the Lord instructs his followers, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD." (Lev 19:18) This principle seems to remain unchanged throughout the scriptures. Pro 24:29 says, "Do not say, 'Thus I

[90] Victor P. Hamilton, "אֶת," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 83.

[91] Henlee Barnette, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1961), 12.

[92] Raymond L. Hilgert, Philip H. Lochhaas, and James L. Truesdell, *Christian Ethics in the Workplace* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 26.

[93] Ibid., 27.

[94] Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 100.

[95]Barnette, 12.

shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.'" (See also; Prov 20:22; 24:17; Deut 32:35 cf. Rom 12:19; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Pet 3:9). The ethical conduct covers every aspect of Israel's life such as the family life (Prov 19:13; 31:10-31; Prov 22:6). For instance, the husband is required to be faithful as infidelity is judged sinful (Prov 6:32). Likewise, children are admonished to honour and obey their parents (Prov 1:8-9; 15:20). Scriptures also give principles that guide Israel's business' life (Prov 30:8-9).[96] In sum, the ethical conduct of the people of God is a response to God's initiative of grace and redeeming action not a blind obedience to rules.[97] So, "the Old Testament reflects a covenantal ethic. That is, Israel is bound to YHWH, who as sovereign ruler is the one whom Israel must obey."[98]

Thus, the horizontal dimension involves living in compliance with ethical principles, treating others justly, and practicing love and compassion towards one's neighbors.

Community Responsibility

The Lord raises the nation of Israel to be a beckon of light to the surrounding nations. They are saddled with some communal responsibilities. For instance, in Jeremiah 29:7, the Lord commands, "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (cf. Rom 13:1,5; 1 Pet 2:13)

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[96] Ibid., 38-39.

[97] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 25.

[98] Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 66.

Discipleship in the Old Testament contains a responsibility towards the well-being of the community. This involves actively contributing to the welfare of the society in which one lives and submitting to authority.

Social Justice

The Old Testament affirms that YHWH is just (2 Chr 12:6; Neh 9:8; Pss 7:9; 103:17; 116:5; Jer 9:24; Dan 9:14; Zeph 3:5; Zech 8:8). His justice is inherent to the covenantal relationship and not just a product of his character (Jer 9:24; Hos 2:19). Any kind of breach of the covenantal bond with Yahweh is considered an injustice.[99] The Bible reveals Yahweh's concern for the vulnerable in the society. For example, the word of God says, "You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child." (Exod 22:21-22) Deuteronomy 10:18 says that Yahweh "…. executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing." (See also, Pss 82:3-4; 103:6; 140:12; 146:7; Jer 22:3-4).

So, as the disciples of Yahweh, God requires his people to do justice. Isa 1:7 says, "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." This is reiterated by the prophet Jeremiah. "Thus says the LORD, 'Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place.'" (Jer 22:3)[100]

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[99] J.J. La Poorta, "Justice," in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 443.

[100] See also; Ps 82:3; Isa 1:23; 10:2; Exo 22:22; Deut 14:29; 24:17; 26:12; Prov 31:9; Eze 22:7.

In the Old Testament, discipleship is characterized by a commitment to social justice - addressing issues of oppression, defending the defenseless, and seeking righteousness in the community. It is noteworthy that the pursuit of the way of justice and righteousness is not restricted to a set of people but "it is generally expected of all of God's covenant people" (Micah 6:8).[101] Thus, Yahweh called Israel and expected them "to live in right relationship with others."[102]

Care for the Less Privileged

The horizontal dimension involves caring for those on the margins of society, such as the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. An example is found in Deuteronomy 24:19 where the Bible says, "When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." (See also; Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:20; Prov 19:17)

Restitution and Forgiveness

The horizontal dimension of discipleship involves the responsibility of making restitution for wrongs committed and practicing forgiveness towards those who have caused the wrong. In Psalm 130:3–4, the possibility of YHWH's forgiveness is boldly expressed. Psalm 32 demonstrates a keen understanding of the damaging force of sin (vv. 3-4) as well as the certainty of forgiveness that comes from complete and honest confession.[103]

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[101] Vincent E. Bacote, "Justice," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 415.

[102] J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, "Righteousness," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Revised by Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), 1239.

[103] Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 86.

It is noted that "no man could approach God and find blessing if he refused to admit his need for forgiveness, or if he intended to go on in sin."[104] In addition, restitution seems to be necessary to remove the obstacle to fellowship with God that sin had created (Lev 5:14-16; 6:1-7).[105] The Bible says, "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep." (Exod 22:1). Such an injunction is well-established in the Scriptures (Exod 22:4; 2 Sam 12:6; Prov 6:31; cf. Luke 19:8).

Family Discipleship in the Old Testament

The concept of discipleship is affirmed in a family setting as found in the pages of the scriptures. It appears that the Lord saddles the parents with the responsibility of nurturing and transferring values and faith to their generation. Below are a few examples of such injunctions:

Deuteronomy 4:6-9

Specifically, the LORD instructs his covenant people on what to do with the commandments and how they should be passed down to the next generation. This task is given to the parents who act as instructors for their children. The LORD says.

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.
> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and your gates. (Deut 6:4-9)

[104] Hinson, 100.

[105] Ibid.

The above texts highlight the pivotal role the family plays in religious education. Parents are commanded to teach their children diligently, integrating faith into every aspect of daily life. By so doing, the family setting becomes a sacred space where discipleship happens through continuous and deliberate engagement with the LORD's commandments. Since the study of the book of Deuteronomy is the focus of Chapter 3 of this research, more explanation will be given later in this passage. Other passages selected to affirm the point are explained below:

Psalms 78:1-8

Phillips affirms that "the Psalms provide much encouragement towards family discipleship."[106] Psalms 78:1-8 provides some instructions that contain the idea of disciplining others. In its opening part, Psalms 78 illustrates a basic strategy for family discipleship and serves as a guide for purposefully transferring one generation's religious beliefs to the next. This Psalms, one of the longest and regarded as a didactic or "teaching" Psalms, narrates the history of Israel and seeks to impart knowledge of its past to new generations.[107]

The texts read:

> Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! 2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, 3 things that we have *heard and known*, that our fathers have *told* us. 4 We will not hide them from their children but *tell* to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. 5 He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which *he commanded our fathers to teach to their children*, 6 *that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children*, 7 *so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments*; 8 and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God. (Italics mine, Ps 78:1-8)

[106] Phillips, 'From Biblical Origin to Practical Application,' 75.

[107] Sherwood, 38.

VanGemeren comments that "the act of 'telling the next generation' (v.4) is a continuation of the tradition 'heard and known' from the fathers (v.3; cf. 44:1). The contents of the tradition of redemptive history are transmitted without further explication, so that each generation may draw lessons from the 'parables' and 'riddles' of God's interaction with the previous generations."[108] So, the text contains the parental responsibility – to teach their children (v.5) and the goal of this teaching is rendered in different ways; that the next generation might know what God had done for them in the past so that they would set their hope in God (v.6), and to prevent them from repeating the mistakes of their father (v.8). The tradition of transmitting value to the next generation is also expressed in Psalms 145:1. The Bible says, "one generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts."

More than any other book in the Bible, Proverbs is filled with wisdom and practical application for family discipleship. The main focus is on a father teaching his son life lessons. Mothers are mentioned throughout Proverbs as well, highlighting how crucial it is for mothers to be involved in family discipleship. Fathers and mothers work together to disciple their families.[109] The book of Proverbs lists various techniques for imparting knowledge and training inside the family. Although both parents contributed to spiritual education, the father was the primary spiritual leader and educator in the family.[110]

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[108] Willem VanGemeren, *Psalms: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Revised edition, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 824.

[109] Phillips, 'From Biblical Origin to Practical Application,' 76.

[110] Sherwood, 'Equipping Parents at Maye River Baptist Church, Bluffton, South Carolina, to Lead Their Children in Deuteronomy 6 Parenting,' 35.

Proverbs 1:8-19

Another text is Proverbs 1:8-19. It reads:

> [8]Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching,
> [9] for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.
> [10] My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. [11] If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason;[12] like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit;
> [13] we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder;
> [14] Throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse"- [15] My son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, [16] for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.[17] For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird,[18] but these men lie in wait for their blood; they set an ambush for their own lives.[19] Such are the ways of everyone greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.

Commenting on vv. 8-9, Bruce K. Waltke asserts that "the admonition places the father and mother on equal footing as the child's pedagogues (cf. Exod 20:12; 21:15, 17; Lev 19:3; Deut 21:18-21; 31:12)."[111] This implies that both parents are accountable for bringing up their children**.**[112] The *mûsar* of the father and the *Tôrat* of the mother are not two different things. *Mûsar* denotes correction, discipline, education, and instruction (Ps 50:17). *Tôrat* also means direction or instruction (Prov 1:8). To preserve the faith, the father instructed his child not to walk in the way of the sinners (v.15).

Proverbs 4:1-4

The Bible says,

> Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight,
> [2] for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching. [3] When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, [4] he taught me

[111] Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 186.

[112] Blake Charles Willard, "Training Parents at Covenant Preparatory School in Southern Pines, North Carolina, to Disciple Their Children" (D.Ed.Min., United States -- Kentucky, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), 21, accessed September 6, 2022, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2306303080/abstract/57CA2056512240CFPQ/8.

and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.

The main theme of this chapter is a father giving advice to his son. The father is clearly stating that he is merely carrying on a long-standing tradition in this plain declaration. In the same way that his own father had earlier talked to him, he is now speaking to his son. This is like the instruction in Deuteronomy 6 where the parents are instructed to teach their children.[113] The father's use of his father to support the authority of his message to his child is noteworthy. The fact that the father's advice is not new to him and is instead something he learned from his father speaks volumes about the advice's quality.[114] This also implies that the father had been discipled by his father and in turn wants to disciple his own son. The writer explains the reason he wants the son, i.e., students to take heed to a father's instruction: because it is good learning (4:2a) which his father taught him when he was a young man.[115] God's will is communicated through parental authority. The two sources of authority complement one another, and when only one is stated, the other is not automatically left out.[116]

Proverbs 22: 6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it." Waltke opines that this training "refers to religious and moral direction, not professional activity."[117] He stresses that the infancy is the

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[113] Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Ebook Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 146.

[114] Ibid., 149.

[115] John W. Miller, *Proverbs*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2004), 63.

[116] Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2004), 322–23.

[117] Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15 - 31*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 204.

time the child "can be molded by verbal instruction (Prov 1:4; 23:13; 29:15) and …by corporal punishment."[118] In his opinion, Dickson Theodore asserts that the training in Proverbs 22:6 encompasses "nurturing and disciplining of the child in an attempt to inculcate a wise and moral character."[119] He stresses that parents have the mandate to transmit their God-given wisdom to their children from early childhood so that the wisdom would not die with them but rather be passed to the next generation.[120]

The consequence of early training results in the child's upholding moral and religious values without departing from it at the old age. This captures the essence of discipling a child – that a child may perpetuate the learning till the old age. Besides, the text also implies that the time to disciple a child is from childhood. Likewise, in the New Testament, Paul enjoins the parents to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." (Eph 6:4; cf. 2 Tim 1:5) He uses the imperative verb ἐκτρέφετε (present active 2nd person plural from ἐκτρέφω). This implies that the injunction is not optional but a command. The verb ἐκτρέφω means; to nourish up to maturity, to nourish, to nurture, or to bring up. This suggests that parental discipleship is a process and not a one-time responsibility. Although, πατέρες (fathers) is used in v.4, it is observed that the term may be used generically to include both the fathers and mothers, that is, the parents.[121]

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[118] Ibid., 204.

[119] Theodore Uchechukwu Dickson, 'Understanding the Meaning of Hánök in the Parenting Discourse of Proverbs 22:6,' *African Journal of Biblical Studies* XXXI, no. 1 & 2 (October 2013): 69.

[120] Dickson, "Understanding the Meaning of Hánök in the Parenting Discourse of Proverbs 22:6," 78.

[121] Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 1040; See also, Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 328, Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 454.

The foregoing shows that in both the Old and New Testaments, the family plays a significant role in discipling a child. If this task is done early, the child becomes a disciple forever (Prov 22:6). Effective discipleship in the family serves as a miniature of discipleship within the larger church community.

In summarily, family-based discipleship provides a sense of continuity and stability within the Christian community. As each generation is nurtured in the faith from an early age, the teachings of God are preserved and transmitted across generations. This intergenerational transmission of faith helps to maintain the unity and growth of the Christian community, as families serve as the building blocks of the church.

Mission/Witnessing

As part of the vertical dimension of discipleship, Yahweh's followers are saddled with the responsibility of witnessing to others. Their call comes with a mission to reach others. Meanwhile, mission is defined as the action of being sent with a specific charge to execute the directives of a higher authority. In this context, it is God who both commissions and sends. The term "sending" serves as a linguistic bridge connecting the Old Testament with the New Testament. The Hebrew term for "to send," שָׁלַח, appears more than 800 times in Scripture, with over 200 instances where God is the agent of this action in the Old Testament. The equivalent term in the Greek New Testament for "to send" is ἀποστέλλω.[122]

The concept of mission or witnessing is well attested to in the Old Testament. Jiri Moskala affirms that "when God calls His people into existence, He gives them a mission. There were no Old Testament people of God without a mission; there is no

[122] C. Walter Jr, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Baker Books, 2012), 4, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=tUk2lHy1_o0C&oi=fnd&pg=PT4&dq=mission+in+the+old+testament&ots=xIDN0VdMun&sig=nVAc0OF7TeY3qVLSFeISfJurWsU.

election without a commission."[123] The mission of the Old Testament people encompassed two main aspects: firstly, an internal focus directed towards Israel's children and subsequent generations (centripetal). Parents were tasked with the responsibility of recounting stories of deliverance to their children, as emphasized in passages such as Exodus 12:24–27, Deuteronomy 6:4–9, and Isaiah 38:19. The Psalmist captures this intergenerational transmission, stating, "One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works" (Psalms 145:4–5). God's goodness had to be perpetuated from one generation to the next, with God's explicit command to "Tell your children and grandchildren" (Exod 10:2).[124]

Secondly, there was an external focus aimed at the nations beyond, the Gentile world, extending even to the islands (Isa 66:19) – an outward mission (centrifugal). The mission of the Old Testament people was not confined solely to their community of faith; it extended to others who were not part of it.[125]

The prophets of God did not restrict their messages to their own people; instead, they prophesied about numerous nations. Their prophecies conveyed the overarching theme that God would judge all nations (Isa 2:4; 13–23; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; Amos 1–2; Joel 3:12; Jonah; Obadiah; and Mic 4:3). The divine concern extended beyond the borders of Israel, highlighting that the message of the Old Testament people reached far and wide. In delivering warnings, God had a purpose -

[123] Jiri Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 2008, 40.

[124] Moskala, 43.

[125] Ibid.

he consistently aimed to lead people towards repentance as illustrated in instances such as Genesis 6:3 and the story of Jonah.[126]

Kaiser notes that "the message of the O.T. was/is both universal in its scope and international in its range. This is clear right from the start in Genesis 1-11 with its universal audience."[127] It is observed that God is dedicated to bestowing blessings upon the nations through a specific group of people. Consequently, the key executor of the mission are the people of God. Rather than simply transporting individuals to heaven as a response to the human predicament, God's solution involves establishing a new earthly community designed to serve as a beacon of light to all nations.[128]

Those devoted to God were entrusted with spreading the message of salvation to others, as indicated in passages like Isaiah 66:19 and Psalms 67:2; 96:3. This mission, encompassing all of humanity, was universally significant and unfolded progressively. Regrettably, not all endeavors to fulfill this mission were successful among God's people. Adam, as the progenitor of humankind, fell into sin, leading to the failure of his mission to guide his entire family back to God.[129]

Examples of Missionary Activities by Yahweh's Disciples in the Old Testament

It is God's intention to bring people to the knowledge of him and for them to be saved (Isa 45:22). Moskala opines that "God will not do it Himself, but His working method will utilize humans to accomplish His objective." (Gen 12:1–3; Exod

[126] Ibid., 43–44.

[127] Walter C. Kaiser, "The Great Commission in the Old Testament," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no. 1 (1996): 3.

[128] Chris Wright, "The Old Testament and Christian Mission," *Evangel* 14, no. 2 (1996): 39.

[129] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 44.

19:4–6).[130] Following are examples of the Lord's followers who were called to be his messengers to the people.

Abraham

Genesis 12:2-3 unequivocally states that Abraham's name, his blessings, and the establishment of a great nation were explicitly intended for the purpose of becoming a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. This, fundamentally, is the core of the mission mandate from its very outset.[131] The first 11 chapters of the Bible span the entire spectrum of the world's nations. The covenant God establishes with Abraham (Gen 12:3) goes beyond a commitment to a particular group; it is a covenant encompassing the entire world. God's purpose is to bestow blessings upon all nations, and His grace is accessible universally. God assumes responsibility for the world and its diverse peoples. In essence, every action God undertakes in connection with Israel is ultimately intended for the well-being of all nations.[132]

God purposed to utilize Abraham as a conduit for blessing to all the nations globally. Evidently, he was designated as the instrument for the world's redemption. This was intended to be God's remedy for the curse that originated from the fall (Genesis 3) and the curse imposed during the dispersal of humanity at the tower of Babel (Gen 11:7ff).[133]

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[130] Ibid., 42.

[131] Kaiser, "The Great Commission in the Old Testament," 3.

[132] Roger H. Hooker, "The Rediscovery of the Old Testament and the New Dimensions of Mission," *The Indian Journal of Theology* 22 (1973): 28.

[133] Kaiser, "The Great Commission in the Old Testament," 4.

Moses

Moses was called by God and was sent on a mission to deliver God's people. The Scripture says, "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." (Exod 3:10).

Moses, as indicated in Exodus 3:6–8 and 6:2–8, was tasked with a universal mission. Together with Israel, his responsibility was to extend this mission to the entire world. This began with acting as a guiding light to the Egyptians, a role that expanded through events like the Exodus (Josh 2:8–12) and persisted over numerous centuries (Isa 42:6–7). The significance of the Ten Plagues in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea went beyond demonstrating the futility of the Egyptian gods (Exod 12:12). Equally important was the intention to facilitate the Egyptians' understanding that God was the Lord (Exod 7:5, 17; 8:22; 14:4, 18. See also; Exod 3:10-15; Deut 34:11; 1 Sam 12:8; Ps 105:26).[134]

Nation of Israel

Israel as a nation was called and chosen by God so that they would evangelize the world. They are chosen to be "steward of the revelation of the one true God."[135] God summoned Israel to uphold a distinctive ethical code, as outlined in passages such as Leviticus 11:44–45, 18:3, 18–19, Deuteronomy 14:1–3, and Micah 6:6–8. Their commitment to a holy way of life was deemed crucial, as it was the only means by which they could live to the glory of God and His name. This ethical distinctiveness was meant to not only attract people to God but also to serve as a

[134] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 47–48.

[135] Mark Glanville, "A Missional Reading of Deuteronomy," in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, ed. Michael W. Goheen (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 142.

beacon to the nations. Through their wisdom (Deut 4:6, Isa 58:8, 60:1–3, 62:1–2, and Ezek 36:23), the nations could witness the glory of God. Moses, in his exhortation to Israel emphasizing obedience to God and His law in Deuteronomy 4:5-8, implies the visibility of Israel and suggests a form of missionary activities undertaken by them.[136] This mission is well stated in Isaiah 42:6, "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, (Isa 42:6).

Isaiah

Prophet Isaiah was called to be engaged in God's missionary work (Isa 6:8-9) Prophet Isaiah, in the conclusion of his book, prophesied that God would send missionaries to the entire world. Survivors of the people of Israel would be sent to distant nations that had not heard of God's fame or seen His glory. The purpose of these missionaries would be to declare God's glory among the nations (Isa 66:19). The result foreseen is that people from all nations would come to worship before the Lord, indicating the universal scope of God's salvation (Isa 66:23).[137]

Jonah

The book of Jonah, a prophetic narrative, serves as a foreign mission text with the purpose of illustrating that Yahweh is the God not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles.[138] Jonah, perplexed by God's mercy towards the Ninevites, considered their salvation as undesirable. However, God, in a dramatic manner, taught Jonah about the

[136] Ibid., 48.

[137] Moskala, 49.

[138] Don Fanning, "The Old Testament and Missions," 2009, 17, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=cgm_theo.

universal nature of His salvation, demonstrating unselfish love even for the enemies of His people (Jonah 4:6–11; John 3:10; 4:1).[139]

From the above study, it is evident that discipleship has its root in the Old Testament although the concept is not obviously expressed. The Old Testament idea of discipleship relates to God's call to individuals and the nation of Israel as a covenant nation. Through the vertical and horizontal dimensions of discipleship in the Old Testament, discipleship related ideas are discovered such as obedience, worship, trust, turning to God, seeking God, and fear of God. These Old Testament ideas established the groundwork for the New Testament's understanding of discipleship, particularly as it relates to followers of Jesus. They show a relationship with God, a dedication to His teachings, and a passing on of those lessons to others.

In the light of the above analysis, discipleship could be described as a lifelong commitment to learn the way of the Lord through his word, which fosters worship, loving relationship with other disciples, and leads to a life of service. In other words, discipleship entails learning, worship, and service.

Coding Frame Based on the Discipleship Languages in both the Old and New Testament

1. The use of לִמֵּד and למד. These terms are used with reference to being a disciple, learning a skill, or the Lord's way, teaching the next generation in order to preserve faith and transmit knowledge (Deut 4:10; 6:7; Ps 78:5 etc). These are specific terms used in the Old Testament in relation to the concept of discipleship.
2. אחר הלך (walk after, follow). Walk in the way of the Lord (Gen 5:22, 24; 6:9; Deut 5:33; 10:12; Josh 22:5). This clause is used to imply intimacy

[139] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 48.

and abiding in God. This is what the disciples do – they walk with the LORD and follow in his way.

3. Keep my charge/commandments. As covenant people, the people of the LORD are required to keep his commandments (Gen 26:5; Exod 20:6; Lev 22:31; 26:3; Deut 5:10, 29). Obedience to the LORD's command seems to be the identifying mark of his true followers. As God's disciples, keeping his commandment is sine qua non. It serves as evidence of one's love for God.
4. Covenant. When God calls, he makes a covenant with his people (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12, etc). The discipleship in the Old Testament seems to be deeply rooted in God's covenant with his people.
5. The use of the word שָׁמַע (Deut 6:4; Ps 78:3). This is how people have access to the instructions of God. God's covenant people and disciples need to hear with obedience. The disciples hear the word of their master and follow it.
6. To walk after/follow (**הלך אחר**) This phrase shows the action taken by the disciples after receiving the divine call. Elisha followed Elijah when he was called (1 Kgs 19:20).
7. Fellowship. Yahweh's followers are called into a fellowship with him and to one another.
8. Bearing witness. This shows the disciples' responsibility of telling/proclaiming/witnessing to the next generation to transmit values, nurture, and preserve faith.
9. Love for God. The term is used in relation to disciple's relationship to God and man.

10. Worshiping and serving the Lord. This explains the vertical and horizontal dimension of discipleship.
11. Fear of God.
12. Membership and election of the people of God.
13. Commandments/Instructions.

Summary

Whereas the Hebrew Bible does not explicitly mention discipleship terms as found in the New Testament, the above study reveals that the Hebrew Bible is rich in discipleship connotations, words, and nuances as discovered in some narratives and injunctions to individuals, parents, and the nation of Israel. So, some of the terms used in some narratives and contexts examined in this Chapter and in relation to the working definition of this study, will be utilized to construct the coding frame that will be employed to conduct a content analysis of the theme of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy. This coding frame will cut across ideas related to worship, relationship with God and man as well as service.

Below is the table showing the coding frame derived from examining the discipleship language in both the Old and New Testaments:

Table 1. Coding Frame

S/N	CODING FRAME	NOTE
	Lexical Coding Frame	
1	לִמֵּד, and למד	Through teaching and learning, Yahweh's disciples grow in relationship with him and others. Hence, the remaining coding frame elements are inter-linked with them.
2	שׁמע	The term connotes "hear," "listen to," "pay attention," or "obey" and has implications for master and disciple's relationship.
3	אחר הלך	Walk with/after God or follow God. This is essential to understanding the Israelites' relationship with Yahweh.
4	אהב	Yahweh's relationship with his followers is based on love.
	Thematic Coding Frame	
1	Worship:	This term explains the vertical dimension of discipleship. Disciples learn to worship God.
	i. Fear of God	This term explains the disciple's response to the principles of their Master.
	ii. Obey/keep God's command	Obedience to the LORD's command seems to be the identifying mark of his true followers. As God's disciples, keeping his commandment is sine qua non. It serves as evidence of one's love for God and it is a form of worship.
2	Covenant	The OT discipleship is entrenched in the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites.
3	Laws/Instructions (Torah)	The Torah forms the basis of the covenant, and it is a means through which Yahweh's disciples know his character.
4	Service:	Yahweh's disciples are called to service.
	i. Bearing Witness	This shows the disciples' responsibility of telling/proclaiming/witnessing to the next generation, to transmit values, nurture, and preserve faith.
5	Membership and Election	Yahweh initiates the covenant relationship with his people as they are chosen to be his light.
6	Fellowship	Yahweh's followers are called into a fellowship with one another. This is the horizontal dimension of discipleship.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONCEPT OF DISCIPLESHIP IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, a coding frame is generated through which the content analysis of the concept of discipleship in the book Deuteronomy can be carried out. This chapter discusses the application of the coding frame.

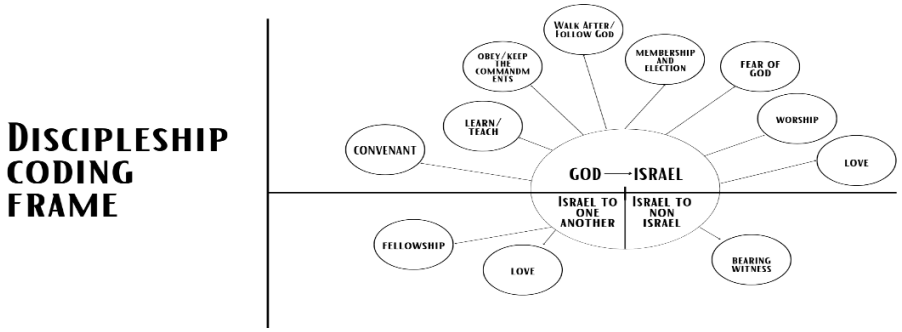

Figure 1. Discipleship Coding Frame Chart

The analysis of Deuteronomy uses the following structure:

1. Introduction/ Moses' Announcement of Deposition: 1:1-4:43
2. A Review of the Law: 4:44-26:19
3. The Blessing and the Curse: 27:1-28:68
4. The Covenant in Moab: 29:1-30:20
5. The Responsibilities of Leadership Laid Down: 31:1-34:12

An Analysis of Deuteronomy 1:1-4:43

This section delves into the foundational events where Moses, serving as a mediator, communicates Yahweh's covenantal instructions to Israel. This analysis aims to uncover how these narratives establish a paradigm for discipleship characterized by receiving, trusting, and obeying God's words. This section reveals the pattern of discipleship, which is not individualistic but grounded in a relational structure where Yahweh's will is mediated through faithful leaders and lived out by his people. Therefore, by examining the structural nuances of Moses' announcements and their subsequent responses, we explore the implications for a community called to learn from and adhere to divine guidance within the covenant framework

Lexical Coding Frame

Following are the lexical terms for discipleship found in Deuteronomy 1:1-4:43. They will be discussed in their context.

למד (Teach/Learn). The Hebrew word למד occurs seventeen times in 16 verses in the book of Deuteronomy[1]. According to Floyd, "the book of Deuteronomy is pastoral, catechetical, and pedagogical. The book is intended to teach the 'way of YHWH,' and how disciples 'follow' that way."[2] למד means "to learn something" (Deut 5:1) or "teach someone something" (Deut 4:5, 14; 5:28; 11:19; 31:19).[3] In Qal stem, למד means "to learn" (e.g., Deut 5:1; 17:19) while in the piel stem, it means "to teach" (e.g., Deut 4:1, 10; 14:23; 5:31). And the related word, לִמּוּד means, "taught,"

[1] See; Deut. 4:1, 5; two times in 4:10, 14; 5:1, 31; 6:1; 11:19; 14:23; 17:19; 18:9; 20:18; 31:12, 13, 19, 22.

[2] Floyd, "The Concept of Discipleship in Deuteronomy: Literary and Lexical Insights into Following YHWH," 50.

[3] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, לָמַד, 540.

"disciple," or "learned" (Isa 54:13; Jer 13:23). It is noted that "the Hebrew למד does not occur in the Torah before Deuteronomy."[4] This shows its relevance in the discipleship discourse in Deuteronomy. A.K Adam notes that "while the Bible does not explicitly cast Israel as God's student, it does include numerous admonitions to learn from God, to exemplify God's characteristics, and to teach what God has taught them; these occupations encapsulate what disciples in antiquity did."[5] Babatunde Adedibu explains that "the idea of teaching (למד, meaning instruct, learn, skillful, teach) conveys the basic concept of discipleship in the Old Testament."[6] Disciples grow through learning. The Israelites, - Yahweh's followers - are required to learn the character and way of God in order to grow.

God's ordinances and judgments are to be learned, understood, and obeyed. Besides, the Hebrew places much importance on learning and understanding the Torah.[7] This could be taught by the LORD (Deut 4:1, 10, 14), by fathers (Deut 11:19), or by a godly person who knows God's will.[8] The first occurrence is in chapter 4 verse 1. This word appears mostly in the context of the commandments. For instance, Moses says, "And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching (מְלַמֵּד, piel participle) you, and do them, …" (Deut 4:1, emphasis mine).

After reflection on their history, Moses continues with the present time with the use of the adverb, וְעַתָּה (and now). This "marks a decisive shift from the historical

[4] Floyd, "The Concept of Discipleship in Deuteronomy: Literary and Lexical Insights into Following YHWH," 50.

[5] Adam, "Discipleship, Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics," 2.

[6] Babatunde Adedibu, "Christian Theological Education and Discipleship: Panacea to Nigerian Church Challenges," *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* 14 (May 30, 2024): 6–7, https://doi.org/10.4314/gjrt.v14i1.6.

[7] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 46.

[8] Verbrugge, "Διδάσκω," 141.

retrospective of chs. 1-3 to the hortatory sermon of ch. 4."[9] This suggests a progression in the narrative calling the attention of the audience and the readers to the present time. So, what he is teaching (Deut 4:1) is identified as "the statutes and the rules." Thus, in v.5, he says, "I have taught (לִמַּדְתִּי, piel perfect) you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, (Deut 4:5). The verb form shows intensification of the action of teaching the new generation the law of the LORD. To authenticate his words, Moses affirms that he was commanded to teach people. He says, "And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules (Deut 4:14).[10] This teacher's role was assigned to Moses at Mount Sinai (see Deut 4:14 and 5:28).[11] The statutes seem to be significant to the covenant blessings. Hence, the LORD commands Moses to teach the people. More so, the essence of learning the statutes is for the people "to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so." (Deut 4:10) Correspondingly, Floyd submits that "based on the usage of the verb למד in Deuteronomy, discipleship in Deuteronomy may be understood as YHWH's instruction of Moses and the people to learn how to follow him in exclusive devotion and obedience."[12] This shows how central learning is in the covenant relationship between the LORD and his followers.

In the same vein, the Hebrew word, למד is akin to the New Testament word διδάσκω. This Greek term appears 97 times in the New Testament, and it means "to teach or instruct." It is noteworthy that while διδάσκω occurs 100 times in the LXX,

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[9] Rob Barrett, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Coercion of Israel," *Department of Theology and Religion University of Durham*, 2005, 3, http://www.coffeewithbarretts.com/writings/Deut4.pdf.

[10] Biddle, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 82.

[11] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, 1st ed, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 43.

[12] Floyd, "The Concept of Discipleship in Deuteronomy: Literary and Lexical Insights into Following YHWH," 51.

most of its occurrence are in Deuteronomy, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Jeremiah. Unlike the classical Greek, the word διδάσκω often refers to teaching on how to live (e.g., Deut 11:19; 20:18), primarily the will of God, rather than imparting information and skills (e.g., 2 Sam 22:35).

So, in Deuteronomy, the statutes are taught so that his disciples or followers could fear him and enjoy more intimate relationship just like Jesus Christ teaches his disciples and others the principles of God's Kingdom (Matt 22:16; Mark 6:2, 34; 8:31).[13] The teaching and learning are necessary to the disciples' growth. The next lexical term shows that disciples learn to obey the commands of their Master.

שׁמע. The word שׁמע could mean to hear, listen to, pay attention, or obey.[14] The similar New Testament word is ἀκούω (Matt 5:27; Mark 2:17; Luke 2:18; John 4:1) which could mean to hear, to attend to, or to understand. In Deut 1:16, it is used in judicial context. Moses charges the judges to "…Hear the cases between your brothers…" to judge righteously. In this sense, שׁשׁמ implies to "listen to" something (cf. 1:17). As covenant people, the LORD encourages fairness and justice. Biddle asserts that the "judges are to be impartial, hearing the cause of the weak and the strong, the poor and the wealthy alike."[15] This could only be achieved when the judges pay attention or listen to the cases before them unbiased. In the horizontal relationship, fairness and justice is one of the marks which distinguishes Yahweh's followers from the heathen. It is part of the ethical conduct required of a true disciple.

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[13] Thompson, "Book of Deuteronomy," 277.

[14] Wilkins, "Hear," 330.

[15] Biddle, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 20.

Another meaning of שמע is "to obey" (Deut 4:30 cf. 1:43). Moses affirms that the stipulations of the covenant must be obeyed in order to be blessed.[16] Many of the blessings promised are conditioned on the people's obedience to the commandments of the LORD (Exod 23:22). The commandments of God are not only learned but lived, building the bedrock of Israelite identity and communal life. Haber affirms that "without exception, it is incumbent on every man, woman and child, regardless of their status in the community, to obey God's will, as set out by the terms of the covenant."[17] Disobedience is tantamount to rebellion (Deut 9:23). So, in Deuteronomy 4, Moses encourages the children of Israel who are about to enter Canaan to pursue a more meaningful and authentic connection rather than allying with the deities of the region, such as the Baals. He knows that Yahweh's offer of a covenanted life of intimacy is incomparable to what they get by following the Canaanites' gods.[18] This is a distinguishing mark of Yahweh's disciple - obedience to his command.

Apart from the lexical terms in this pericope, there are discipleship themes which also shed light on the subject matter and contribute to the development of the discipleship concept. Such themes are discussed below:

Thematic Coding Frame

In this section, the thematic Coding Frame present in this pericope are examined contextually.

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[16] Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, v. 5 (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2011), 37.

[17] Haber, "God, Israel and Covenant," 134.

[18] Stephen L. Cook, *Reading Deuteronomy: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Smyth & Helwys, 2015), 65.

Covenant. Deuteronomy 1:1-5 provides information about the covenant message that Moses would present to the people of Israel who were about to enter Canaan. This unit is structurally illustrated as follows:

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A. These words

B. Moses spoke

C. (place) beyond the Jordan

D. (time) eleven days journey from Horeb to Kadesh-arnea

E. Moses spoke as YHWH commanded

D'. (time) In the 40th year after Horeb

C'. (place) beyond the Jordan

B'. Moses explained

A'. this Torah[19]

The above structure shows that הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה ("the words which Moses spoke") (v.1) is identified as "this Torah" (v.5). Whereas the name "Moses" appears three times in these verses, it is pointed out that he only speaks as Yahweh commanded him. Also, Yahweh is identified as the initiator of the covenant (v. 3), Israelites as the recipients of the covenant (v. 1; v. 3; cf. Deut 4:44), Moses as the covenant mediator between God and Israel (vv. 1, 3, 5), and the covenant text itself is referred to as "words" (v. 1) or "this law" (v. 5).[20] One can liken this to the Suzerainty treaty. In ancient suzerainty agreements, the preamble served as the opening statement where the speaker, typically the one asserting authority and seeking the vassal's loyalty, introduced themselves. Put in other words, in the Deuteronomic preamble,

[19] Biddle, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 15.

[20] Cook, *Reading Deuteronomy: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 41, 42.

Moses is identified as the speaker (verse 1)[21], but more importantly, as the earthly intermediary representing Yahweh (verse 3), who is depicted as the heavenly Suzerain and the ultimate Master of this covenant.[22]

The party to the covenant is the children of Israel. Deuteronomy 1:1 establishes that the words which Moses spoke in the book were directed to כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (all Israel). The addressees which are identified as "all Israel" (Deut 1:1) are also referred to as "the Israelites" (v.3 NIV). These two descriptions are found throughout the book of Deuteronomy. Block notes that "the former suggests that Moses speaks to the community of faith; the latter highlights the nation's ethnic cohesion (they are the descendants of Jacob/Israel).[23] Besides, the expression כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל is found in some pages of the book of Deuteronomy (5:1; 27:9; 29:1; 31:1; 32:45) and this includes all the categories of individuals that constitute the community, as is evident also in Deut 29:9-14.[24] The covenant includes male and female, young and old. Hence, the message of the LORD through Moses in Deuteronomy is directed to כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (all Israel, Deut 1:1), or בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (children of Israel, Deut 1:3), the phrase which is used across the entire book (e.g., 1:1,3; 5:1; 13:11; 18:6; 27:9; 32:45) to underscore the relevance of the message to all the children of Israel.

In addition, the phrase "to all Israel" appears fourteen times in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 1:1; 5:1; 11:6; 27:9; 29:1; 31:1, 7, 11; 32:45; 34:12) and just

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[21] Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: J. Knox Press, 1990), 24.

[22] Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 50. See also, Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, v. 5 (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2011), 57.

[23] Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy: The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 74.

[24] Haber, "God, Israel and Covenant," 134.

twice in the other books of the Pentateuch (Exod 18:25 and Num 16:34). This suggests that the message of the covenant seems not to be optional but a mandate for all Israelites which the LORD expects them to respond to with obedience.[25] Also, Wright asserts that the phrase "all Israel" stresses the covenant unity of Israel, both horizontally (all in each generation, cf. 29:10ff.) and vertically (throughout all generations, cf. 5:3; 29:14)."[26] However, Biddle submits that although the offer of covenant relationship and blessings by Yahweh is to "all Israel," every individual in each generation must responsibly accept the grace.[27] This stresses the idea of individual responsibility within the community of Israel.

More so, the verb דִּבֶּר used in Deut 1:1 occurs frequently in the Pentateuch. It occurs in 183 verses in the Pentateuch. In these occurrences, it is worthy of note that the clause וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה appears in 91 verses with Yahweh being the subject and Moses the direct object.[28] This implies that in the Pentateuch, Yahweh is the active speaker communicating his commandments, statutes, and precepts to his covenant people through his servant, Moses. In turn, Moses as a spokesman, the mediator of the covenant between Yahweh and the Israelites speaks on behalf of Yahweh.[29] Also, in relation to the covenant between Yahweh and the people of Israel, this verb seems to

[25] Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, Revised (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 379.

[26] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, EBook Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 33.

[27] Biddle, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 15.

[28] Exod. 6:10, 13, 29; 13:1; 14:1; 16:11; 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22; 31:1; 32:7; 33:1; 40:1; Lev. 4:1; 5:14, 20; 6:1, 12, 17; 7:22, 28; 8:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1, 33; 15:1; 16:1; 17:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:16; 22:1, 17, 26; 23:1, 9, 23, 26, 33; 24:1, 13; 25:1; 27:1; Num. 1:1, 48; 2:1; 3:5, 11, 14, 44; 4:1, 17, 21; 5:1, 5, 11; 6:1, 22; 8:1, 5, 23; 9:1, 9; 10:1; 13:1; 14:26; 15:1, 17; 16:20, 23; 17:1, 9, 16; 18:25; 19:1; 20:7; 25:10, 16; 26:52; 28:1; 31:1; 33:50; 34:1, 16; 35:1, 9; Deut. 32:48.

[29] Exod 6:9, 12; 34:31; Lev 10:5, 12; 21:24; 23:44; 24:23; Num 9:4; 14:39; 17:12, 21; 26:3; 27:15; 30:2; 31:3; Deut 1:1, 3; 4:45; 27:9; 31:30.

establish the fact that Yahweh is the initiator as he speaks to his children calling them into a covenant relationship with him.

The above theme points out the pattern of discipleship which operates in Deuteronomy. The Master is Yahweh. However, he chose to lead and speak through a human mediator, Moses. His initiation of the covenant serves as a call to the children of Israel. Their response to this covenant comes in the form of loving obedience to the covenant stipulations. The relationship between Yahweh and Israel cannot exist without the laws which serve as a guide. Hence, the next theme.

Laws/Instructions (Torah). Deuteronomy 1:3 says, that "Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them." That which the LORD commanded Moses is identified in v.5 as the תּוֹרָה. McConville and Millar are of the view that "laws and statues" are equated with this "torah." They explain further that "torah" is being used (Deut 1:3) to describe all the preaching that follows Deut 1:5.[30] According to them, "the law includes the motivation to obey. This applies whether law is expressed as Torah, Statute, or commandment.[31] Moses has the responsibility of expounding the law (cf. Deut 27:8 and Hab. 2:2). Wright calls it '"preached law'- that is, law explained with prophetic urgency, divine authority, and a preacher's clarity."[32]

Regarding this law, Block comments:

> The expression "this Torah" (*hattôrâ hazzo't*) characterizes what follows as instruction rather than legislation. This interpretation is confirmed by the way the book depicts Moses. He "teaches" (limmēd) the people (4:5, 14; 5:31; 6:1; 31:19) and they "learn" the Torah (4:10; 5:1; 17:19; 31:12–13). The bulk of

30 J. G. McConville and J. G. Millar, *Time and Place in Deuteronomy*, ed. David J.A. Clines, Philip R. Davies, and John Jarick, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 179 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 39.

31 Ibid., 40.

32 Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 33.

> the book consists of pastoral instruction and exhortation, and even when earlier laws are cited, they are surrounded with hortatory appeals.[33]

Likewise, Tigay opines that the word "instruction" would better encompass the broad spectrum of meanings conveyed by Torah, as it encompasses both the intellectual and legal dimensions of the term. Torah encompasses rules of civil and ritual procedure, prophetic teachings and admonishments, moral guidance, and didactic narratives.[34] In another vein, "'Torah' relates to the exposition of the law, as well as to its written form, that all Israel might learn and know God's will."[35] This has implication for discipleship. The Torah serves as the manual for instructing the chosen people the way of the Lord. It is noted that in Deuteronomy, different technical terms are used to describe its laws such as; מִצְוָה (commandments), עֵדָה (testimony), חֹק (statute) (Deut 4:45; 6:17 20; cf. Exod. 25:16).[36]

Admittedly, the law plays a crucial role in the covenant between Yahweh and the Israelites. The introductory section of the book of Deuteronomy (1:1-5) seems to affirm the central role the laws play in the covenantal relationship between the LORD and his chosen people. The new generation needs to understand the nature of the covenant and its stipulations. The frequent clause, וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי , "And the Lord said to me" (Deut 1:42; 2:9,3; 3:2, 26; 9:3; 10:1, 11; 18:17, etc.) emphasizes the fact that the content of the book is divine, that is, it is the words or message of the LORD. Hence, Moses, an intermediary and the spokesman of the LORD explains (בֵּאֵר), that is, makes plain the law (תּוֹרָה). In order words, he makes an exposition of the

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[33] Block, *Deuteronomy: The NIV Application Commentary*, 75.

[34] Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 5.

[35] Woods, *Deuteronomy*, 32.

[36] Wood, *Deuteronomy*, 32-34.

instructions earlier given by the LORD for proper comprehension which would aid the application of the law and guide in their covenantal relationship.

The laws/instructions are guide for the disciples. It provides the framework of operation for both vertical and horizontal relationships. The disciples are not only to learn the laws they are also required to keep them. This is expounded in the next theme.

Keep the Commandments. As earlier established, Moses teaches the children of Israel the statutes of the LORD (Deut 4:2; 5:1). He does not only teach them for knowledge acquisition but also for practice. He says, "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, *that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God* that I command you." (Deut 4:2, emphasis supplied, cf. Luke 11:28). Barrett asserts that, "Obedience to the LORD's commands is sine qua non for life in the land (vv. 1, 40). His commands are imposed unilaterally upon Israel and are not open for human adjustment (v. 2)."[37]

The sentence structure of Deut 4:2 shows that it complements verse 1.

1. And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules
   that I am teaching you, and do them,
   that you may live and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.
2. You shall not add to the word
   that I command you, nor take from it,
   that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you. (Deut 4:1-2)

[37] Barrett, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Coercion of Israel," 14.

The above structure shows the relationship between the two verses. The דָּבָר (word) in verse 2 corresponds and refers to the statutes and rules in verse 1. The significance of the statutes or words of Moses could be deduced from the repetition of the verb מְצַוֶּה (to command or give charge) used twice in verse 2. The verb stem, piel participle also heightens the action of the command. Hence, the children of Israel are commanded repeatedly to keep, do, or observe the commandments of the LORD their God.[38] Besides, the blessing of keeping the commandments is that they would live and possess the Promised Land (4:1).

The keeping of the commandments is necessary to the continual blessing of God for the covenant people. Following the demise of Moses, the LORD would reiterate the significance of keeping the commandments. He tells Joshua, "Only be strong and very courageous, *being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you.* Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. (Jos 1:7, emphasis supplied) Israel's success and nation growth depend on adhering to the LORD's commandments, statutes, and ordinances, which involve worshipping Yahweh at the right time, place, with all their heart.[39]

Furthermore, as followers of Yahweh, the children of Israel will be distinguished from the heathen by keeping the commandments. Moses is specific in his instruction. He instructs, "… you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. (Deut 4:5 cf. 4:14) In v.6, Moses adds that Keeping the

[38] James Jardin, "Deuteronomy 4:1-8 Exegetical Paper," 2012, 5, https://www.academia.edu/download/32989283/Gods_law_and_the_believers_response__Deut_4_1-8_Exegesis.pdf.

[39] Bruce E. Willoughby, "A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-19," *Restoration Quarterly*, 1977, 86, https://biblicalelearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Willoughby-Deut6-RestQ.pdf.

commandments and doing it would preach to the surrounding nations. Thus, the Old Testament standard of keeping the commandments by the followers of Yahweh seems to be a model for the New Testament disciples.[40] Jesus affirms this while speaking with his disciples. He says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John. 14:15 cf. 15:10) To the man who came to Jesus, he says, "if you would enter life, keep the commandments." (Matt 19:17)

Thus, since the LORD does not change, his requirements and standards appear to be the same for his disciples of all ages. This implies that disciples of all ages are commanded to keep the Master's command.

Worship the LORD. One of the major points in Moses' speeches is the issue of worship. Apart from rebellion and unbelief,[41] serving or worshiping other gods seems to be the problem of the first generation and that being the major cause why they are prohibited from entering Canaan. Therefore, Moses admonished the new generation against serving other gods.

And Deuteronomy 4:15 - 43 provides understanding into the nature of worshiping and serving God, providing a premise that resonates through the entire biblical narrative. This pericope serves as an admonition to the Israelites to remain faithful to God, steering clear of idolatry and adhering to His commandments.[42] From this passage, some insights are derived which explain the principles of true worship and service to God.

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[40] Tamara L. Anderson and Shelly A. Skinner, "Feelings: Discipleship That Understands the Affective Processes of a Disciple of Christ," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 1, 2019): 67, https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891318820333.

[41] Biddle, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 28.

[42] Carly Crouch, "The Threat to Israel's Identity in Deuteronomy: Mesopotamian or Levantine?," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 124 (December 1, 2012): 550, https://doi.org/10.1515/zaw-2012-0038.

First, there is the call to exclusive worship. This appears to be the main theme of Deuteronomy 4:15-43. Moses forewarns the children of Israel against making any form or appearance of idol or image to represent Yahweh, emphasizing His unique and invisible nature.[43] He says, "Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire." (Deut 4:15) From verses 15-18, Moses plainly warns against crafting images in the form of any creature, whether human or animal, terrestrial or celestial.[44] This prohibition stresses the transcendence of God, who is beyond the confines of physical human representation. Even though distinct sounds were heard coming from the mountain when the LORD spoke to them, no visual form or representation of the Divine Being who spoke was seen to reveal His nature or attributes, as understood by the beliefs of the heathens.[45] Then, Mayes states that "because Yahweh is imageless any attempt to make an image of him is in fact the worship of another god."[46] In view of this, Feder opines that "veneration of idols is equated with the worship of foreign gods."[47] So, by avoiding idolatry, the children of Israel, as disciples of Yahweh would maintain the purity of their worship, acknowledging the LORD's uniqueness, incomparability, and as the one true God who cannot be encapsulated by human constructs.[48]

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[43] Alexander Salakpi, "Deut 4:1-8 and the Observance of the Law," *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* 9, no. 2 (2019): 29.

[44] Biddle, 85, 86. See also; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 73.

[45] Salakpi, "Deut 4:1-8 and the Observance of the Law," 29.

[46] A. D. H. Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Literary Criticism of Deuteronomy," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100, no. 1 (1981): 27, https://doi.org/10.2307/3265533.

[47] Yitzhaq Feder, "The Aniconic Tradition, Deuteronomy 4, and the Politics of Israelite Identity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 2 (2013): 268.

[48] Woods, *Deuteronomy*, 56.

In addition, Moses affirms that obedience to the LORD'S statutes is another key aspect of worship and service highlighted in this passage. He stresses the significance of upholding the statutes and laws given by the LORD, which serve as prescriptions for righteous living for the LORD's disciples (vv. 39-40). This obedience is not a legalistic adherence but a genuine commitment to live by the LORD'S will, reflecting His holiness and justice in their daily lives.

Moreover, the consequences of backsliding from the LORD to idolatry are spelt out. In verses 25-28, Moses warns that idolatry would lead to terrible consequences, which include exile and dispersion among the nations.[49] This scattering serves as both a punishment and a form of divine discipline, with the intention to bring the children of Israel back to repentance and a renewed recognition of God's sovereignty.[50] Yet, there is a message of hope in this warning. Deut 4:29-31 says,

> But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

The above text underscores Yahweh's everlasting mercy and his readiness to restore those who return to Him in genuine repentance.[51]

Also, the passage affirms the holiness of God, which seems to be the basis for why He must be worshipped exclusively and the reason his commandments should be followed by his followers. Moses declares, "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." (Deut 4:24) This imagery conveys His absolute purity and the

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[49] Barrett, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Coercion of Israel," 8-9.

[50] Ibid., 10.

[51] Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1997), 124.

high devotion He requests from His people. The holiness of the LORD is not just a matter of moral perfection but an all-encompassing reality that consumes anything impure. Therefore, Yahweh's disciples are called to reflect this holiness in their lives, setting themselves apart from the practices of surrounding nations and dedicating themselves completely to the LORD alone.[52]

Worship is one of the vertical dimensions of discipleship. Israelites are called out of the land of slavery to worship God. This aspect of discipleship strengthens and aids the spiritual growth of the disciples.

Covenant Relationship. Deuteronomy 4 provides an exposition on the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the children of Israel, a central theme that defines the religious and social identity of the Israelite nation.[53] Arie Versluis asserts that "covenant is a central concept in Deuteronomy"[54] And he describes Deuteronomy as a "document of covenant between Israel and Yahweh."[55]

It is worthy of note that Deuteronomy uses covenantal language to describe the connection between YHWH and Israel as well as between the Israelites: (1) adaptations of the covenant formula, "I will be your God and you will be my people" (26:17–18); (2) frequent allusions to YHWH as "your God" and "our God"; (3) unique titles for Israel: "a holy people belonging to YHWH" (7:6; 14:2, 21; 28:9); "his treasured people" (26:18 ; 14:2 ; 7:6); YHWH's "very own possession" (4:20;

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[52] Justin Fuhrmann, "Deuteronomy 6-8 and the History of Interpretation: An Exposition on the First Two Commandments," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 1 (March 2010): 61.

[53] James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus' Call to Discipleship*, ed. Howard Clark Kee (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 65-66.

[54] Arie Versluis, "Covenant in Deuteronomy: The Relationship between the Moab, Horeb, and Patriarchal Covenants," in *Covenant: A Vital Element of Reformed Theology* (Brill, 2021), 1, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004503328_005.

[55] Ibid.

cf. “YHWH’s portion,” 32:9); YHWH’s “sons” (14:1 ; cf. 8:5); (4) peculiar verbs expressing suzerain-vassal relationship: “to serve YHWH” as his vassal (11:13 ; 20, 10:12; 24, 6:2); “to demonstrate love for YHWH” (22, 13, 11:1; 10:12; 7:9; 6:5; 5:10, 19:9; 13:4; cf. 30:6, 16, 20) as YHWH has demonstrated love for Israel (4:37; 7:13; 10:15, 18; 23:6), “walking in YHWH’s ways” (28:9; 26:17; 19:9; 11:22; 10:12; 8:6; 33; cf. 30:16); “walking after YHWH” as opposed to walking after other gods (6:14; 8:19; 11:28; 13:3; 28:14); “to act with/keep covenant faithfulness” or “to keep the covenant” (2,7:9, of YHWH), as opposed to “breaking” or “abandoning YHWH’s covenant (20,31:16, [of Israel]); “holding fast to YHWH” (11:22 ;10:20 ;4:4; cf. 30:20), as opposed to “abandoning him” (28:20, cf. 31:16); and, of course, “keeping and doing” his commands (5:1; 4:6, etc.).[56] In line with this view, Chennnattu affirms that “the OT covenant stipulations have the same function: a call to a decision accepting an exclusive relationship with Yahweh.”[57]

So, Moses frequently reminds the children of Israel of their covenantal relationship with the LORD (v.23). He recollects how God delivers them from Egypt, comparing this liberation to being brought out of an iron furnace (Deut 4:20). This metaphor underscores the transformative and purifying process of God’s deliverance, setting the children of Israel apart as His chosen people. This seems to be the basis of the Deuteronomistic discipleship. The setting apart is a call to a lifelong covenantal relationship. The covenant, marked by the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, is central to their identity and their duty to worship God alone. These commandments serve as a guide for Israel as Yahweh’s disciples. Also, remembering

[56] Daniel I. Block, *The Triumph of Grace Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), 86–87.

[57] Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship*, 56.

this covenant is important for the Israelites to remain faithful and obedient, ensuring their continued blessing and favour from God.

The Sinai Covenant formalizes this relationship through the giving of the Law. Moses tells them, "And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone." (Deut 4:13) This act of inscribing the commandments on stone symbolizes their immutability and the binding nature of the covenant.[58] Besides, the covenant requires strict adherence to the commandments given at Sinai (Deut 4:1-2). This obedience is essential for maintaining the covenantal relationship and ensuring the well-being and prosperity of the nation of Israel.[59] Likewise, the covenant stipulations highlighted in Deuteronomy 4 are created to perpetuate the sanctity and distinctiveness of the children of Israel as Yahweh's followers or disciples.[60] Hence, the stipulations are integral to the identity and purpose of Israel as a holy nation.

Therefore, in Deut 4:9, Moses charges the parents to teach their children and grandchildren the law. This is to ensure the perpetuity of the law. This generational transmission is crucial for sustaining the covenant community across time.

Fellowship. Fellowship seems to be a pivotal theme in the biblical concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy. It points out a shared life under Yahweh's covenant. In the first speech of Moses (Deut 1:1-4:43), he stresses the need for obedience, remembrance, and faithfulness to God. In this context, fellowship is portrayed as a discipleship term that stresses the communal view of Israel's journey

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[58] Jeff Zaremsky, *Jewish Heritage Scripture Studies* (New Port Richey, FL: Jewish Heritage Inc, 2007), 104.

[59] Willoughby, "A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-19," 73.

[60] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006), 249.

with their God. It emphasizes their collective identity, communal experiences, and obligation to uphold the covenant.

Moses begins by narrating their history which functions as a reminder that they are people of the covenant who need to walk together in obedience. Fellowship in this context is seen in the unity of Israel's experiences - both in their failures and in God's merciful guidance. By recounting their rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea (Deut 1:19-46), Moses affirms that their journey was not only personal but communal.[61] Thus, as Yahweh's disciples, they have the duty of supporting one another in faithfulness and learning from their shared history.

Further, it is noteworthy that the central point of biblical fellowship is ingrained in the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the children of Israel. Moses urges Israel to obey the LORD's commands (Deut 4:1-14), not as isolated individuals, but as a nation bound together in covenant.[62] He stresses that the LORD gives his laws to the whole community, underscoring the view that discipleship involves mutual accountability.[63] Thus, from this context, one can deduce that fellowship connotes living out the covenant together, encouraging one another in obedience, and ensuring that future generations remain faithful to Yahweh's commands. This is also practiced by the early disciples in the New Testament (Acts 2:41-47).

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[61] "Commentary on Deuteronomy 1 by Matthew Henry," Blue Letter Bible, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Deu/Deu_001.cfm.

[62] "Deuteronomy 4 Commentary | Precept Austin," accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.preceptaustin.org/deuteronomy-4-commentary#4:1.

[63] Mangadar Simbolon and Davied Zebedeus, "Spiritual Accountability Practices in Discipleship Among the Indonesian Seventh-Day Adventist Fellowship Members in Manila," *Jurnal Koinonia* 14, no. 1 (June 2022): 61–62.

In addition, in Deuteronomy 4:15-31, Moses admonishes the children of Israel to remain committed to the one true God. For them, worship was not a private matter but a collective expression of their commitment to God. Their faithfulness in worship would sustain their fellowship with one another. Another crucial dimension of fellowship in discipleship is the transmission of faith to future generations for the preservation of faith. Moses urges the children of Israel to take note of their unique calling and teach their children about Yahweh's mighty acts in their history.[64] In order words, fellowship expands beyond the present community to include the responsibility of disciplining future generations. This act of teaching the next generation allows for continuity in the covenant relationship.

Bearing Witness. In Deuteronomy 4:6 and 4:14 the idea of bearing witness is established, which is a foundational aspect of Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh. Moskala explains that "Moses's exhortatory speech to Israel when he stressed the importance of obedience to God and His law (Deut 4:5-8), implies the visibility and some kind of missionary activities of Israel."[65] As earlier explained, as part of Moses' final speeches to the children of Israel who are preparing to enter Canaan, he restates the laws given at Sinai and urges the people to remain faithful to their covenant with God. [66] He states, "Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. (Deut 4:6) Verse 14 adds, "And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you

[64] Block, *Deuteronomy: The NIV Application Commentary*.

[65] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 48.

[66] Thomas Krüger, "Law and Wisdom According to Deut 4:5–8," in *Wisdom and Torah* (Brill, 2013), 36, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004257368_004.

statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess." This text shows that the commandments given to Israel are not just for internal governance but also to serve a broader goal. First, by observing the commandments, the children of Israel would exhibit the LORD's wisdom and righteousness to the surrounding nations.[67] This witness is significant in revealing the distinctiveness of Israel's relationship with God. The wisdom and understanding showcased in their obedience serve as preaching to the nations, prompting recognition of the greatness of Israel's God. This outward display of God's wisdom through Israel's conduct is a form of bearing witness that extends beyond oral proclamation.[68] Scripture shows that one of the purposes of God for Israel is to be a spiritual light to other nations (e.g., Isa 42:6-7; 44:8; 49:6).[69] According to Moskala, "there were no Old Testament people of God without a mission; there is no election without a commission. God's call presupposes a call for action."[70] Therefore, Israel, as the chosen of the LORD is called to bear witness to the nations around them (cf. Matt 28:18-20).

Furthermore, bearing witness seems to be tied to the identity and mission of Israel as a chosen people. Deut 4:6 indicates that the obedience of the children of Israel to the LORD's command would lead other nations to acknowledge their unique status. [71] This acknowledgment strengthens Israel's identity as a people set apart by

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[67] Ibid.

[68] H. Douglas Buckwalter, "Testimony," in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 229. See also; R. Hedlund, "Mission Paradigms in the Old Testament," *Indian Journal of Theology*, 1995, 24–34.

[69] Fanning, "The Old Testament and Missions," 2.

[70] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 40.

[71] Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 39.

their relationship with the LORD. Besides, it emphasizes their mission to serve as a light to the nations.[72] So, Israel's faithful observance of the commandments is designed to attract and bring others to the knowledge of God, which would make them fulfil their role as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:6).[73]

Yahweh's commandments serve as a means of mediating God's presence among His people. In Deut 4:14, Moses states that he was commanded to teach these statutes in order that Israel would know how to live properly in the Promised Land. So, the observance of these laws ensures that Israel maintains a proper relationship with God, thereby reflecting His holiness to the world. And this reflection of divine holiness through their communal and individual lives is a powerful form of bearing witness, illustrating the tangible presence of God amid his people.[74]

As God's chosen people, bearing witness via obedience to God's decrees is a communal task. The collective conduct of the Israelite community is what will be observed by other nations.[75] So, the faithfulness of each member contributes to the overall testimony of the community. This communal aspect emphasizes the importance of mutual accountability and support in adhering to the covenant stipulations.

In comparison, the New Testament uses the word μαρτυρέω to mean being a witness (Acts 1:8), to bear witness, i.e. to affirm that one has seen or heard or

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[72] Jardin, "Deuteronomy 4:1-8 Exegetical Paper," 7.

[73] Cristian Dumitrescu, "Mission Theology in the Old Testament: A New Paradigm," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 4, no. 1 (2008): 10.

[74] Jonathan Lunde, *Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenantal Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 3.

[75] Ronald Hendel, "Israel Among the Nations: Biblical Culture in the Ancient Near East," in *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ronald Hendel (Oxford University Press, 2005), 0, https://doi.org/10.1093/0195177967.003.0001.

experienced something (Matt 10:18; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:13; John 1:8; 3:11), to give testimony, or to give a good report (John 5:32). In relation to this perception, Keith Marriner explains that "the verb μαρτυρέω refers to what a 'witness' actually does. One is a 'witness' because one offers a testimony of what one has seen. One is an eyewitness to someone's actions or words, or to an event."[76] The last charge of Jesus Christ before his ascension is that his disciples would be his witness (Acts 1:8) which is in line with the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20; Rev 14:6-12).

The above analysis seems to suggest that all the followers of the LORD in all ages are required to testify or bear witness about the deeds of their God. One of the fruits of discipleship seems to be bearing of fruit for the Master's kingdom.

Membership and Election of the People of God. Chennattu affirms that, "the concept of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel is based on choices: God's choice of his people Israel and their choice of God,"[77] Moses clearly points out the graciousness of Yahweh in choosing the people of Israel. He declares, "And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power." (Deut 4:37) Yahweh-Israel relationship is based on divine love.[78] In addition, the LORD delivers them so that they would be his people, his inheritance (Deut 4:20). Barret notes that, "it is only in contrast to the other nations that Israel's election as a nation is made clear: her extraction from the nation of Egypt and her dispossession of the nations of the land. It is the exodus and conquest that establish Israel's election."[79] The LORD's kindness to

[76] Marriner, *Following the Lamb The Theme of Discipleship in the Book of Revelation*, 93.

[77] Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship*, 60.

[78] Barnette, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 13.

[79] Barrett, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Coercion of Israel," 13.

chosen Israel is evident through various means, including being brought out of another nation (Deut 4:34), witnessing the LORD's fire and voice (Deut 4:33), receiving righteous laws (Deut 4:6), dispossessed the Transjordan kings (Deut 4:22, 38), and gaining unique intimacy with the LORD (Deut 4:7).[80] Becoming Yahweh's disciples begins from the call and election. According to Guder,

> Election is a calling to service. God calls, and enables the response to his call, not solely for the benefit of the one called, but for a greater purpose, for which the called-out ones are now enlisted and enabled. Certainly, those who experience this call encounter God in a relationship filled with blessing and enrichment. They are 'blessed in order to be a blessing.'[81]

Therefore, the children of Israel become the LORD's disciples by being chosen by Him. So, by this divine choice, they become Yahweh's followers expected to live in obedience to his commandments.

The above content analysis of Deuteronomy 1:1- 4:43 is paramount to the understanding of the role of mediated communication and how it shapes the concept of discipleship. In this segment, apart from recounting the journey experience of the children of Israel, emphasis is also laid on the relationship among Moses, Yahweh, and Israel. Using the structural analysis, it has been established that the form of communication portrays Moses as a mediator, delivering Yahweh's will to Israel and interpreting their responses back to God.[82] Moses's position places on him the role of teacher. The will of God is revealed personally to Moses, affirming the need for divine instruction in discipleship. This disclosure becomes the foundation of truth that

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[80] Barrett, 13.

[81] Darrell Guder, *Be My Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 9.

[82] Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 392.

disciples must follow. This dynamic reinforces the biblical pattern of discipleship, based on trust and obedience.

It can be deduced from the analysis that Moses as a mediator is a model of discipleship. The position of Moses as a mediator underlines the essence of a servant-leader who faithfully conveys divine instructions to the Israelites. This mediatorial role shows some crucial aspects of discipleship. First, there is a faithfulness to Yahweh's Message. Moses conveys what Yahweh commands and does not speak on his own authority (Deut 1:3, 42; 4:1-2, 5-6, 13-14). This signifies that discipleship involves faithfully receiving and transmitting the message of God. There is a demonstration of accountability. As a leader, Moses explicates Israel's actions and decisions before Yahweh, affirming that discipleship is not only about learning but also living in accountability before Yahweh. This mediated communication serves as a model for future discipleship relationships, where leaders guide the followers to trust and obey the Lord's instructions, which eventually lead them closer to Him.

More so, the account in Deuteronomy emphasizes trust in Yahweh's character and promises (Deut 1:29-31, 33; 2:7; 3:21-22; 4:7-8, 31, 37-39) as well as the trust in the Moses as the mediator (Deut 1:16-18, 42; 4:1-2, 5, 10). At the beginning, Moses reminds Israel of Yahweh's faithfulness, recounting past victories and His promises to their forefathers (Deut 1:8-11). This implies that discipleship begins with acknowledging and trusting in Yahweh's character - His consistent faithfulness, love, and justice.

Besides, Israel is called to trust Moses, who is Yahweh's chosen servant. In other words, discipleship calls for submission to spiritual leaders who faithfully portrays Yahweh's will, whose message matches with Scripture. Hence, trust is fundamental to discipleship, as it permits the disciple to move beyond personal

understanding and lean into their Master's guidance through His appointed messengers.

Additionally, obedience is explained in Deuteronomy as the natural response to trust in Yahweh. Moses admonishes the children of Israel to obey the Yahweh's commandments as the way to life and blessing (Deut 4:1-2). This obedience involves hearing and doing. This implies that discipleship is not passive. Israelites are required to act on Yahweh's commands, just like the disciples in the New Testament are called to put God's words into practice in their lives (James 1:22). As a matter of fact, the nature of the covenant Yahweh made with Children of Israel requires their obedience as an affirmation of their commitment to the covenant relationship (Deut 4:1-2, 5-6, 9, 13, 23-24, 39-40).[83] Likewise, discipleship requires a life that is in harmony with God's covenantal expectations. Hence, obedience seems to be both the proof of trust and the way to profound closeness with Yahweh. Hence, discipleship grows on a premise of trust in Yahweh and active obedience to His commands.

Discipleship Language

The above analysis shows that the book of Deuteronomy establishes a detailed framework of discipleship language that centers on some key words such as; למד (learn/teach), שׁמע (obey, hear, listen to), keeping the commandments, worshiping and serving the Lord, maintaining a covenant relationship, and bearing witness. These concepts form the core of what it entails to be a follower of Yahweh and guide them in their relationship with the LORD.

As the LORD commands Moses (Deut 1:3), he teaches the commandments of the LORD which guides the covenant relationship. So, the use of למד translated as

[83] Scudder, "Ethics in Deuteronomy," 36.

teach (piel) and learn (qal) is very crucial in the book of Deuteronomy. Learning is a crucial part of discipleship. It involves a continual process of understanding and applying God's laws (Deut 4:10). Learning is associated with reverence and a deep respect for LORD's commandments, and it is integral to a life of discipleship. So, the Israelites, Yahweh's followers, are required to learn the commandments of the LORD being taught by Moses. Not only that, they in turn are also to teach the next generation. This is important for sustaining the covenant community across generations (Deut 6:6-7).

In addition, Moses emphasizes the need to keep the commandments. Yahweh's followers are not only to learn the law but also expected to keep it (Deut 4:40). This implies obeying, guarding, and preserving them. Keeping the commandments is presented as a source of life and prosperity, necessary for the well-being of Israelites' community. Obedience to the Lord's commandments is a recurring theme in Deuteronomy which stresses the significance of following Yahweh's commandments as expected of his followers and as an act of discipleship (Deut 11:1). It is portrayed as a means of expressing love and commitment to the LORD. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus tells his disciples that keeping of his commandments is evidence of their love for him (John. 14:15).

More so, worship and service are crucial to the life of a disciple. Deuteronomy 10:12-13 asks, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?" Worshiping the LORD involves a wholehearted devotion which involves fear, love, and service, reinforcing the totality of a disciple's commitment to the LORD.

More so, the covenant relationship is well established in Deuteronomy, and it defines the special bond between Yahweh and the Israelites (Deut 7:9). This relationship is based on mutual faithfulness, where the LORD's faithfulness is met with Israel's obedience and love.

Bearing witness to Yahweh's mighty acts and commandments is an integral aspect of discipleship. The Israelites are chosen by the LORD to serve as light to other nations. Through them, the nations of the world are to be blessed. And as the LORD's witnesses, they are to fear the LORD and shun idolatry (Deut 13:4). In the same vein, Jesus tells his disciples, "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:13) which implies their responsibility of living the truth before the world. And before his ascension, he gives them the task of being his witness to all the world (Acts 1:8 cf. Matt 28:18-20).

An Analysis of Deuteronomy 4:44-26:19

This segment critically examines the pedagogical framework of Deuteronomic law, presenting a unique blend of oral and written Torah to forge a disciplined community. Also, this pericope highlights the centrality of the Torah in discipleship, emphasizing learning, teaching, and covenantal living. The considerable focus on the Torah in Deuteronomy 4:44–26:19 underlines the educational dimension of discipleship.

Thus, through a comparative lens, we evaluate how this approach to instruction and moral formation distinguishes Israelite discipleships from other ancient Near Eastern traditions. The analysis seeks to unravel the complexities of teaching (למד) and learning within the covenantal relationship, highlighting its significance for both ancient and modern conceptions of discipleship.

It is observed that the Second Speech of Moses is lengthy. Moses presents to the children of Israel the nature of the covenant faith with its fundamental demand for

complete loyalty to Yahweh (5:1-11:32). He draws lessons from the history (8:1-10:11), and the children of Israel are called to total commitment (10:12-11:32). Not only that, the law of God with its detailed stipulations of the covenant (12:1-26:19) is explained.[84] Following are the covenantal terms or discipleship inferences deduced from this pericope.

Lexical Coding Frame

Some lexical terms found in Deut 4:44-26:19 are discussed below.

למד (Teach/Learn). In contrast to the use of למד in Deuteronomy 14:23 and 17:19, which aim to promote undivided devotion to YHWH, the two subsequent instances of למד are meant to discourage the worship of other gods by avoiding the practices of the nations that Israel would displace. In Deuteronomy 18:9, Moses instructs Israel not to learn to imitate the abominable practices of the land's previous inhabitants. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 20:18, he urges Israel to completely destroy their enemies to prevent them from teaching Israel to imitate their abominable practices and sin against YHWH. In this context, Moses uses both "to learn" (Qal stem in Deut 18:9) and "to teach" (Piel stem in Deut 20:18), as well as the term for "imitate." The purpose of this instruction is to ensure that Israel, as Yahweh's disciples, does not follow or imitate the pagan practices of non-Israelites, thereby avoiding the worship of other gods and remaining faithful to YHWH.[85]

More so, the use of למד in Deut 5:31; 6:1, 7: 11:19; and 20:18 underlines the significance of instruction, especially in the context of the covenantal relationship that exists between Yahweh and the children of Israel. The texts affirm that teaching is a

[84] Thompson, "Book of Deuteronomy," 274.

[85] Floyd, "The Concept of Discipleship in Deuteronomy: Literary and Lexical Insights into Following YHWH," 56.

foundational component in the religious and social life of the people of Israel.[86] Discipleship is grounded on the instructions of the Master. These instructions provide a guide through which the disciples operate. In this case, the children of Israel are instructed in the way and will of Yahweh.

Also, another crucial point the passage affirms is that teaching is a divine mandate. After the restatement of the law, the LORD instructed Moses, "But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you the whole commandment and the statutes and the rules that you shall teach them, that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess." (Deut 5:31) Moses seems to be the subject of most of the verbs in the section under study. The LORD has bestowed the teaching authority to him as his authorized spokesperson. God speaks to Moses, and Moses teaches Israel what God speaks (v 31).[87] This shows the uniqueness of the pattern of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy. Unlike in the New Testament where Jesus Christ speaks directly to his disciples, Yahweh, in the book of Deuteronomy speaks through a human mediator, Moses.

This text sets the stage for perceiving teaching as a divine mandate, and it is a tool for nurturing the disciples. Here, God commands Moses to teach the Israelites the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments. It is observed that the technical words used to describe God's instructions are used namely, מִצְוָה, עֵדָה, חֹק. This might suggest the teaching of the whole instructions of the LORD which the children of Israel as his followers need to know.[88] So, the stress on the communication of the

[86] Noh Ibrahim Boiliu, "Educational Aspects in the Book of Deuteronomy," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104, no. 4 (2023): 7, http//: www.pharosjot.com.

[87] Youtaek Kang, "Title: God as Teacher: Studies on Deut. 5-8 and Exodus 16," 2002, 26.

[88] Thompson, "Book of Deuteronomy," 274.

divine will, implies that teaching is not only an educational activity but a sacred duty. The resulting goal of this instruction is to ensure that the children of Israel conduct themselves in accordance with the LORD's commandments in the Promised Land.

Another important point deals with the instruction of laws and their perpetuation (Deut 6:1, 7). Correspondingly, Chapter 6 verse 1 stands as a complement to 5:31. Hence, its continuation. Earlier, the LORD instructed Moses to tarry with him where God told him the commandments which Moses would teach the people. Chapter 6:1 continues by saying, "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it." This passage recapitulates the need for teaching God's commandments as a prerequisite for life in the Promised Land.

Furthermore, in Deut 6:4-9, popularly referred to as *Shema*, Moses elaborates on the method of teaching God's instruction. He says,

> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deut 6:6-7)

The Hebrew word שׁנן in Deut 6:7 translated as "teach diligently, in the English Bible appears only once in the Hebrew Bible, in piel perfect stem. In this verse it means "to repeat" or "to recite." The word could also mean "to inculcate," "to sharpen" or "to teach by rote."[89] The adverbial clause, "teach them diligently," implies a continuous, immersive process, integrating the commandments into daily

[89] Brad Ball, "A Believers-Discipleship Model for Oak Hill Baptist Church" (D.Min., United States -- Tennessee, Union University), 81, accessed September 6, 2022, https://www.proquest.com/docview/1521717855/abstract/57CA2056512240CFPQ/15.

life (cf. Eph. 6:4). The use of repetitive and situational learning ensures that the laws are deeply entrenched in the community's consciousness.[90]

Likewise, another noticeable point is the intergenerational transmission of commandments and societal stability. Deuteronomy 11:19 reiterates the views of Deut 6:7: It says, "you shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." (Deut 11:19) This repetition emphasizes the necessity of intergenerational transmission of knowledge of God's laws.[91] The stability and perpetuity of the Israelite society is dependent on the faithful teaching and adherence to the LORD's commandments. By entrenching these commandments in their daily life, each generation is equipped to uphold and live out the covenant. The covenant relationship extended across multiple generations (Deut 4:9–10, 25, 40; 5:9–10, 29; 6:2). Consequently, parents were responsible for instructing their children in the commandments and fostering a love for Yahweh.[92] In Deut 6:7, Moses' use of the locative clauses בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ (when you sit at home), וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדָּרֶךְ (when you walk by the way) as well as temporal clauses, וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ (when you lie down), and וּבְקוּמֶךָ (when you rise up) implies that the commandments are to be taught everywhere.[93] In his words, Loina stresses that, "Moses uses contrasting locative and temporal phrases to create a merism that expresses the totality of time and place to teach."[94] This suggests

[90] Andor and Quaye, "Wholistic Adventist Education and the Shema Creed (Deuteronomy 6," 25.

[91] Arnold M. Eisen 1951-, "Taking Hold of Deuteronomy," *Judaism* 47, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 323.

[92] Samuel, "The Shema as Foundational Verdict for God's People," 134-135.

[93] Ibid., 135.

[94] Ibid.

that the parents has the responsibility to teach their children everywhere and at all times possible. The above discussion affirms the active and significant function parents perform in the discipleship process. Family discipleship helps in inculcating the godly values and perpetuating moral principles in the children.

Accordingly, Deut 20:18 points out a different aspect of teaching. Moses says, "…that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God (Deut 20:18). This text underscores the protective function of teaching, aimed at preserving religious and cultural purity. The children of Israel are warned against adopting the practices of other nations, which could lead them away from their covenantal duties. So, teaching, in this context, serves as a precaution against religious and moral corruption. That is the reason for constantly warning the children to obey the Lord.

שׁמע. It is observed that the term שׁמע [95] appears frequently in the book of Deuteronomy[96] with varied meanings such as; "to hear" "to listen" "to obey" "to perceive" "to catch" "to comply", and "to fulfill."[97] Sacks notes that "shema, is the

[95] The focus here is on the word שׁמע. Other issues not related to the focus of the writing are not discussed. Meanwhile, there are other discussions on other aspect of *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9). For instance, Janzen discusses the significance of the word אֶחָד. He interpreted אֶחָד in relation to various parts of its biblical "co-text." For the details, see; J. Gerald Janzen, "On the Most Important Word in the Shema (Deuteronomy VI 4-5)," *Vetus Testamentum* 37, no. 3 (1987): 280–300, https://doi.org/10.2307/1517630. Also, K. Kohler, "Shema Yisroel: Origin and Purpose of Its Daily Recital," *Journal of Jewish Lore and Philosophy* 1, no. 3/4 (1919): 255–64. Nathan Macdonald addresses the issues surrounding the date of shema. See, Nathan MacDonald, "The Date of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6: 4–5)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 4 (2017): 765–82. He submits that Deut. 6:5 was not a late addition but an integral part of 6:4-9. Also, Kraut's argument centres on Deut. 6:4. He maintains that the key to understanding the syntax of Deut 6:4 lies simply in the fact that Moses' exhortation is couched in an AB//AC poetic structure, yielding a semantic meaning that is both simple and plainly defensible (i.e.ABC): "YHWH our God is one!" See; Judah Kraut, "Deciphering the Shema: Staircase Parallelism and the Syntax of Deuteronomy 6:4," *Vetus Testamentum* 61, no. 4 (2011): 582–602

[96] Cook, *Reading Deuteronomy: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 88.

[97] Ibid., 124, 125.

single most important word of the book; it occurs no less than ninety-two times."[98] The frequent occurrence of this verb and other related ones are chiastically demonstrated below:

A hear . . . do (5:27);
B fear . . . keep (5:29);
C teach . . . do (5:31);
D keep . . . do . . . turn aside . . . walk (5:32–33);
C´ learn . . . do (6:1);
B´ fear . . . keep (6:2);
A´ hear . . . keep . . . do (6:3).[99]

The repetition and flow of the above verbs show their interconnectedness and point out their significance and role in Moses discourse. As a matter of fact, in the book of Deuteronomy, the imperative verb שׁמע, holds deep theological, moral, and communal significance. Willoughby explains that שׁמע denotes a strong intention and sense of urgency in the speaker's attitude and not only represents the physical act of hearing but also a special plea to obedience.[100] In most of the usages of שׁמע in a qal imperative form, Moses calls the attention of the people and gives instructions as commanded by the LORD. The first occurrence of such שׁמע in Deuteronomy is in Deut 4:1, where it is followed by an extensive discussion on how to properly obey God's commands.[101] The second שׁמע appears in Deuteronomy 5:1, urging the Israelites to listen to the statutes and judgments being presented, again accompanied by detailed explanations. Also, in Deuteronomy 6:4, the third שׁמע elaborates on the commandments, specifically focusing on the exclusivity of God and presenting

[98] Sacks, "Deuteronomy," 10.

[99] Michael A. Grisanti, Tremper Longman III, and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, Revised (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 186.

[100] Willoughby, "A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-19," 76.

[101] Nichol, "Hearken," 976.

numerous requirements that follow this central commandment. Further, Deut 9:1 introduces the fourth שׁמע which emphasizes that Israel's success and survival are due to God's compassion, not their own merits, as they prepare to cross the Jordan.

However, the fifth שׁמע found in Deut 20:3 shifts to the topic of warfare, including rules on deferment for certain men, the treatment of defeated populations, and the preservation of food-bearing trees in enemy territories. Finally, the sixth שׁמע in Deuteronomy 27:9 highlights a significant declaration, marking the Israelites as the people of the Lord their God on that day.[102]

More so, in most of its occurrences, שׁמע appears in connection with the commandments. For instance, in Deut 5:1, Moses summons all the Israelites to hear the commandments. They are not merely called to hear but to an active obedience.[103] By summoning the entire nation of Israel to hear, he underscores the communal aspect of the covenant. Deut 5:25, 27 reveals the fear entertained by the nation of Israel to hear the voice of the LORD directly therefore asking Moses to act as the intermediary.[104] So, this context shows that hearing the LORD's commands through his spokesperson is necessary for maintaining their covenantal relationship with the LORD.

Furthermore, the popular passage in Deuteronomy (6:4-9) begins with the word שְׁמַע and gives it its name. Moses declares, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד ("Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." Deut 6:4) This declaration seems to be the foundation of Israelite's monotheism and communal identity. Hence, the

[102] Charles D Isbell, "Deuteronomy's Definition of Jewish Learning," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (April 2003): 112-115.

[103] Richard S. Hess, *The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 149.

[104] Nichol, "Why should we die?," 972.

command to “hear” calls for unflinching attention and response. It summarizes the call to exclusive devotion to Yahweh. Contextually, hearing here is connected to loving and obeying God, integrating belief and action (6:5).

In Deut 9:1, Moses again commands, the people “Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you.” This admonition frames the conquest of Canaan as an act of divine fulfillment. Likewise, before a battle, the priest instructs the soldiers to “hear” and trust in God’s deliverance (Deut 20:3). In these contexts, hearing functions as a call to be courageous and trust in the LORD’s promises, which is important for the community’s victory and survival.

More so, the verb שׁמע is used in a judicial context. Example is present in Deut 17:13 which states, “And all the people shall hear and fear and not act presumptuously again.” (Deut 17:13)[105] Similarly, Deut 18:16 refers to the people’s request at Horeb to hear God’s voice mediated through a prophet. Deuteronomy 19:20 and 21:21 stress that hearing about just punishments will instill fear and discourage wrongdoing.[106]

Moses in his speech affirms that the children of Israel would be destroyed if they would not obey (שׁמע) the voice of the LORD (8:20).[107] Their blessing is conditioned on their obedience to the commandment (11:13 cf. 11:27-28; 13:8; 15:5).[108] Besides, Moses lists what it entails to follow or walk after the LORD

[105] Nichol, 1013.

[106] Ibid., 1022.

[107] Barrett, “Deuteronomy 4 and the Coercion of Israel,” 9.

[108] Willoughby, “A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-19,” 73.

namely; “fear him,” “keep his commandment,” “obey him,” “serve him,” and “cling to him.” (13:4). This encapsulates the essence of discipleship.

אחר הלך (To walk after/follow). The Hebrew word אַחַר has diverse meanings. It could mean “behind”, “afterwards”, or “after.”[109] The phrase אחר הלך is used idiomatically to mean, “to go after,” “follow,” (2 Kgs 13:2; 23:3; Isa 65:2).[110] As a figurative expression, אחר “follow” is used once in the prologue of Deut 1:1-4:44 (Deut 4:3), three times in “The Command” of Deut 6–11 (Deut 6:14; 8:19; 11:28), twice in the “Statutes and Judgments” of Deut 12–26 (Deut 13:2, 4), and one final time in the blessings of Deut 28:1–14 (Deut 28:14).[111] For the covenant people, following the LORD connotes obedience and trust (Num 14:24; Josh 14:8). It also implies keeping the laws of God (Deut 33:3-4; 1 Kgs 14:8).[112]

The phrase אחר הלך in the book of Deuteronomy is ingrained with deep implications for the Israelites’ relationship as Yahweh’s disciples. This phrase contains the concepts of loyalty, obedience, and the pursuit of divine guidance. Deuteronomy 5:33 instructs, “You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.” From this text, it seems that to “follow” the LORD implies “to walk” in His ways and keep His commandments. The

[109] This particle functions as adverb, preposition, and can also be used figuratively or idiomatically. As an adverb of place, it means “behind.” (Examples Gen 22:11), as an adverb of time, it means “afterward” (e.g., Gen 10:18; 30:21); as a preposition of place, it means, “behind” and “after” (Exod 3:1; 11:5; 2 Kgs. 11:6;2 Kgs. 2:9; Isa 57:8), and as a preposition of time, it means “after” (Gen 9:28, Lev 25:15).

[110] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 29.

[111] Floyd, “The Concept of Discipleship in Deuteronomy: Literary and Lexical Insights into Following YHWH,” 58.

[112] Luke L. Keefer Jr., “Follow” in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 263.

passage affirms that following the LORD's way is essential for life, prosperity, and longevity in the Promised Land. It marks the foundation for understanding following as an act of obedience that brings about divine blessings.

Additionally, in Deut 10:12, Moses asks, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." This verse expands the concept of following to include fear, love, and service to the LORD with one's whole being.[113] Following God here means a holistic devotion that permeates every aspect of life, integrating reverence, affection, and active service into a unified expression of faithfulness.

Deuteronomy 13:4a commands, אַחֲרֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם תֵּלֵכוּ (You shall walk after the LORD your God). The phrase is rendered as "walk after" (e.g., ESV, NKJV, etc.) and "follow" (NAS, NIV, etc.). Nonetheless, the text seems to underscore exclusive loyalty to Yahweh rejecting any influence from false prophets or idolaters (v.5). 4b says, "… and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him." The prohibition against following other gods is so emphatic that it demands a level of loyalty to YHWH that surpasses even the closest family ties (Deuteronomy 13:7-10).[114] In Deuteronomy, the phrase "walk after" occurs frequently in the context of prohibition to follow other gods (See, Deut 6:14; 8:19; 11:16, 28; 13:2-3; 28:14). The injunction seems to prevent the Israelites from negative discipleship. Also, it highlights an extensive framework for fidelity which

[113] W. Ross Blackburn, "Keep Them from Idols," *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 30, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 32.

[114] Haber, "God, Israel and Covenant," 137.

includes fear, obedience, attentive listening, service, and unswerving attachment to God.

Likewise, Deut 26:17 says, "You have declared today that the LORD is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules and will obey his voice." This reveals a formal confession of the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh. In view of this, following the LORD signifies an intentional, public commitment to live according to the LORD's commandments. It marks a reconfirmation of the covenant, emphasizing the collective decision of the Israelites to align their lives with Yahweh's injunctions and maintain their identity as His covenant people. Nonetheless, in the book of Deuteronomy, the negative sense of following is seen. Deut 6:14 says, "You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you." (cf. Deut 11:28; 13:2). By prohibiting the children of Israel from following other gods, conversely, the LORD calls them to follow him.

In comparison to the New Testament, the word ἀκολουθέω has the idiomatic sense of the Hebrew אחר הלך. This Greek word means, "follow." In the New Testament, it seems that following does not always imply being a disciple. When the Synoptic Gospels mention crowds following Jesus (e.g., Matt 4:25; 8:1; 21:9; Mark 10:32), they use the term in a neutral sense. However, the word gains special significance when referring to individuals. In Jesus' usage, it often appears as a command, particularly when he calls disciples to follow him.[115] Hence, the call to follow in both Testaments calls people to service, loyalty to God, and obedience.

[115] Verbrugge, "ἀκολουθέω," 189.

אהב (love). One crucial mark of discipleship is love and in Deuteronomy, love[116] for the LORD is portrayed as an essential part of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and children of Israel, which requires; commitment, exclusive devotion, and a reflection of divine love in human actions. Love for God is in relation to obedience to His commandments (Deut 5:10).[117] In his word, Fuhrmann Justin states that,

> Love is more than emotion and feeling; rather, it concerns covenant faithfulness and loyalty to Yahweh through obedience to the commands,….When modified by the expressions "heart," "soul," and "might," it emphasizes in the strongest possible terms the total commitment and whole-hearted devotion to be shown towards YHWH.[118]

Willoughby also says,

> This love is not mere lip-service. The Deuteronomist clearly states the implications of this love. Israel is to fear God (4:10; 5:29; 6:24; 8:6; 10:12; 14:23; 17:19; 28:58; 31:13), to cleave to him (10:20; 11:22;13:4; 30:20), to serve him (10:12; 11:13), to obey his voice (30:20), to walk in his ways (10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16) and to keep his commandments (5:10; 7:9). Such fidelity is motivated by Israel's gratitude for what Yahweh did and by a desire for her own well-being (4:40; 5:16, 29; 6:3, 18; 12:25, 28; 22:7).[119]

אהב is not only an emotional or abstract concept but a visible commitment demonstrated through faithful adherence to God's commandments. This covenantal love, reciprocated by God's steadfast love, establishes a relationship based on mutual fidelity and ethical living.

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[116] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 12-13. The Hebrew term, אָהַב is translated love. It could be human love to human object (Eccl. 3:8), such as; man's love to woman (Gen 24:67), woman's love to man (1 Sam 18:20), of love of slave to master (Exo 21:5), love to neighbor (Lev 19:18). It could be love of appetite, object food (Gen 27:4, 9, 14); and drink (Prov. 21:17). There is also love to God (Exod. 20:6; Deut 5:10; 6:5; 7:9); of divine love to individual men (Deut 4:37; 2 Sam 12:24), to people of Israel (Deut 7:8, 13; 23:6; Hos 3:1; 9:15).

[117] Jeffrey Audirsch, "Historical Background: The Book of Deuteronomy," n.d., https://www.academia.edu/2583364/Historical_Background_The_Book_of_Deuteronomy.

[118] Fuhrmann, "Deuteronomy 6-8 and the History of Interpretation," 58.

[119] Willoughby, "A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-19," 81.

The term אהב as it occurs in Deut 6:5 refers to people's love for God. This word appears about twenty-four times in the Old Testament, 13 times outside of Deuteronomy (Exod 20:6; Josh 22:5; 23:11; Judg 5:31; 1 Kgs 3:3; Neh 1:5; Ps 18:2; 31:24; Ps 91:14; 97:10; 116:1; 145:20; Dan 9:4) and 11 times in Deuteronomy (Deut 6:5; 7:9 ; 10:12; 11:1,13,22; 13:4,19:9; 30:6,16,20). In Deuteronomy, it is basically employed to condemn the love of other gods and encourage love for Yahweh. Moses calls the Israelites to have the right attitude of love towards God.[120] The command to love the LORD in Deut 6:5 encapsulates the obligations of Yahweh's disciples in the covenant. The bond of love involves - to fear the LORD (Deut 4:10; 5:59; 6:24; 8:6; 10:12; 14:23; 17:19; 28:58; 31;13), to serve the LORD (Deut 10:12; 11:13), to cling to the Lord (10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20) and - to obey the LORD and walk in His ways (Deut 19:9; 30:16; 13:3–5) as established in Deuteronomy.[121] Similarly, Mckay opines that with regards to man's proper relationship to God, אהב always bears the implication of duty or obligation.[122] Commenting on Deut 6:5, Kohler posits that "the principle of love as self-surrender comprises God and humanity."[123] In the New Testament, Jesus refers to Deut 6:5 as the foremost and great commandment (Mark. 12:30 and Matt 22:37-38.)[124]

Furthermore, Deut 7:7 and 7:9 shows that Yahweh's love for Israel is rooted in His sovereign choice rather than their merit. These passages highlight God's initiating

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[120] Samuel, "The Shema as Foundational Verdict for God's People." 131-132.

[121] Ibid., 132.

[122] McKay, "Man's Love for God in Deuteronomy and the Father/Teacher -- Son/Pupil Relationship," 426.

[123] Kohler, "Shema Yisroel." 264. See also; Jacqueline E. Lapsley, "Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2003): 350–69.

[124] Samuel, "The Shema as Foundational Verdict for God's People," 131.

love, which calls for a response of love and obedience from Israel.[125] Verses 12 and 13 further underscores that Israel's love for God would lead to blessings and prosperity, reinforcing the covenantal dynamic of mutual love and faithfulness.

Also, Moses asks,

> And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you,
> but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him,
> to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.
> (Deut 10:12).

This verse connects love for God with fear, walking in His ways, and service, presenting a holistic approach to devotion. Verse 15 reaffirms the LORD's special love for Israel: "Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day." (Deut 10:15)[126] And verse 19 calls for Israel to imitate God's love by loving the aliens, thus extending divine love into social ethics.

According to Deena Grant, the Deuteronomic directive to love Yahweh is customarily followed by an instruction to engage in specific actions such as; to serve Him (Deut 10:12; 11:13), to observe His laws and statutes (Deut 11:1), and to love walk in His ways (Deut 11:22).[127] This implies that Yahweh's disciples demonstrate their love through service and obedience. Further on this, in Deut 11:1, Moses reiterates the inseparable connection between love for God and obedience to His commandments. Verse 13 stresses this by promising rain and harvests as rewards for loving and serving God wholeheartedly. These verses underscore the reciprocal nature

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[125] Jr. Walter C. Kaiser, "The Book of Deuteronomy," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

[126] Jacqueline E. Lapsley, "Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2003): 361.

[127] Deena E Grant, "How to Love God: Deuteronomy, Early Rabbinic Literature, and Gospel Texts," *The Journal of Interreligious Studies* 26 (2019): 61.

of covenant faithfulness, where divine blessings are contingent upon Israel's love and obedience.[128] Succinctly, Bill Arnold asserts that love is the only logical response to the character of Yahweh.[129] And Paul Hanson asserts that "when Israel responded to the love of God in worship, it found the motivation from which righteousness and compassion alone could enter the life of community and individual."[130]

Thematic Coding Frame

The following themes are discussed in relation to the discipleship concept in Deut 4:44-26:19.

Keep the LORD's Commandments. Frequently, Moses employs the word שׁמר (keep, watch, preserve, take heed) in his speech to the children of Israel. Being exhortative, he often pleads with the new generation of Israel to take heed or keep the way of the LORD.

In most instances of the Hebrew verb שׁמר in Deuteronomy, it relates to the observance or keeping of the commandments. For example, Moses instructs, "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you" (Deut 5:12; 15). He explicitly states, "You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you" (Deut 6:17; 8:2, 6; 10:13; 11:1). Similarly, following or walking after the LORD is also described as keeping His commandments (Deut 13:4; 26:17-18) which is the essence of discipleship.

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[128] Thompson, "Book of Deuteronomy," 274.

[129] Bill T. Arnold, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 142.

[130] Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*, 175.

On the other hand, the scripture shows that when the LORD himself is the subject of the verb שׁמר, it happens in the context of covenant relationship between God and Israel. The LORD keeps (שׁמר) his end of the covenant. Deut 7:9 says, "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations." Also, those who keep the commandments experience God's mercy (Deut 5:10), success (Deut 5:29), longevity (Deut 6:2), and prosperity (Deut 11:8).

Moses equally stresses the need to keep all the commandments without an exception.[131] The use of כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה underscores total devotion and commitment. Moses say, וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם (You shall therefore keep the whole commandment that I command you today (Deut 11:8; 19:9; 26:18). The LORD requires complete loyalty or devotion from his disciples. They are to keep the commandments of God as a response to his love (See also; Matt 19:17; John 14:15, 23; 15:10)

Lastly, שׁמר is used to indicate guarding oneself. In Deut 23:9, Moses instructs, "when you are encamped against your enemies, then you shall keep yourself from every evil thing." Niphal perfect is used here. This could mean being protected, being on one's guard, or being careful (cf. Deut 4:15).

Covenant. Versluis affirms that "the core of Deuteronomy, chapters 5-26, is framed by a narrative of covenants."[132] He stresses that the book is "the narrative as

[131] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012), 382.

[132] Versluis, "Covenant in Deuteronomy," 79.

well as the document of a covenant between YHWH and Israel."[133] And as earlier established, the covenant relationship between the LORD and the children of Israel is a predominant theme in the book of Deuteronomy. One sees this view across the book and this section considers some of these passages (E.g., Deut 5:2-3; 7:2, 9, 12; 8:18; 9:9, 11, 15; 10:8; and 17:2). It is noted that the term ברית "in the Old Testament always related God to man."[134] Hence, "the OT covenant promises are bilateral in nature: God's commitment to Israel and Israel's obligation to be obedient to Yahweh."[135]

Deuteronomy 5:2-3 says, "the LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today." This text is vital to the understanding of the covenant relationship between God and Israel.[136] It emphasizes several key aspects of this relationship. First, by affirming that the covenant was made "with who are all of us here alive today," Moses stresses its immediate relevance to the new generation. He proves that the covenant is not only a historical treaty with past generations but a living and active commitment with the current generation. So, "the covenant was never simply a past event, because Yahweh (as the living covenantal Lord) is the suzerain of every succeeding Israelite generation."[137] Consequently, the covenant

[133] Ibid.

[134] Cory M. Marsh and C. A. El Cajon, "A Dynamic Relationship: Christ, the Covenants, and Israel," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 30 (2019): 263.

[135] Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship*, 101.

[136] Mirosław Łanoszka, "The Relationship between God and Israel as a Biblical Portrayal of the Bond between God and the Person in the Light of Deuteronomy 1:1–4:43," *The Person and the Challenges. The Journal of Theology, Education, Canon Law and Social Studies Inspired by Pope John Paul II* 4 (February 18, 2014): 9, https://doi.org/10.15633/pch.658.

[137] Grisanti, Longman III, and Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 159.

becomes personally relevant to every Israelite present. Besides, in the covenant, all members of the community, irrespective of their status or role, is part of this divine agreement. This inclusivity promotes a sense of collective responsibility and unity among the Israelites.

Deuteronomy 5:2 starts with the declaration that "The LORD our God made a covenant with us." This emphasizes that the idea of the covenant emanates from the LORD. This divine initiative is foundational, as it underlines the LORD's sovereignty and mercy in choosing Israel as His covenant people.[138] The call to discipleship emanates from the LORD. That call is necessary as it is foundational to discipleship process. It is the beginning of a lifelong experience and relationship with the Master. Whereas the covenant is made with the new generation, it also links to the historical events at Horeb (Sinai), where the covenant was first established. This connection establishes continuity and reminds the Israelites of their shared history and heritage. This forms the pattern of discipleship.

To maintain purity in their covenant relationship with the LORD, Israel is forbidden from making a covenant with the people in Canaan (Deut 7:2). As long as Israel demonstrates love and obedience to the commandments of the LORD, Deut 7:9, affirms that Yahweh would keep covenant with them forever (cf. Deut 7:12; 8:18). Also, Deut 8:18 points out the significance of acknowledging God's role in their prosperity as part of the covenant relationship. It is noteworthy that whereas the children of Israel rebels against God with the golden calf, God still renews his

[138] Jonathan Sacks explains that in the ancient Near East, covenants were a common practice. However, a covenant between a deity and a group of people was unprecedented and unimaginable. It was beyond belief that a god would limit His powers for the sake of righteousness and justice. The idea that an all-powerful deity would form an agreement with any human group, especially the most powerless, was inconceivable. See; Jonathan Sacks, "Deuteronomy: Covenant Society," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 51, no. 3 (2019): 8.

covenant showing his kindness and readiness to continue the relationship with them (Deut 9:9,11,15).

However, Deuteronomy 17:2-5 address the seriousness of covenant violations. This passage describes the approach of dealing with idolatry and other breaches of the covenant.[139] Anyone found guilty of breaking the stipulations of the covenant is to be stoned to death, emphasizing the importance of communal integrity and faithfulness to God's commands.

Worship God. Recognition of Yahweh as the only God (Deut 6:4) who deserves to be served and worshiped is entrenched in the covenant stipulations (Exod. 20:3-4). Whereas Yahweh is the only God, there are other gods being worshiped by other nations. Therefore, in Moses' speech, he warns the generation that is preparing to enter the Promised Land against worshiping or serving those gods. He instructs, "You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Deut 5:9). The verb חוה could be translated as "bow down," "pay homage," or "do obeisance." It seems synonymous to שָׁחָה which means "worship." Deut 5:9 uses both חוה and the verb עָבַד to emphasize his point. עָבַד (Qal) means "to work," "to serve," "to serve as subject, "to serve God" "to make oneself a servant (Niphal). Hence, in Canaan, the children of Israel are warned not to worship or serve as subjects to any graven images (5:8). Moses states the consequence of worshiping and serving other gods: "And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. (Deut 8:19).

[139] Łanoszka, "The Relationship between God and Israel as a Biblical Portrayal of the Bond between God and the Person in the Light of Deuteronomy 1," 13.

Additionally, serving only Yahweh seems to be a requirement of the covenant relationship (10:12, 20; 11:13; 13:14; 16:13). Israel is warned of the danger of serving other gods: "they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods" (7:4; 16). Besides, serving other gods would provoke God's anger and lead to destruction (7:4). Discipleship requires a wholehearted devotion and commitment to God. God's followers have the call to worship only him. This distinguishes them from followers of heathen gods.

Fellowship. As earlier established, fellowship is a basic concept in biblical discipleship which encompasses communal relationships, shared responsibilities, and commitment to God. It is noted that the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and children of Israel functions as the key to understanding fellowship as a discipleship term (Deut 4:44 -26:19).

Apart from personal faithfulness, discipleship in Deuteronomy also involves a communal responsibility. The laws in Deuteronomy 12-26 highlight different parts of communal living that affirm fellowship. Injunctions regarding justice, worship, economic practices, and social relationships affirms that Israel's covenant with the Lord goes beyond every facet of their lives. For example, in Deuteronomy 15, every seven years, debts are to be cancelled. This would promote economic fellowship among Israelites.[140] Likewise, Deuteronomy 24 highlights laws protecting the vulnerable such as the hired servant, the poor, etc so that the community remains a place of righteousness and mutual support.[141] This emphasizes the horizontal dimension of fellowship.

[140] Ibid., 198.

[141] Wright, 265.

Furthermore, worship plays a significant role in promoting fellowship in the book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 12, worship seems to be centralized. The children of Israel are directed to one place of worship, which ensures unity and purity in their relationship with their God. “But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go.” (Deut 12:5) It is observed that the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles in Deuteronomy 16 are communal celebrations that strengthen spiritual fellowship by connecting the people together to remember God’s acts of deliverance and provision.[142] These assemblies promote a sense of shared identity and mission, emphasizing the discipleship principle that faith is nourished within the community.[143] This horizontal dimension of discipleship helps to strengthen disciples faith, encourage love, and sustain unity.

In the light of the above, genuine fellowship among Yahweh’s disciples requires ethical conduct (Deut 19-26). The injunctions concerning honesty, fairness in business, sexual purity, and social justice reveal that righteousness is essential to maintaining godly fellowship. Deuteronomy 10:12-22 summarizes this ethical framework, calling Israel to fear God, walk in His ways, love Him, and serve Him.[144] These principles ensure that fellowship is not external but is embedded in a life that reflects God’s holiness.

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[142] Jeffrey K. Salkin, *Shofetim (Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9) and Haftarah (Isaiah 51:12-52:12) : The JPS B’nai Mitzvah Torah Commentary*, The JPS B’nai Mitzvah Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018), 153–54, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2093766&site=ehost-live.

[143] Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*, 501.

[144] Wright, 156.

Fear God. The injunction "fear God" is a recurring instruction in the book of Deuteronomy, where it is repeatedly echoed as pivotal to the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people. The Hebrew term יָרֵא has diverse meaning which includes "to fear," "to revere," "to be afraid," "to stand in awe," "reverence," "honour," or "respect." In some of its usages in Deuteronomy, יָרֵא is used to mean not only being afraid but it entails a deep reverence and awe for Yahweh, which culminates in obedience and loyalty to him by his followers.

Also, the LORD desires that his covenant people will have hearts that fear him which is linked to a profound obedience that brings blessings (Deut 5:29). It is observed that to fear God is associated directly with obeying His commandments with the promise of a prolonged and prosperous life (Deut 6:2, 24; 10:12) and exclusive devotion and service to him (Deut 6:13). Moses links fearing God to obedience. He says:

A. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him

B. and keep his commandments and obey his voice,

C. and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. (Deut 13:4).

So, walking after the LORD and fearing him will be demonstrated by "keeping his commandments and obeying his voice. The first (A) and the last line (C) seem to be parallel. Whereas the second line (B) holds the two together affirming what it means to walk after the LORD and serve him.

Alternatively, יָרֵא is used in a way which connotes "to be afraid." In Deut 11:25, Moses says, "No one will be able to stand against you. The LORD your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go." Here יָרֵא is linked with the idea that God's power will make other nations to be afraid of the nation of Israel, contributing to their protection and success.

Although, in governance and legal contexts, Moses affirms that fear engendered by witnessing justice serves as a deterrent against disobedience. (Deut 17:13; cf. 13:11; 19:20; 21:21)

So, fear of God is a basic principle that shapes the relationship between the LORD and Israel, making sure that the Israelites live in a manner that reflects God's holiness and justice. As a result of the fear of God, the Israelites are motivated to adhere to divine laws, shun evil, and encouraged to trust in God's protection and guidance.[145] This profound respect and reverence for God strengthens the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his disciples.

Bearing Witness. The concept of witnessing is firmly established in Deuteronomy 4:44–26:19. Moses' teachings in this passage are centered on the need to uphold covenantal loyalty, obey Yahweh's instructions, and pass on the divine truth to future generations. According to a discipleship paradigm, giving witness involves accepting and sharing God's message in both words and deeds so that others might come to know him. The children of Israel fulfill this duty in a variety of ways.

First, living in obedience to the Lord's command serves as a witness to the nations around them.

Deuteronomy stresses that Israelites are to obey their God's commands which serves as a testimony to surrounding nations (Deut 4:5-8). So, their obedience demonstrates wisdom and understanding, showcasing them as a people who walk in relationship with the one true God. For disciples in the modern time, bearing witness equally connotes living in faithful obedience to Jesus' teachings (John 14:15).

[145] Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 15.

Through this, disciples' actions and conduct will reflect the Lord's holiness, making the divine truth visible to the people.

Besides, while Moses was restating the commandments, he admonishes the children of Israel to observe the Sabbath with their servants and the sojourners in their gate (Deut 5:14). This provides the opportunity of living out the commandment before the non-Israelites and including them in their observance.

Also, Moses enjoins the Israelites to recall Yahweh's mighty works and to teach them to their children (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Forgetting God's works leads to unfaithfulness, while deliberate remembrance strengthens faith. Hence, discipleship entails bearing witness by continually reminding ourselves and others of God's faithfulness. Teaching God's word, sharing testimonies, and mentoring others are ways to pass on divine truth.

Not only this, but Israel, Yahweh's disciples, are also often reminded that they are the chosen of God, set apart for His purposes (Deut 7:6-9; 26:18-19). Israel's identity as Yahweh's chosen serves as a witness to the world. The New Testament also establishes the unique identity of God's disciples. They are called to live as a "holy nation." (1Pet 2:9), reflecting God's kingdom values.

Another significant way Israel is called to bear witness is through act of kindness and compassion. For instance, Moses charges the people to be generous and care for the less privileged (Deut 15:7-11), showing God's justice and compassion. Thus, caring for the poor becomes a means of witnessing Yahweh's character.

Membership and Election of the People of God. In his word, J.G. McConville posits that "Deuteronomy can be read as the strongest statement of Israel's election, an argument for Israel's separateness from and superiority over all

other nations."[146] Israel becomes a member of God's family by a divine choice. This divine choice articulates the unique relationship between God and the children of Israel, establishing their special status and responsibilities as the LORD's chosen people (Deut 4:20; 7:6–7; 9:26–29; 10:15; 14:2; 21:8; 26:17–18; 29:13). Block notes that, Israel is referred to as "your people" (Deut 9:26, 29; 21:8; 26:15) and "his people" (Deut 29:12; 32:9, 36, 50; 33:3, 7) by Moses on many occasions. In addition, he uses several phrases that emphasize Israel's unique bond with YHWH. They are his "special possession" (Deut 4:20; 9:26); his "allotted possession" (Deut 32:9), a "holy/sanctified people belonging to YHWH" (Deut 28:9; 26:19;21,14:2;7:6), his "chosen people," chosen from among all the peoples of the earth (Deut 10:15;7–7:6;4:37,14:2), his "sons" (Deut 14:1 ;8:5 ;1:31), and his "treasured people" (Deut 26:18 ;14:2 ;7:6, cf. 1Pet 2:9–10). YHWH selected Israel for this special status.[147]

The selection of children of Israel is rooted in the covenant the LORD makes with their fathers which has everlasting implications on them (Gen 17:7). The covenant with Abraham sets forth the beginning of a special relationship where the LORD promises to be the God of Abraham's descendants, establishing them as His people. This covenantal relationship is eternal and establish the perpetual bond between God and the chosen people.

However, Israel's chosen status is conditioned upon their perpetual loyalty and obedience to God's covenant. It also involves a call to holy living and service, differentiating Israel from other nations and assigning them a priestly role (Exod.

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[146] J. G. McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology (Genesis - Kings)*, ed. David J.A. Clines, Philip R. Davies, and David M. Gunn (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 76.

[147] Block, *The Triumph of Grace Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes*, 103.

19:5-6). This selection is founded on God's love and fulfillment of promises the LORD makes to their fathers (Exod. 6:7; Deut 4:37). Willoughby affirms that, "election was not an automatic guarantee of the continued prosperity of Israel. It required an unremitting worship of Yahweh and a loyalty to his covenant offer (Deut 6:1-3).[148]

So, Deuteronomy 7:6 states, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession." This choice is motivated by divine love.[149] Similarly, Deut 14:2 says, for you are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession." The passages emphasize the holiness required of Israel owing to their chosen status. Hence, being God's treasured possession implies a responsibility to live according to His way and reflect His holiness.[150]

Lastly, Moses reaffirms Israel's status and reiterates their duty to obey the LORD's commandments as God's chosen (Deut 26:18-19). Chennattu remarks that "the election serves as a motivation for observing the laws" (see Deut 14:21).[151] So, being chosen by God brings both privileges and responsibilities, requiring Israel to live in a way that reflects God's character and purposes.

The distinction between Yahweh's Followers and the Idol Worshipers. A clear distinction is established in the book of Deuteronomy, between Yahweh's followers, that is, the Israelites and idol worshipers in Canaan. The first clear mark of

[148] Willoughby, "A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-19," 76.

[149] Barnette, 13.

[150] Ibid., 14.

[151] Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship*, 59–60.

distinction is that Yahweh's followers are bound by a covenant, which is central to their identity. Deut 6:4-5 states, "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." This text seems to express "the essence of Old Testament faith: one God, one Lord, one love."[152] The monotheistic nature of Israel's religion seems to be rooted in this text. Thus, these texts emphasize the exclusive worship of Yahweh and a complete devotion to Him. "God wants an exclusive commitment of love, a love backed up by everything one has within oneself."[153]

Also, in Deuteronomy, Moses often emphasizes the need for the Israelites to be holy and separate from the practices of the surrounding nations.[154] Deut 7:6 states, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession." The children of Israel are called to be distinctive from the surrounding nations, they are called to holiness which involves not merely moral and ritual purity but also a distinct religious identity.[155]

Lastly, idolatry in any form is a major point of distinction between Yahweh's followers and others. Moses instructs the Israelites, "Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and

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[152] Christopher J. H. Wright, "Reading the Old Testament Missionally," in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, ed. Michael W. Goheen (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 117.

[153] Cook, *Reading Deuteronomy: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 112.

[154] Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*, 172.

[155] Wright, "Reading the Old Testament Missionally," 119.

wipe out their names from those places. You must not worship the LORD your God in their way." (Deut 12:2-4) This prohibition implies that other gods are unrecognized, and that Yahweh's worship is incomparable to the idolatrous practices of other nations.

From the analysis above, it is observed that the commandments in the book of Deuteronomy seem to be presented not only as a set of legal stipulations but as an essential part of a covenantal relationship. The aim of the Deuteronomistic laws is holistic, covering the moral (Deut 5:6-21; 24:17-18), spiritual (Deut 6:4-5; 12:4-5) and communal aspects of life (Deut 14:28-29; 16:13-15). The emphasis on למד (learning and teaching) perceives instruction as relational. Learning is associated with the covenant between Yahweh and the children of Israel, portraying obedience not out of coercion but out of love and respect for God (Deut 6:4-9). Another dimension is that teaching is presented as generational. The Torah instructs parents to diligently teach their children, creating an intergenerational structure for discipleship (Deut 11:18 -21).[156]

It is also interesting to note that the Deuteronomic law shares some correlations with other ancient Near Eastern legal collections, such as the Code of Hammurabi, the Hittite Laws, and the Middle Assyrian Laws, but notable differences distinguish it, underscoring the unique nature of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy. One of the similarities is the casuistic and apodictic Laws. Like other legal codes, Deuteronomy includes both case-based laws (e.g., Deut 22:1–4) and categorical commands (e.g., the Ten Commandments in Deut 5). Also, both Deuteronomy and ancient Near Eastern laws focus on sustaining social order,

[156] Hess, *The Old Testament*, 147.

protecting vulnerable groups (e.g., fatherless, widows and orphans), and resolving conflicts.[157] Another example is the Eshnunna Code and the biblical laws which have parallel laws concerning animals (Ex. 21:35).[158]

However, unlike other law codes, Deuteronomy is ingrained in a covenantal structure. The laws are not only societal statutes, but divine instructions given in the context of a covenantal relationship with Yahweh.[159] This relational dynamic transform obedience into an act of discipleship. Besides, Deuteronomy emphasizes an equality in the application of the law. For instance, kings are confined to the same law as their subject (Deut 17:18 - 20), unlike many ancient Near Eastern laws that raised rulers above their subjects.

Another distinguishing feature of the Deuteronomistic law is the clear and direct call to learn, teach, and meditate on the law (Deut 6:7; 11:19). This seems to be absent from other ancient legal collections. This focus on internalization and discipleship via teaching sets Deuteronomy apart as an educational model. Also, Deuteronomy incorporates legal instruction with moral and theological commands. For example, laws concerning the treatment of aliens (Deut 10:19) are grounded in Israel's personal experience of being foreigners in Egypt, associating ethical behaviour with spiritual identity.

Hence, the distinctive characteristics of Deuteronomy's method of discipleship provide ageless principles pertinent to contemporary faith communities.

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[157] Samuel Greengus, *Laws in the Bible and in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the Ancient Near East* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 13.

[158] "Mosaic and Ancient Near Eastern Laws," *Quartz Hill School of Theology*, n.d., 1, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwirl6KbyPKKAxVXT0EAHZ9gAhIQFnoECBYQAQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.theology.edu%2Fegypt3.htm&usg=AOvVaw3n3C05DvnSXkozifnzSIJt&opi=89978449.

[159] Ibid.

Deuteronomy's incorporation of learning, teaching, and practicing the laws shows that discipleship is about integrating the values of the kingdom and not only about intellectual knowledge.[160] Contemporary discipleship needs to also center on character formation, ethical living, and active participation in community life. The stress on teaching children (Deut 6:7) affirms the significance of deliberate, intergenerational discipleship. Likewise, Christians today are required to fucus attention on family-based and multigenerational methods to nurture spiritual growth.

Discipleship Language

Deut 4:44-26:19 forms the larger portion of the structure employed in this study. Although the term תַּלְמִיד (disciple) does not appear in any part of the sections, the various verbs used, implicitly suggest that the act of discipleship is entrenched in the book of Deuteronomy.

First, in this section, Moses repeatedly uses the verb למד. The frequent recurring of this verb underscores its significance in Moses' discourse. Learning of the way of the LORD helps Yahweh's followers to know him intimately. Likewise, this idea of learning from the LORD continues in the New Testament. Jesus uses the verb μανθάνω (to learn, to increase in knowledge) when he invites his disciples to learn of him (Matt 11:29). Learning from the master is important in discipleship. In Deuteronomy, the Israelites are admonished not to learn the idolatrous ways and practices of the surrounding nations (Deut 18:9).

The verb למד is also used in piel form severally to mean "teach." Moses shows that teaching is a divine mandate (Deut 5:31). He teaches as the mouthpiece of the LORD. Moses teaches all the instructions of the LORD. This is to ensure that

[160] Malan Nel, "Discipleship: The Priority of the 'Kingdom and His Righteousness,'" *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73 (April 21, 2017): 2, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i4.4583.

Israel's conduct is in accordance with the way of the LORD. As earlier noticed, Moses is the subject of most of the occurrences of the למד which implies that he is authorized to teach. To make disciples, the master needs to teach his followers/disciples. Thus, in the New Testament, Jesus Christ teaches his disciples and equally commissions them to teach as they also make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19-20). In the same way, Moses teaches the children of Israel and they in turn are to teach and make disciples of their children first (Deut 6:4-9). Therefore, in a master-disciple relationship, teaching seems to be crucial. This is the same with Yahweh and his followers in the Old Testament. Discipleship involves being taught the ways of God and then living out those teachings in everyday life. In the light of the foregoing discussion, it appears that whereas the term תַּלְמִיד does not appear in the book of Deuteronomy, one may conclude that the children of Israel are Yahweh's disciples in that they are taught by the LORD through Moses, the way of the LORD as expressed in the Torah.

Another crucial word used by Moses which happens to be significant to the master-disciple relationship is שׁמע. This word is considered very important in the book of Deuteronomy.[161] Moses uses this verb to mean "hear," "Listen," or "obey." These nuances are inter-related and have implications on discipleship. שׁמע appears mostly in relation to the commandments. Moses invites the children of Israel to hear and listen to the commandment. The summons to hear the commandment calls for unflinching attention and active obedience (Deut 5:1).

Another implication of the verb שׁמע is that it relates to loving the LORD (Deut 6:4-5). So, as the Israelites hear the law, they respond with loving obedience.

[161] Cook, *Reading Deuteronomy: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 124-125.

Obedience to the stipulations of the covenant appears to be non-negotiable since disobedience brings destruction (Deut 8:20). As a matter of fact, their blessing is dependent on their obedience (Deut 11:13, 27-28; 13:8; 15:5).

The word שׁמע plays a vital role in discipleship. A true disciple listens to the instructions of the master and obeys them. Moses emphasizes this point (Deut 13:4). Jesus, as the Master Teacher upholds this element of discipleship. Emphatically, he says, "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John15:14) and "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15) Love for Jesus is by keeping his commandment (John 14:21, 23; 15:10). So, what it requires to be Yahweh's followers or disciples in the Old Testament appears to remain the same in the New Testament as affirmed in Jesus' teaching.[162]

More so, in Deuteronomy, the phrase אחר הלך is used as an idiom to connote "follow" (NAS, NIV). Some English versions of the Bible (such as ESV and NKJV) use "walk after." As a chosen people, Israel is called to follow their God. This idea of "following" includes walking in God's way and obedience to his commandment (Deut 26:17). Categorically, Moses states that following the LORD is required by the children of Israel as chosen people (Deut 10:12). They are to follow only Yahweh exclusively and not any other deities (Deut 13:7-10; 11:28; 13:2). In comparison, the New Testament uses ἀκολουθέω which means "follow" and one of the usages implies walking after or following someone. So, Yahweh's followers are required to follow him.

Again, the basis of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel is love. It is observed that "the covenant rests on a two-dimensional love. First, love moves in the

[162] Grant, 3.

crucial instance from God to Israel and initiates the covenant. Second, love, therefore, flows from Israel to Yahweh and keeps the covenant in effect.[163] Given this, love plays a vital role in the covenant relationship between the LORD and the children of Israel. The Hebrew verb אהב is not merely an emotional concept but it entails tangible commitment which is displayed through obedience to Yahweh's commandment (Deut 6:5; 8:6; 19:9; 30:16). Love for God and obedience to his commandment are crucial. This love has both vertical and horizontal dimensions – love for God and love for man (Deut 6:5). Jesus in the New Testament alludes to Deut 6:5 and calls it the greatest commandment (Matt 22:37-38; Mark 12:30). This love seems to be the human's response to the character of God.[164] Jesus also emphasizes the significance of keeping his command as an act of love (John 14:15). So, in discipleship, love plays a crucial role.

Further, the Hebrew word בְּרִית (covenant) is pivotal to the understanding of discipleship in the Old Testament. Discipleship is based on the covenant that the LORD makes with Abraham and his descendants (Deut 5:2-3). Thus, the narratives in Deuteronomy chapters 5-26 revolve around covenant. Rekha opines that "the covenant metaphor (בְּרִית) is the principal image used in the OT to define the distinctive relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel."[165] It is observed that the covenant relationship bestows a unique status on the children of Israel as a "treasured possession" (Deut 14:2). In response, they are duty-bound to love the LORD, obey his commandment, and love their fellow man (Deut 6:4-5; 10:18; 15:11; 24:12-15). Hence, "the covenant relationship thus (sic) not only recalls God's

[163] Willoughby, "A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-19," 85.

[164] Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship*, 65.

[165] Ibid., 50.

promises but also demands loving and keeping the commandment of God in return for God's love"[166] and "faithfulness and obedience to God and his laws are an expression of love in return for God's love."[167]

In addition, the covenant relationship brings about serving and worshiping the LORD. Yahweh's followers are called to worship the LORD exclusively (Deut 5:9) and shun any form of idol worship (Deut, 8:19). Jesus stresses this truth in the New Testament. He affirms that God alone should be worshiped and served (Matt 4:10) buttressing that no disciple can serve two masters (Matt 6:24).

Lastly, "Yahweh's choice and Israel's decision constituted the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel."[168] Moses affirms this fact in Deut 7:6. Israel was chosen by God. The relationship is a divine initiative. This is like the call "follow me" in the New Testament. Jesus initiates the relationship and people respond and become his followers and give him exclusive loyalty (Mark 8:34-38; Luke 14:26-33).[169] In summary, the different terms used in the context of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel describe the form and nature of discipleship in the Old Testament.

An Analysis of Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68

In this analysis, we explore the dichotomy of blessings and curses as communal experiences that reinforce the covenantal bonds and collective identity of Israel. By scrutinizing the conditions laid out for obedience and disobedience, we aim

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[166] Chennattu, 66.

[167] Petros Vassiliadis, "God's Will for His People: Deuteronomy 6:20-25," *International Review of Mission* 77, no. 306 (April 1988): 183.

[168] Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship*, 42.

[169] Thompson, "Book of Deuteronomy," 277.

to understand how these collective outcomes not only serve as a deterrent or reward but also as a mechanism for shaping a cohesive community identity centered around the principles of discipleship. So, the communal aspect of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68 highlights the interdependent nature of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. These shared experiences model the community's identity, practices, and discipleship, stressing mutual accountability, collective learning, and corporate witness.

In Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68, Moses urges the children of Israel to renew their covenant with the Lord.[170] Also, he outlines the rewards that Yahweh promises the children of Israel will receive if they keep his rules and abstain from worshipping other gods. Owing to the covenantal connection that exists between Israel and the Lord, he pledges to reward his chosen people abundantly for their faithfulness and has specific expectations of them.[171]

Lexical Coding Frame

שׁמע. As earlier observed, the Hebrew word שׁמע, meaning "to hear," "to listen," or "to obey" runs like a thread through the book of Deuteronomy, especially in the context of covenantal obedience and discipleship. In Deuteronomy, שׁמע connotes both the idea of hearing and the necessity of responding with faithful obedience. In this regard, it serves as a key discipleship term that underlines the relationship between Israel and their God.

In Deuteronomy 27:10, Moses says, "You shall therefore obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you

[170] Grisanti, Longman III, and Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 414.

[171] Ibid., 430.

today." This text reveals that שׁמע is not a passive act but an active act that requires an active response. The verse connects the act of listening to obedience, emphasizing the discipleship pattern where Israel's faithfulness is showcased by their adherence to Yahweh's commandments.

In another instance, שׁמע links obedience with covenantal blessings. Israel, as Yahweh's disciples, only have their blessings guaranteed as they listen to God, that is, act upon his words. This in turn will make them receive divine favour and elevation among the nations (Deut 28:1-2). So, "Israel is faced with a choice: to obey or not to obey. The consequences of each option are clear: obedience results in blessings, disobedience in curses."[172] Deut 28:9 further affirms this concept: "The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways." The covenantal blessings depend on the condition of שׁמע, demonstrating that discipleship in the Old Testament is a dynamic process that necessitates both hearing and doing.

The other side of discipleship is the repercussion of failing to obey the voice of the Lord. Moses warns of the consequences which befall God's followers who do not obey the words of the Lord (Deut 28:15). Here, שׁמע functions as the factor which differentiates between the genuine disciples of Yahweh and the false ones. As obedience brings blessings to a faithful follower, disobedience equally brings disaster.[173] This point is buttressed in v.45 and underlines the unavoidable results of dishonouring Yahweh's instructions, affirming the concept that true discipleship is inseparable from obedience (cf. Deut 28:62). Thus, שׁמע serves as a crucial term in

[172] Paul A. Barker, "The Theology of Deuteronomy 27," 1998, 280, https://tyndalebulletin.org/ https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30344.

[173] Peter M. Head, "The Curse of Covenant Reversal: Deuteronomy 28: 58-68 and Israel's Exile," *Churchman* 111, no. 3 (1997): 219.

understanding the bond between Yahweh and Israel, illustrating that faithful obedience is the mark of a true disciple.

Thematic Coding Frame

Below is the discussion of the themes in Deut 27:1-28:68 as they relate to the discipleship concept in Deuteronomy.

Obey God's command. In Deuteronomy 27:1-10, Moses, with the elders of Israel, commands the people to obey all the commands he gives them. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy, this is the first occurrence of the elders of Israel speaking alongside Moses as God's spokesman. *The Expositor Bible Commentary* observes that the elders are included since Moses would not enter the Promised Land with them and the elders would assume leadership responsibility.[174] They instruct, "…Keep the whole commandment that I command you today." (Deut 27:1) Again, verses 9-10 mention that Moses together with the Levitical priests also said to all Israel, "…Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the LORD your God." You shall therefore obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today." Obedience is expected from everyone. Thus, the message is addressed to כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (See also; Deut 1:1, 3; 5:1; 13:11). They are required to obey the voice of the LORD and keep his commandments. God's commandments are central to these two chapters (Deut 27:1, 10; 28:1, 9, 13, 15, 45). Obedience to these commandments seems to be a recurring injunction in the book of Deuteronomy. It is pointed out that "the obedience Yahweh

[174]Ibid., 416.

demands of his people is the consequence of their relationship with Yahweh and not its cause."[175] Obedience stems from the Master's relationship with his disciples.

Deut 28:1-14 highlights the blessings attached to following and obeying the LORD's commandments. Laura Quick points out that "in ancient Near Eastern treaty texts, blessings and curses function as divine encouragement to enforce the stipulations of the treaty."[176] He adds that blessings and curses in Deuteronomy function in the same way.[177] "The blessings and curses of chs. 27–28 reinforce the colossal implications of obedience to the Lord's stipulations."[178]

The blessings in Deut 28:1-14 are all-encompassing covering different aspects of life, such as prosperity, health, and protection from enemies. On the contrary, Deut 28:15-68 enumerates the curses that ensue from disobeying the commandments of the LORD. They serve as warnings and highlight the repercussions of turning away from the LORD's commands. The curses emphasize the severity with which the LORD perceives disobedience and the cost of unfaithfulness, reinforcing the gravity of the covenant relationship.[179]

Covenant. Although the term בְּרִית does not appear in these chapters, the concept of covenant is embedded. The blessings and curses are directly linked to the covenant relationship between God and Israel. This covenant is not just a legal contract but a relational bond that requires loyalty and faithfulness. Understanding the

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[175] Grisanti, Longman III, and Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 419.

[176] Laura Quick, "Blessings and Curses in Deuteronomy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Deuteronomy*, ed. Don C. Benjamin (USA: Oxford University Press, 2020), 56.

[177] Ibid.

[178] John E.P. Taylor, "Moses and Old Covenant Obedience," *Churchman* 131, no. 4 (2017): 343–59.

[179] Ibid., 437.

covenant is important for discipleship, as it defines the expectations and responsibilities of being in a relationship with God.

Fellowship. Fellowship plays a crucial role in describing Israel's relationship with God, their communal identity, and their responsibilities as His chosen people. Firstly, fellowship in Deuteronomy 27-28 is connected to covenant commitment. The Bible says, "Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, 'Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the LORD your God. You shall therefore obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today." (Deut 27:9-10) This reveals the covenantal nature of Israel's fellowship. They become people of God and are charged to obey the statutes of God. This shows that fellowship is an act of discipleship that involves complete loyalty to the LORD and his commands and is not only a social construct.[180]

Also, in the context of the covenant, fellowship involves communal responsibility and not individual obedience alone. The list of curses in Deuteronomy 27:15-26 affirms this, as different societal sins such as idolatry, injustice, and moral corruption - are condemned. The phrase "Then all the people shall say, 'Amen!'" which is repeated many times shows collective accountability. So, true fellowship among Yahweh's followers is maintained when they hold each other accountable in discipleship, ensuring the integrity of the covenant.

In addition, Deuteronomy 28 further illustrates this by detailing the blessings for obedience (28:1-14) and the curses for disobedience (28:15-68). The blessings (Deut 28:1-14) affirm that fellowship with God leads to communal flourishing

[180] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy "become the people of the Lord.": The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, 1st ed, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 250–51.

whereas the curses (Deut 28:15-68), emphasize the destructive results of violating the covenant. [181] This dual structure reveals that fellowship in the biblical sense is not passive companionship but an active, obedient discipleship that determines the fate of the entire community.

Also, the ceremony of covenant renewal recorded in Deuteronomy 27-28 functions as a reminder that true fellowship requires obedience. The repeated conditional structure - "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, …then the Lord will…" (Deut 28:1, 9, 13) - set obedience as the bedrock of covenant fellowship. In discipleship, this principle seems to apply to contemporary Christians as well. Fellowship with the LORD is nourished via faithful adherence to his word, just as Israel's relationship with God relied on their commitment to the covenant. Besides, the curses highlighted (Deut 28:15-68) serve as an admonition against superficial fellowship. It is not enough to be connected with God's people; sincere fellowship demands a heart completely devoted to God. This discipleship principle harmonizes with Jesus' teaching in the New Testament (John 15:5-6). He affirms that genuine disciples must remain in him to bear fruit, just like Israel needed to remain faithful to their covenant.

Serve the Lord. In Deuteronomy 28, serving the LORD is presented imperatively with its attendant blessings while turning after other gods comes with terrible consequences. Important to this idea are verses 14-15. Moses says, "And if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his

[181] Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 411.

statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you." So, "if Israel obeys the commandments of God, then the blessing will follow."[182]

It is inferred from the text that the LORD expects unwavering adherence to his commandments from his chosen people. They are warned against idolatry, emphasizing that faithfulness to the Lord is non-negotiable. So, serving the Lord involves a steadfast commitment to His ways, avoiding deviations that lead to false worship. In the book of Deuteronomy, the phrase "other gods" occurs in seventeen times often with "to serve" or "to go after," except for four instances (Deut 5:7; 18:20; 31:18, 20). Yahweh does not accept the worship of other gods by his chosen people whom he has done so much for. He declares himself to be jealous (Deut 4:25; 5:9; 6:15; 27:15-26; 32:16, 21).[183]

To explain the seriousness of this fact, the narration then transitions to the consequences of failing to serve the Lord. Verse 36 states: "The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone." This verse predicts the exile and subjugation of the Israelites as a punishment for their disobedience. This punishment is not only physical displacement but also spiritual degradation – because they would be coerced to worship worthless idols.[184] It

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[182] Peter C. Craigie, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Deuteronomy*, ed. R.K Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 281.

[183] Willoughby, "A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-19," 86.

[184] Grisanti, Longman III, and Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 448.

demonstrates the stark contrast between the protection offered by serving the Lord and the vulnerability exposed through disobedience.

In addition, verses 47-48 point out that their failure to serve the LORD their God "with joyfulness and gladness of heart, they would then, serve their enemies whom the LORD himself would send against them. Also, they would be scattered among the nations where they would worship other gods (v.64)

Bearing Witness. The concept of witnessing is also engrained in Deuteronomy 27:1–28:68 and is linked to covenantal obedience, blessings, and curses. First, in Deuteronomy 27:1-8, Moses commands the children of Israel to set up large stones on Mount Ebal, engrave the law on them, and erect an altar for sacrifices. This action functions as a public witness of Israel's commitment to Yahweh's covenant. In a way that the etched stones make God's law visible, disciples are required to make God's message known via their lives and testimonies.

More so, Deuteronomy 28:1-14 states the blessings Israel would experience if they obey God faithfully. God's visible blessings upon the Israelites serve as a witness to the neighbouring nations (Deut 28:10). This implies that being obedient to God results in spiritual fruitfulness, peace, and favour, which serve as a testimony to other people. So, as disciples walk in obedience, they manifest God's goodness, attracting others to Him.

On the other hand, Deuteronomy 28:15-68 enumerates the curses that will come upon Israel if they violate the covenant stipulations Their punishment would function as a warning to future generations and other nations (Deuteronomy 28:37).

Disciples bear witness by demonstrating the blessings of obedience and by warning others about the consequences of rejecting God. Therefore, sharing personal

testimonies of past failures and God's redemption can serve as a powerful witness to others.

Discipleship Language. The emphasis on obedience stresses its significance as a mark of genuine discipleship. This obedience is not only about following the commandments, but it is indicative of a deeper commitment to live by God's will. Discipleship involves a deep respect for and adherence to the commandments. The law provides the framework within which the covenant relationship operates, and understanding the law is essential for faithful living by Yahweh's followers. More so, the concept of blessings in this context serves to illustrate the rewards of faithful discipleship and adherence to God's covenant. Likewise, Jesus also promises blessings for his faithful and dedicated disciples (Matt 19:28-29).

In addition, Deuteronomy seems to place a serious emphasis on serving or worshipping Yahweh by his followers. The blessings and curses attached underscore the significance and seriousness of this demand. Thus, discipleship in the Old Testament involves serving the Master, the LORD.

The analysis of Deut 27:1-28:68 presents an apparent picture of the blessings and curses linked to obedience or disobedience to the covenant.[185] While the conditional nature of the covenant is fundamental to understanding the nature of discipleship in the Old Testament, another important element involved is the communal aspect. The blessings and curses in these texts are not meant primarily for individuals but are intended to form the collective identity, practices, and ethos of the

[185] Luke Emehiele Ijezie, "Blessings for Obedience and Curses for Disobedience in Deuteronomy 28," *The Nigerian Journal of Theology (NJT)* 37 (2023).

covenant community. And this communal element provides a profound understanding of discipleship in the Old Testament context.

The public and participatory nature of the blessings and curses underlines their communal significance. In Deuteronomy 27:11-26, Moses instructs the children of Israel to divide themselves between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal for the ceremonial pronouncement of blessings and curses. This act is essentially communal, involving the entire nation in a collective affirmation of their covenant obligations. This exercise ends in the people's unified response of "amen" to each curse (Deut 27:14-26), signifying their collective acceptance of responsibility and accountability.[186] This occasion establishes the idea that the covenant is not an individual contract but a corporate commitment. The action of each of them affects the entire community, signifying the interconnectedness of their covenantal relationship (Deut 27:9-10, 14-26; 28:1-2, 15, 45-46, 58-59, 64-66).

The blessings outlined in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 reflect communal prosperity. It is noted that the blessings are not restricted to individual prosperity but involve the entire community of Israel. First, the fertility of the land and the increase of crops and livestock (Deut 28:3-6) represent the community's collective well-being. Not only that, the promise of peace and victory over enemies (Deut 28:7) ensures the security of the entire nation. Besides, the pronouncement that Israel would be established as "a holy people" (Deut 28:9-10) shows a communal identity rooted in their covenantal relationship with the LORD.

On the contrary, the curses presented in Deuteronomy 28:15-68 highlight the destructive effects of disobedience on the entire community of Israel. The curses

[186] Lois Fuller, *The Pentateuch: Foundation of God's Message to the Word* (Plateau State, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2004), 112.

cover every aspect of communal life such as famine, pestilence, and crop failure (Deut 28:17-18) which would ruin the community's economic stability. Disobedience would also engender internal strife, dysfunctional families, and oppression (Deut 28:30-34) and break the social fabric of the nation. And the climax of the curse is exile (Deut 28:64-68). This signifies the loss of their community's identity and their separation from the Promised Land.

The blessings and curses function as educational device for communal discipleship, shaping the practices and identity of the covenant community (Deut 27:1-3, 9-10; 28:9-10, 15, 45-47). First, the individual member of the community is responsible not only for their own obedience but also for encouraging others to remain faithful. This is reflected in the instructions to confront sin within the community (Deut 13:6-11) and to maintain justice in communal affairs (Deut 16:18-20).

The blessings and curses serve as a way of teaching future generations about the covenant and the need for obedience. The curses serve as a deterrent to sin.[187] Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and 31:10-13 emphasize the importance of reciting and remembering the laws as a community. Evident symbols, such as the altar on Mount Ebal (Deut 27:2-8), function as concrete reminders of the covenant, ensuring that the community's identity remains rooted in their relationship with the LORD.

The communal experience of blessings and curses positions Israel as a witness to the neighbouring nations. As the community walks in obedience and experiences blessings, they show the character and faithfulness of Yahweh (Deut 28:10). On the other hand, the curses serve as a warning to others about the consequences of

[187] Danny Shelton and Shelley Quinn, *Ten Commandments,* Second Edition (United States: Remnant Publications, Inc., 2007), 40.

disobedience (Deut 27:16, 19; 28:15, 20, 25-26, 35-37, 45-47). This dual role as witness and warning aligns with Israel's mission to represent Yahweh to the world.

Thus, for the Christian today, the communal aspects of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68 provide crucial lessons discipleship. First, discipleship in contemporary times should move beyond individualistic structure to adopt a collective journey of faith. Shared practices, such as communal worship, small group study, and mutual encouragement, reflect the communal ethos of Deuteronomy.[188]

The focus on teaching and remembrance in Deuteronomy calls contemporary community of faith to emphasize intergenerational discipleship. As such, parents, elders, and leaders bear the responsibility of transmitting faith and covenantal values to younger generations.

An Analysis of Deuteronomy 29:1-30:20

This section focuses on the covenant renewal at Moab, emphasizing the transformative aspect of discipleship that extends beyond mere obedience to encompass a heartfelt devotion to Yahweh. We explore how this renewal, with its forward-looking promises and stipulations, lays the groundwork for an enduring legacy of faithfulness. The analysis highlights the importance of generational transmission of covenantal values as a cornerstone of Israelite discipleship, offering insights into the dynamic nature of faith commitment across time.

Lexical Coding Frame

שׁמע**.** In the context of Deuteronomy 30:1-5, שׁמע is used in the sense of obeying the Lord after one has backslidden from him. Their turning point would be

[188] Haruna Akebok, "Factors That Hinder Discipleship in Missions: A Case of Church of Christ in Nations (Cocin) Community Missions Shiroro Zone Niger State in Nigeria" (PhD Thesis, Africa International University, 2019), 12–13, https://dlibrary.aiu.ac.ke/xmlui/handle/123456789/515.

accompanied by returning to the Lord and listening to his voice (Deut 30:2), then the Lord will bring them back to their land (Deut 30:5).[189] This way, שׁמע relates to repentance (שׁוב), illustrating that true hearing involves turning back to God in faithfulness. This implies that discipleship is not only about former obedience to God's word but also about a continual responsiveness that entails repentance and restoration.

This idea is reiterated in Deuteronomy 30:8. Moses says, "And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today." After their repentance, they would still need to continue to live in obedience.[190] Thus, שׁמע implies continuous, active obedience. Discipleship, in this regard, is depicted by a life-long commitment to listening and responding to God's word. Still, שׁמע is specifically linked with the observance of the law, demonstrating that discipleship is framed around divine instructions (Deut 30:10).

To this end, Deuteronomy 30:16, 19–20 shows how שׁמע is directly tied to the choice between life and death: Verses 19-20 encourage choosing life by loving God and obeying him. Craige asserts that "the options in the choice set before the people are the most important that any man – whether in the plains of Moab or in the modern world – has to face."[191] These acts determine genuine discipleship, as listening to God is not only an obligation but a means of experiencing divine blessing and life itself.

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[189] Craigie, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Deuteronomy*, 306.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Craige, 308.

אהב. The Hebrew word אהב, meaning "to love," is significant especially in the context of covenantal discipleship. The term shows the essence of Israel's relationship with Yahweh – which is grounded in love, obedience, and life-giving commitment. In the book of Deuteronomy, אהב is not just an emotional affection but an active, covenantal love portrayed through obedience and devotion to God.

In his last speech, Moses states, "and the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." (Deu 30:6) The idea of heart circumcision connotes spiritual renewal and transformation. This would make love of God and obedience to his commandments possible.[192] Sincere discipleship occurs when God himself empowers his people to love him with all their heart. So, loving God is not just a duty but a divine work that transforms the follower's heart, causing genuine devotion.

In Deut 30:16, Moses ties אהב directly to obedience. In other word, loving God seems to be tantamount to following his commandments faithfully.[193] This underlines the idea that discipleship is a continuous endeavour of walking in God's ways. Hence, love is not just a feeling but a lived-out commitment, which leads to blessings and life.

In Deut 30:19-20, love for God is portrayed as a choice between life and death. Genuine discipleship entails choosing God wholeheartedly, loving him, listening to His voice, and embracing him in faithfulness.[194] The call to אהב appears to be a command to commit to God completely.

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[192] Woods, *Deuteronomy*, 293.

[193] Wood, 296.

[194] Ibid., 297

In summary, based on Deuteronomy 30:6, 16, 19-20, the term אהב incorporates the essence of biblical discipleship in three crucial ways. First, sincere love for God emanates from a circumcised heart (Deut 30:6). That, discipleship is not self-generated; it is a response to God's initiating work. Also, love is not only an inward feeling but a lifestyle of faithful obedience to God's instructions (Deut 30:16). Being a disciple means loving God in action. Lastly, by choosing to love God, one has chosen life itself (Deut 30:19-20).

Thematic Coding Frame

The following are the themes in Deut 29:1-30:20. They help in understanding the nature of Deuteronomistic discipleship.

Covenant. It is revealed that the covenant at the plain of Moab is a reaffirmation and expansion of the covenant earlier made at Horeb.[195] Moses says, "these are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb (Deut 29:1). This is the evidence of the continuity and consistency of Yahweh's relationship with the children of Israel. The mentioning of Horeb and Moab implies that the covenant is not a one-off event but a continuous commitment that adapts to new contexts and circumstances. One can deduce that Israel's relationship with their God is a lifelong commitment. This is what discipleship requires.

Moses reminds them of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt (v.2), provision in the wilderness (vv. 5-6) and protection and victory over the enemies (vv. 7-8). Based on this, Moses instructs, "Therefore keep the words of this covenant and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do." (v.9). This suggests that the

[195] Grisanti, Longman III, and Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 464.

covenant is first based on the LORD's loving act and shows the conditional nature of the covenant. Their success is linked directly to the adherence to the stipulations of the covenant. In addition, Moses explains the purpose and scope of the covenant (vv. 12-14). The covenant extends to the future generation of Israel (v.14). This suggests the perpetuity of the covenant. Thus, the stipulations and promises to go beyond the immediate audience but apply to their descendants.

However, violation of the covenant stipulations attracts consequences (vv. 22-23). The justification for their punishment would be because of their failure to uphold their part of the covenant.

Obey the Commandments. Following the disobedience highlighted in Deuteronomy 29, Moses gives a message of hope explaining that when the children of Israel return to the LORD and obey his voice (Deut 30: 1-2), that the LORD would bring them back from captivity (Deut 30:3). While disobedience results into captivity, obedience to the commandments would bring deliverance. The verb שׁוּב (v.2) could mean "return," "change one's mind," (Job 6:29), or "turn back from evil" (1 Kgs 8:35). So, the phrase וְשַׁבְתָּ עַד־יְהוָה (and return to the LORD) implies a departure owing to disobedience and subsequent repentance. Consequently, they are to return to the LORD "with all your heart and with all your soul, (Deut 30:2) which suggests the need for wholehearted and genuine obedience to the commandments of the LORD.[196]

In addition, after the experience of restoration, the children of Israel would need to continue to obey the commandments. Thus, Moses states, "And you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today" (Deut 30:8). The text shows a renewal of the covenant relationship

[196] Dapot Damanik et al., "Moses And The Commands Of God: The Role of Obedience to God's Commandments and Their Implications for the God's People," *Didache: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristen* 4, no. 1 (2022): 52.

through renewed obedience. Hence, obedience to the LORD's commandments is necessary for sustaining a proper covenant relationship with the LORD and experiencing His blessings.

In Deuteronomy 30:16, Moses explains the blessings of obedience. He says, "If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it." So, loving God and walking in obedience are presented as inter-related actions, indicating that love for God naturally manifests in obedience to His commandments. This obedience is the medium through which the chosen people, his disciples, can maintain their covenant relationship with the LORD, their Master, and receive His blessings.

Fellowship. Deuteronomy 29:1 begins with the announcement of a renewed covenant between Yahweh and Israel, different from the one made at Mount Sinai. It says, "these are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb." This is evidence of the unceasing nature of the Lord's relationship with His people. Hence, fellowship in this context is both vertical - between Yahweh and Israel - and horizontal - among the Israelites themselves.

Moses admonishes the Israelites against idolatry and disobedience (Deuteronomy 29:18-19), emphasizing that genuine fellowship with the LORD entails

unswerving loyalty.[197] A disciple of God has the charge to remain committed to divine instructions, reflecting the covenant relationship God established.

Fortunately, whenever a disciple of Yahweh turns away from God in disobedience, there seems to be an opportunity of returning to him.[198] Moses presents repentance as a means of restoring fellowship (Deut 30:1-10). If Israel errs and suffers the repercussions of disobedience, the Lord's mercy allows for restoration upon sincere repentance. This principle is an important aspect of discipleship: fellowship with the Lord is not static but dynamic, requiring humility, self-examination, and a willingness to return to the Lord when one strays. The New Testament equally reiterates that fellowship is sustained through confession and renewal (1 John 1:9).

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 presents a choice between life and death, blessings and curses. This choice signifies the foundational nature of fellowship as a discipleship term – this implies that one needs to actively choose to follow the Lord, the only right way[199] Hence, true discipleship demands deliberate and daily decisions to remain in fellowship with Him. In the New Testament, Jesus equally admonishes his disciples to take up their cross daily (Luke 9:23), underscoring the cost and commitment of true fellowship.

Love the Lord. In response to the act of returning to the LORD by the Israelites, Moses itemizes God's own response to them:

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[197] "Deuteronomy 29 Keil and Delitzsch OT Commentary," accessed February 11, 2025, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/kad/deuteronomy/29.htm.

[198] From the fall of man, God has demonstrated his interest in restoring man into fellowship with him. Dinah Baah-Odoom and Frimpong Wiafe, "The Importance Of The Old Testament To The Christian Spirituality," *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention*, July 27, 2016, 2423, https://doi.org/10.18535/ijsshi/v3i7.07.

[199] "Deuteronomy 30 Matthew Henry's Commentary," accessed February 11, 2025, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/mhc/deuteronomy/30.htm. "Deuteronomy 30 Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary," accessed February 11, 2025, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/jfb/deuteronomy/30.htm.

i. The LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, (Deut 30:3)

ii. LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you (Deut 30:4)

iii. The LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, (Deut 30:5)

iv. The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (Deut 30:6)

v. The LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. (Deut 30:7)

vi. The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand (Deut 30:9a)

vii. The LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, (Deut 30:9b)

At the center of all this is the circumcision of the heart which is a metaphor for an internal transformation that would enable genuine devotion to the LORD. This circumcision would be the act of God not of Israel (Deut 30:6).[200] As a result of heart transformation, Moses states that they would then love the LORD their God with all their heart and with all their soul. Toombs asserts that "love cannot be half-hearted. It must involve the concentrated dynamic and energy of the whole personality."[201] So, the act of circumcising the heart signifies the removal of anything that hinders a total

[200] Lawrence E Toombs, "Love and Justice in Deuteronomy, a Third Approach to the Law," *Interpretation* 19, no. 4 (December 31, 1965): 402.

[201] Ibid.

and true relationship with God and stresses the necessity of internal purity and wholehearted commitment.

Hence, the transformation of their hearts is God's initiative. So, while the Israelites are called to love the Lord, it is the LORD who empowers his love by changing their hearts. This emphasizes the kindness and sovereignty of God in the covenant relationship. Also, the love expected of the children of Israel is not intangible or mere emotion but a covenantal faithfulness that involves one's whole being. Willoughby encapsulates this when he says that "love is manifested in reverential fear, loyalty, and obedience, as a vassal to his king. Love is commanded by God."[202] Hull asserts that "obedience provides the evidence of love."[203] Therefore, the holistic love is fundamental to the Israelites' obedience and faithfulness to the LORD, reflecting their commitment to live according to His commandments.

Bearing witness. The concept of bearing witness as described in Deuteronomy involves both the verbal testimony and a lived commitment to Yahweh's covenant. Deuteronomy 29:1-30:20 serves as a crucial time in Israel's history, as Moses emphasizes the terms of the covenant and calls the children of Israel to faithful obedience. This passage pinpoints the duty of Israel to bear witness to Yahweh's faithfulness, the consequences of disobedience, and the hope of restoration.

Moses reminds the Israelites of God's covenantal acts which include his miraculous provision, Victory, and guidance. This historical reminiscence serves as a call to faithfulness. The act of recalling God's goodness is a means of bearing witness to the next generation and reinforcing identity as God's people (Deut 29:2-9).

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[202] Willoughby, "A Heartfelt Love: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-19," 75.

[203] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 124.

Again, obedience serves as another fundamental means of bearing witness. Deuteronomy 29:10-15 affirms that the covenant is obligatory not only to those present but also to future generations. This communal obligation demonstrates that bearing witness is not an individualistic act but a collective expression of faithfulness. Thus, in discipleship, bearing witness through obedience means harmonizing one's life with God's commands.

More so, Moses provides explanation on the results of forsaking the covenant, portraying Israel's potential exile and suffering as a testimony to the seriousness of disobedience. These warnings serve as a public witness to the reality of divine justice (Deut 29:16-28). In discipleship, this principle is pertinent as the repercussion of sin function as a reminder and a call to repentance. The failures of believers, when acknowledged and repented of, can serve as testimonies of God's mercy and restoration.

Discipleship Language

In Deuteronomy chapters 29-30, Moses reaffirms the covenant earlier made at Horeb. He has a reminiscence of their history illustrating the divine intervention and guidance throughout their journey. In the light of this, he charges them as Yahweh's disciples to keep the words of the covenant as their relationship is covenant based and as his chosen people, they in turn are to reciprocate God's love by keeping the terms of the covenant. Hence, whenever Israel wanders through disobedience and later returns to the LORD, there is hope of restoration. Nevertheless, they are charged with obeying the commandments. Their obedience is linked to their blessings and vice versa.

Also, it seems that love strengthens the bond of master-disciple relationship. Hence, the LORD transforms the heart of his followers so that they would love him

wholeheartedly. Before Israel could love the LORD, the LORD has shown them love by his character to them (cf. 1 John 4:9). Their love is a response to God's loving acts.

The account of the covenant renewal at Moab (Deut 29:1-30:20), presents a theological basis that underscores both the internal transformation needed for loving Yahweh and the relational dynamics of discipleship. This heart transformation is the foundation for covenantal obedience, portraying discipleship as a holistic process involving both inward devotion and outward action.[204]

The covenant renewal at Moab is not narrowed to the immediate audience but intentionally expands its purview to future generations. Moses explicitly includes "and with whoever is not here with us today" (Deut 29:15) indicating the lasting significance of the covenant. This future-oriented perspective reflects the understanding that the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israelites is not a static contract but a dynamic and everlasting commitment.

By addressing future generations, the covenant establishes a framework for generational discipleship. The community's faithfulness to the covenant is presented not only as a present responsibility but as a legacy to be intentionally transmitted. This future-oriented view calls for a proactive approach to teaching and living out covenantal values, ensuring that each generation is equipped to embrace and sustain their identity as Yahweh's followers.

It is noted that generational discipleship seems to be a principal theme in Deuteronomy, summarized in the Shema (Deut 6:4-9) and repeated in the covenant

[204] Kevin Samy Gabriel, "Regeneration and the Heart under the Old Covenant: A Study in Deuteronomy and the Major Prophets" (Th.M., United States - Kentucky, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), https://www.proquest.com/docview/2576814868/abstract/5789A2D3621E42D4PQ/1.

renewal at Moab. This process involves deliberate teaching, modeling, and fostering a relational connection with God that goes beyond individual lifetimes.

The covenant affirms the significance of teaching Yahweh's laws to future generations (Deut 6:7; 11:19). This teaching is not merely informational but transformational, aiming to inculcate a love for God and a commitment to obedience. The inclusion of blessings and curses (Deut 30:19-20) serves as an instructional tool, illustrating the tangible consequences of covenantal faithfulness or unfaithfulness.

Generational discipleship also depends on the community's ability to model covenantal obedience. Deuteronomy 29:9 calls for collective faithfulness to the covenant so that "all of you may prosper." This communal obedience sets a precedent for younger generations, demonstrating the blessings of living in alignment with God's will. Such modeling creates a lifestyle of faithfulness that shapes the identity and practices of the covenant community.

Forward-looking obedience is a critical aspect of the covenant, grounded in the expectation of God's ongoing work within the community. This perspective provides a sense of hope and responsibility, motivating the community to sustain their faithfulness for the sake of future generations. Deuteronomy 30:19-20 presents a choice between life and death, urging the people to "…. choose life that you and your offspring may live." This stresses the intergenerational impact of obedience, presenting it as an investment in the community's future.

The future-oriented part of the covenant has crucial implications for modern understandings of discipleship, especially in the context of faith communities and families. First, modern discipleship needs to adopt its generational dimension, recognizing the significance of equipping future generations to perpetuate the faith.

This involves deliberate teaching, relational mentoring, and the creation of enabling environments where faith can be nurtured and sustained.

Also, the covenant's forward-looking perspective presents a model of hope and perseverance for modern discipleship. In a way that Israel was called to remain faithful in expectation of Yahweh's future work, today's disciples are urged to persevere in their faith journey, trusting in Yahweh's faithfulness to complete His purposes. This perspective enables disciples to sail through challenges with resilience and hope.

An Analysis of Deuteronomy 31:1-34:12

This final section of Deuteronomy captures the poignant moments of Moses' leadership transition to Joshua and the strategic importance of the law's regular public reading. It presents an opportunity to reflect on the role of prophetic witness through Moses' song and the implications for discipleship across generations. The analysis seeks to underscore the continuous need for leadership that is committed to teaching and upholding the covenantal principles, ensuring the perpetuation of a faithful community.

Lexical Coding Frame

למד. The Hebrew verb למד meaning "to learn" or "to teach," has earlier been affirmed as a key concept in biblical discipleship. In the book of Deuteronomy, למד serves as a basic term for instruction, emphasizing the transmission of divine truth and covenantal obedience from one generation to the next.

In Deuteronomy 31:12-13, Moses commands, "assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn (למד) to fear the LORD your God and be careful to do all the words of this law and

that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn (לִמַּד) to fear the LORD your God…." Hearing God's mighty deeds would inspire obedience in them.[205] לִמַּד in this context suggests that learning God's law is not a passive process but an active and communal one. The act of hearing leads to learning, which results in the fear of the Lord and faithful obedience. This cycle of teaching and learning helps each new generation to embody divine instruction, reinforcing the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the children of Israel.

It is observed that לִמַּד in Deuteronomy 31:18-19 implies that learning is not only cognitive but also involves remembrance and internalization through recitation. And the poetic form of the song would facilitate memorizing it.[206] The song of Moses serves as a tool of discipleship, ensuring that Israel remains alert of both God's expectations and the results of disobedience. Learning here is an act of covenant renewal, strengthening Israel's identity and obligation before God. In obedience to the Lord's command, "Moses wrote this song the same day and taught it to the people of Israel." (Deut 31:22) This indicates that discipleship involves not only receiving instruction but also faithfully transmitting it.

It is however noted that another Hebrew word is used in Deuteronomy 33:10 (יָרָה). This term also denotes "instruct" or "teach." So, Moses blesses the tribe of Levi, pinpointing their distinctive function as teachers of the Law. Whereas the verb יָרָה is used here instead of לִמַּד, the idea remains closely related. The Levites play the role as the basic instructors of God's law, ensuring its faithful transmission. Their teaching is

[205] Jeffrey Tigay, *Deuteronomy =: [Devarim]: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, 1st ed, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 292.

[206] Tigay, 295.

tied to worship, demonstrating that learning and spiritual devotion are inseparable in biblical discipleship.

Thematic Coding Frame

This last pericope, Deut 31:1-34:12, also points out some themes which shed more light on the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy.

Covenant. Deuteronomy 31:1-34:12 forms the last part of the book structure. At the close of Moses' speech in Deuteronomy, he assures the children of Israel of the fulfilment of God's promises emphasizing their victory over their enemies (Deut 31:3-4). Also, he prepares Joshua, his successor, for the task ahead encouraging him to be strong and courageous (Deut 31:7-8). He passes his mantle to Joshua.[207] This happened after Moses had mentored Joshua in leadership, a core aspect of discipleship.

Then, Moses wrote the law and handed it over to the priests to be preserved in the Ark of the Covenant. However, he foretells the future rebellion of the children of Israel. The LORD says, "…. They will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them. (Deut 31:16); "they will turn to other gods and serve them and despise me and break my covenant. (Deut 31:20). The covenant here refers to the treaty God has condescended to make with them at Sinai and reaffirmed at the plain of Moab. The breaking of this covenant manifests in form of following other gods rather than Yahweh which the LORD prohibits (Exod. 20:2-6; Deut 12:29-32; 13:1-18; 32:17). This seems to be a betrayal of agreement and disloyalty to the covenant stipulations.

[207] James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 10.

Hear the Commandment. As Moses closes his speech, the Bible records that he wrote the law and delivered it to the priests (Deut 31:9). This underscores "the sanctity, authority, priority, and relevance of God's word for his people."[208] He commanded that it should be read at the end of every seven years before the congregation of the children of Israel. Male and female including strangers would be gathered. The expression לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ (in order that they will hear, Deut 31:12) reveals the purpose of this gathering. They assemble to hear the תּוֹרָה identified in v. 9. Besides, "….that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess." (Deut 31:13). Once again, the significance of listening or hearing is emphasized here. Hearing the content of the covenant would help them to fear the LORD. Also, the children who would be born after would benefit from the reading of the תּוֹרָה which is the total instructions of Yahweh. This is not mere hearing but hearing that results in obedience. The fear here calls for reverence and adherence to his commandments, which he expected from a true disciple.

Meanwhile, there is a prophetic warning that Israel would be involved in such negative discipleship, leading to terrible repercussions. The LORD tells Moses, "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them." (Deut 31:16)

This rebellion indicates a failure to uphold the covenant stipulations that define genuine discipleship. Therefore, the LORD forewarns Moses that Israel would

[208] Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy*, ed. J. A. Motyer and John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 434.

"prostitute" themselves to foreign gods (Deut 31:16). This depiction describes a total departure from covenant faithfulness, displacing loyalty to YHWH with devotion to idols.

This negative discipleship is marked by an intentional rejection of the covenant (Deut. 31:20). God says, "For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant." (Deu 31:20) This forsaking of God seems not to be coincidental but a deliberate decision to abandon the commitments made at Sinai. The negative discipleship appears to be a result of forgetting God's former faithfulness. Israel's prosperity in the Promised Land will lead them to complacency and spiritual amnesia (Deut. 31:20-21). This will result in severe punishment by the LORD (Deut 31:17-18)

This insight on negative discipleship serves as a warning against the dangers of violating God's laws. Hence, a call to be watchful, urging the new generation to be faithful seems crucial.

Discipleship Language

The last chapters of Deuteronomy (31-34) offer narratives which highlight the principles of discipleship. These chapters, which contain the Song of Moses, the appointment of Joshua, Moses' last instructions, and Moses' blessing of the tribes, summarize important aspects of what it means to be a disciple in the context of the covenant community. First, the commissioning of Joshua, in which Moses, an experienced leader, equips and encourages him to carry out the mission, is a significant act of discipleship. It emphasizes the value of having a mentor and depending on God.

Also, God's instructions play a vital role in discipleship. Hence, Moses wrote it down as commanded by the LORD and he commanded it to be read regularly so that people would remember the stipulations of the covenant and adhere to it. In the New Testament, Jesus also emphasizes the need to hear and do as mark of his true disciples (Luke 8:21). Later, Paul affirms that "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Rom 10:17). So, the repeated hearing of Yahweh's instructions commanded by Moses would increase the faith of his followers as they serve him.

Moses' song recounts the history of Yahweh's faithfulness and Israel's repeated unfaithfulness (Deut 32:7-18). This historical recounting serves as a reminder of Yahweh's steadfast love and justice, emphasizing the results of disobedience and the blessings of faithfulness. The poetic and remarkable nature of the song ensures that its message is easily retained and conveyed across generations, highlighting the community's covenantal duties.

The song also serves as a motivational tool, calling Israel to renew their commitment to God. The inclusion of the song in public ceremonies, as directed in Deuteronomy 31:19-22, affirms its role in shaping the communal identity and practices of discipleship.

Moses' song highlights the role of prophetic witness in generational discipleship. It provides a structure for teaching future generations about the covenant, using the community's collective memory as a tool for spiritual formation. This stresses the importance of integrating historical narratives and prophetic exhortation into contemporary discipleship practices.

The use of historical narratives and prophetic admonition, as presented in Moses' song, provides a pattern for contemporary discipleship. By recounting

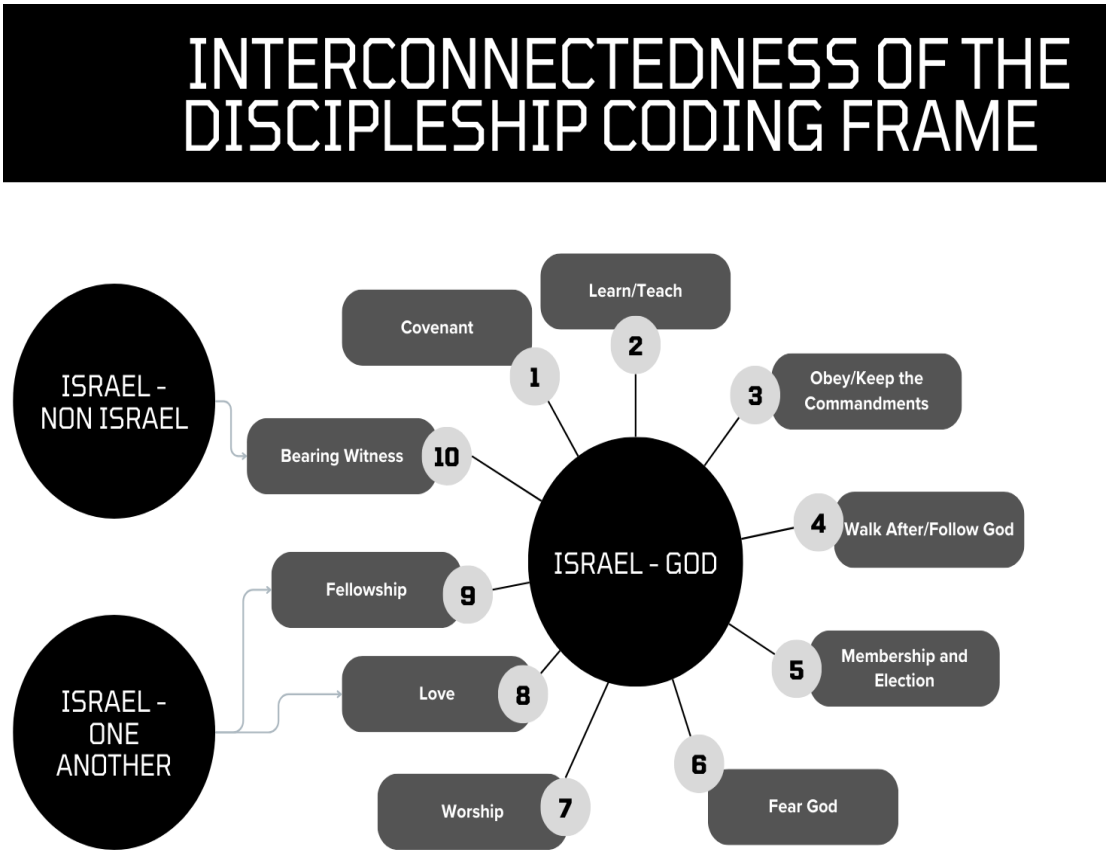
Yahweh's faithfulness and the community's journey, faith communities can inspire a deeper commitment to covenantal living. This approach ensures that the lessons of the past remain relevant for future generations.

Summary

According to the above assessments, the book of Deuteronomy establishes a comprehensive framework for discipleship terminology that revolves around some essential terms, including worshipping and serving the Lord (Deut 8:19; 11:16; 12:4, 31; 26:10; 30:17), upholding a covenant relationship (Deut 4:13, 23, 31; 5:2, 3; 7:9, 12; 8:18), obeying (Deut 4:30; 11:13, 27; 12:28; 13:4; 13:18; 27:10; 28:1), teaching (Deut 4:14; 5:31; 6:7; 11:19), learning (Deut 4:10; 5:1; 14:23; 17:19; 18:9; 31:12, 13), keeping the rules (Deut 4:2, 6, 10; 5:10; 6:17; 7:9; 8:6; 11:8; 13:4), and bearing witness (Deut 4:6-8; 6:4-5). These ideas serve as a foundation for Yahweh's followers and direct them in their interactions with the LORD. The *Expositor Bible Commentary* refers to these discipleship terms as "covenantal terms" which describe the multifaceted nature of the LORD's expectations of his covenantal people.[209]

The interconnectedness of these elements is shown through the chart below:

[209] Grisanti, Longman III, and Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 455.



The concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy is integral to the framework of Israel's covenant relationship with YHWH. The concept develops through some theological and ethical themes which include covenant, teaching and learning, obedience to YHWH's commandments, following God, fear of God, fellowship, worship, love, and also bearing witness. They are all interconnected and not isolated themes. They model the life of Israel as a covenant community, calling them to a life-changing journey of obedience and faithfulness to YHWH.

One of the discipleship themes that reoccurs throughout the book of Deuteronomy is the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his followers (Deut 4:23, 31; 7:9; 29:14-15). It is relational and experiential. Yahweh initiates the covenant, and he calls the children of Israel into this covenant relationship.

Understanding the covenant is important for discipleship, as it defines the expectations and responsibilities of being in a relationship with God.

Also, central to the concept of discipleship in Deuteronomy is the need for the covenant people to learn the way of the LORD (Deut 5:1; 18:9). Yahweh authorizes Moses to teach the children of Israel, the commandments which will help them learn how they will follow the LORD in complete obedience (Deut 4:14; 6:1). Teaching serves as a means of grooming the disciples. It is a foundational component in the religious and social life of the people of Israel. To maintain their covenantal relationship with the LORD, Moses keeps teaching the new generation. He summons them to hear the words of the LORD and keep his instructions.

It is worth noting that the mark of Israel's discipleship is obedience. The command to keep YHWH's commands and walk in his ways runs like a thread in the entire book of Deuteronomy (e.g, Deut 5:33; 8:6, 10:12-13; 11:13, 27; 12:28; 27:10), indicating that genuine discipleship requires total obedience to God's instructions as a demonstration of love and faithfulness to him. Thus, the Israelites are repeatedly called to keep Yahweh's commandments. They are to keep all the commandments without any exception. As Yahweh's disciples grow in obedience, they are called to walk after and follow God, aligning their lives with his will and way. This walking after the LORD affirms their membership and election, distinguishing them as God's chosen people who are set apart for his purposes. Following this identity is the obligation to fear God (Deut 4:10; 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24; 10:12; 20; 13:4; 14:23), living in reverence of his holiness, resulting in a life of devotion and integrity.

It is also noticed that worshipping only Yahweh is fundamental to discipleship (Deut 6:13; 10:12, 20; 26:10). Israelites as Yahweh's disciples are called to maintain the purity of their worship. Moses, on several occasions, warns the children of Israel

against following other gods. Serving the Lord involves a steadfast commitment to His ways, avoiding deviations that lead to false worship. Also, genuine worship deepens love for God and others. Yahweh demonstrated his divine love by calling the Israelites out of nothingness and establishing a covenant relationship with them. In turn, they are required to respond in loving obedience. Love seems to be an ideal expression of discipleship (Deut. 6:5, 10:12, 30:6).

Deuteronomistic discipleship is communal rather than individualistic. As the community of people called by God, the Israelites, Yahweh's disciples, strengthen one another in fellowship. Their love for God fosters this fellowship, where believers come together in unity, to strengthen one another in faith. The community is saddled with the responsibility of discipling one another, ensuring that no one backslides from the way of the LORD.

Finally, one crucial responsibility of the disciples is to witness to others the work of their Master (Deut 4:5-8). So, Israel is to reflect the character of the LORD. Their loyalty and obedience to their Master's command serve as a witness (Deut 4:6 and 4:14) which will attract the heathen to the worship of their God. Therefore, their witnessing is not only oral but through godly living. Besides, the children of Israel are the elect of God through his grace and this election is a call for responsibility since an election usually comes with a mission.

The climax of discipleship in Deuteronomy is found in chapter 30, verses 15-20. In this context, Moses invites people to love the LORD God "by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules" (Deut 30:16). This call represents the highest call for discipleship.

To this end, Deuteronomy reveals that discipleship is not instantaneous but a lifelong journey of covenant faithfulness, learning, obeying the LORD's

commandments, worshipping, fellowshipping, loving, and witnessing. The climax in Deuteronomy 30 indicates that discipleship, in the long run, is about obedience and choosing life through unflinching devotion to the LORD. This choice shapes the biblical understanding of what it means to follow God.

In conclusion, the process of discipleship in Deuteronomy begins with the choosing or calling of the children of Israel into a relationship, followed by teaching them the way of the LORD, which engenders transformation of heart and a charge for them to teach the next generation. This aids the preservation of faith in Israel. This process seems crucial. God does not begin by charging Israel to witness. He calls and establishes a relationship with them. He gave them his holy law and transformed them after which he charged them to represent him before other nations.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLICATIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP FOR MISSION

Wright defines mission as "sharing the good news of God's redemptive work with all nations."[1] Guichun Jun describes discipleship from the perspective of God's mission as "a journey whose ultimate goal is to grow toward Christlikeness. Growing in Christlikeness does not only mean that believers may live Christlike living in all aspects of life or attain Christlike attributes but also clarify their perspective of the nature of mission."[2] Concerning mission, Paul Bendor-Samuel asserts that "mission is God's… it is not that God has a mission for his church but that God has a church for his mission."[3] Tom O'Reilly explains that Christians' purpose is to join God in His mission, which is to continuously reach out to people from all walks of life with love and compassion since mission is God's project and we are not the main actors.[4] In light of this, a Christian mission is defined as "an organized effort for the propagation of the Christian Faith."[5] This statement affirms that the church is the agent of

[1] Wright, "Reading the Old Testament Missionally," 116.

[2] Guichun Jun, "Missional Discipleship in the Public Sphere: With Special Reference to Lordship, Followership and Christlikeness in the Concept of Public Discipleship," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 2022): 116, https://doi.org/10.1177/02653788211062462.

[3] Paul Bendor-Samuel, "Challenge and Realignment in the Protestant Cross-Cultural Mission Movement," *Transformation* 34, no. 4 (2017): 271.

[4] Tom O'Reilly, "Reflections on Mission Today," *The Furrow* 69, no. 5 (2018): 271.

[5] Akebok, "Factors That Hinder Discipleship in Missions," 8.

mission, the agency is not primarily individual but the Church.[6] However, David Killingray opines that the commission to go and make disciples of all nations is a command to all believers, not just a few selected missionaries. It is work which should be done at home, in workplaces, and in the communities.[7] In the same vein, Niemandt submits that "God's mission has a church. Mission not only precedes the church but also includes it: 'Mission calls the church into being to serve God's purposes in the world'"[8] Thus, it appears that the essence of discipleship is mission.

Biblical Origin of Mission

The whole Bible is perceived to be a missionary book, and mission is the foundation and very nature of God. Significant mission themes emerge that are later expanded in the Old Testament which become a foundation for what is found about mission in the New Testament.[9] For example, Genesis 1:1 shows God as a missionary God when in the very beginning He created the heavens and the earth for a reason. Hence, the OT foundation of mission is rooted in Genesis 1:26-28 where God created man in His image and charged man with the responsibility to become fruitful and multiply. From Adam after the fall, God chose Noah and his household including the selected animals were saved (Gen 6-7:23) to begin a new life on earth by fulfilling the

[6] Kenneth R Ross, "Understanding Mission Today: Points of Convergence?," *Transformation* 34, no. 4 (2017): 262.

[7] David Killingray, "Passing on the Gospel: Indigenous Mission in Africa," *Transformation* 28, no. 2 (2011): 97.

[8] Thomas J. Smith and Nelus Niemandt, "Exploring a Missional Pedagogy for Transforming Discipleship: Implications for Missional Discipleship within the DRC," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 8, no. 1 (2022): 3.

[9] Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions Second Edition A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 27.

command of fruitfulness and multiplication (Gen 9:1).[10] But after man's rebellion, by building the tower of Babel, God still had the promise of the blessing of all nations when he called Abram to create a kingdom of people (Gen 12:1-3). Although this call was particular to Abram, it also has a universal intention – a blessing to all people.

In biblical history, God providentially led the Israelites through experiences to make all people know that God's hand is powerful to save and can cause all to fear Him forever (Josh 4:24). So, during the dedication of the temple built by King Solomon, he prayed that God should listen and answer the prayers of a foreigner whenever he/she comes to the temple to pray. This was also meant for making the whole world know the name of the LORD (see 1Kgs 8:41-43; 2 Chr 6; 32-33). So, after the Exodus, Israel was called to be a priestly nation that would show forth God's power and glory to other nations (Exod 19:5-6, 16; Deut 4:6-7). Israel, a peculiar group, was thus used by God to achieve His universal goal for mission.[11]

But when Israel failed to fulfil this commission given to them then came Jonah, who was sent to a Gentile nation – the city of Nineveh. So, Jonah's story becomes the call for Israel to become as compassionate as God and it shows that God deals with the particularistic attitude of Israel, and it also reflects God's relationship with the heathen.[12]

Admittedly, the term mission as a word is not explicitly seen in the English Versions of the Bible; however, the concept of mission – the act of sending, is seen,

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[10] G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: Unfolding Story of One The Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 30.

[11] Michael Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 39.

[12] Thomas Schirrmacher, "Biblical Foundations for Missions: Seven Clear Lessons," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no. 1 (1996): 33.

for the Greek words πεμπω and ἀποστέλλω (sending) both relate to mission (cf. Matt 10:5; Luke 11:49; John 1; 6; 4:30; 20:21). The term mission is thus derived from the Latin, *mitoo*, 'to send' and *missio* 'sending or being sent.'[13]

Rationale and God's Plan for Missions

Walter C. Kaiser Jr. posits that "the Bible begins with the theme of missions in the book of Genesis and maintains that driving passion throughout the entire Old Testament and on into the New Testament."[14] The Bible records in Genesis 3 the fall of man. This crisis of the fall and the flood (Gen 6-9) necessitates a mission. There is a need to save humanity. God initiates the plan of salvation (Gen 3:15). Genesis 1-11 records events which have universal implications. Hence, the plan of God is equally universal to save the world. And the universal scope of the mission is first clearly referenced by Abraham. The Great Commission of the Old Testament declares, "And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3). On three occasions, the Lord emphasizes this promise to Abraham. (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). Abraham is called to be a blessing to "all families on earth," serving as a beacon of light to the entire world.[15] This blessing which would come through Abraham's seed refers to the blessing announced to Adam and Eve when they sin (Gen 3:15).[16]

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[13] Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy S. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 5.

[14] Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, Second (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), ix.

[15] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 45.

[16] Walter Jr, *Mission in the Old Testament*, xiii.

God intends to bless one person for them to be the conduit of blessings to the whole world. God purposes that Israel would be his missionary to the world.[17] God wants to be known throughout the world including where idolatry is being practiced and Israel is chosen to be the instrument to accomplish the mission.[18] It should be noted that Israel is not chosen above other nations but to reach other nations.[19] Hence, the election of Israel does not imply the rejection of other nations. Rather, it is designed to be a means of saving them.[20] According to Deuteronomy 28:9-10, God's blessing on the children of Israel is meant to draw the attention of other nations to their unique God and why he should be worshipped not for personal aggrandizement.[21]

Further, Moskala describes the two-fold mission of the children of Israel. The first is for Israel's children and the following generations. This is inward focus (centripetal). Parents have the task of telling the stories of God's work to their children (Exod 12:24 –27; Deut 6:4 –9; Isa 38:19). Secondly, God's followers are expected to spread the message of salvation to others (Isa 66:19; Pss 67:2; 96:3). This mission is global in scope and is gradually unfolded. Although Israel did not always succeed in this assignment.[22] Also, in the Prophetic Writings, prophets of God repeatedly remind the nation of Israel of their assignment to other nations.

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[17] Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, 12.

[18] Rollin G. Grams, "Narrative Dynamics in Isaiah's and Matthew's Mission Theology," *Transformation* 21, no. 4 (2004): 245.

[19] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 42.

[20] Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, 14.

[21] Kaiser Jr., 18.

[22] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 43–44.

In the New Testament, the mission to save the world continues. When Jesus came, his mission was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He did not hold anything back to reach the people he loved.[23] This mission continues through the ministry of the apostles. He gives them the Great Commission. He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Matt 28:19; cf. Mark 16:15, 16). This commission inaugurates a rescue mission of which all followers of the Lord are expected to be part.[24] Before Jesus' ascension, he tells his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8). From Jerusalem to the end of the world implies that the mission work begins from their immediate environment but does not end there. It goes beyond and reaches the end of the world. The universality of the gospel message is also obvious in the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12. Verse 6 says, "Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on the earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people." One can infer from the above discussion that God initiates a mission to save humanity as they respond to his grace.

Discipleship and Mission

There seems to be a connection between mission and discipleship. The purpose of the disciples' commission is to make more disciples, which is how the disciples carry out God's mission.[25] And consequent upon the relationship between

[23] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 26.

[24] Hull, 26.

[25] Jun, "Missional Discipleship in the Public Sphere," 111.

discipleship and mission, scholars seem to have merged the two concepts and coin what is called "missional discipleship." The earliest known usage of the term missional is traced to 1883, maybe even 1814.[26] Thus, Smith and Niemandt define missional discipleship as "a lifelong, communal process of being immersed in the *Missio Dei* for the sake of the world."[27] According to Jun, the core of Christianity is missional discipleship, which is not a recent fad or movement since these terms have a deeper connection to who the disciples are, than to what they do.[28] He buttresses that "missional discipleship is more than the transmission of the gospel but the transformation of individuals and societies by demonstrating true followership of believers whose values are transformed."[29]

Jun affirms that,

> Mission and discipleship are organically connected by nature. Mission devoid of discipleship is an empty slogan for the expansion of God's kingdom, and discipleship devoid of mission is bottomless trap called religious self-satisfaction. Therefore, missional discipleship is the appropriate term to include both engaging in mission and being intentional about faithful discipleship.[30]

More so, Jun highlights three characteristics between mission and discipleship namely; they are both God's call to be missionaries and disciples by acknowledging Christ's Lordship in their lives; they are both transformative, and both of them are

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[26] Thomas Paul Schirrmacher, "On the Term 'Missional,'" 2017, www.thomasschirrmacher.net. Schirrmacher argues that missional still has several different definitions and has a wide range of connotations. Some interpret the term to mean a church that fully incarnationally conforms to its surroundings, while others take it to mean the exact opposite—a church that provides a different kind of community as a substitute for society as it could be. According to some, missionary practice reflects a postmodern flexibility on theological matters for the good of genuine human relationships. Others assume an orthodox comprehension of God's mission in Christ, which leads to everything being viewed through the lens of this purpose and bowed down to it.

[27] Smith and Niemandt, "Exploring a Missional Pedagogy for Transforming Discipleship," 3.

[28] Jun, "Missional Discipleship in the Public Sphere," 112.

[29] Jun, 112–13.

[30] Jun, 112.

progressive.[31] He therefore submits that "missional discipleship is to participate in the grand narrative of God's redemptive mission as a way of living rather than to be methodologically creative and strategic for effective witness for church growth."[32]

In the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20), the verbs "go," (πορευθέντες) "baptizing," (βαπτίζοντες) and "teaching" (διδάσκοντες) are participles in the original Greek writing whereas "make disciples" (μαθητεύσατε) is an imperative verb. Grammatically, the emphasis seems to fall on the command to "make disciples" which is imperative whereas the participles (going, baptizing and teaching) provide the vehicle, means or process for making disciples. Not only that, but those verbs also describe the character of a disciple; one who is going, baptizing, and teaching. So, the imperative - make disciples - is the goal.[33]

A crucial aspect of God's mission and the church's calling is evangelism. Evangelism is a subset of mission because mission is broader. Making disciples is a fundamental component of evangelism, which is the call to personal conversion and discipleship. The Holy Spirit works to develop genuine disciples of Jesus Christ, and the church takes part in the mission of God by spreading the gospel.[34] Smith and Niemandt explain that a call to discipleship is contained in the offer to follow Jesus Christ. It is an invitation to give one's life to Christ and to become a part of Him.

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[31] Jun, 113.

[32] Ibid., 114.

[33] Linda Stromsmoe, "Making Disciples: A Foundation for an Integrated Mission Program" (PhD Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, Virtual Campus, 2011), 35, https://rts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Stromsmoe-making-disciples.pdf.

[34] Smith and Niemandt, "Exploring a Missional Pedagogy for Transforming Discipleship," 3.

God's call to mission is also a call to discipleship, which is to live a life of obedience and praise in response to God's presence, purpose, and promise.[35]

Mission of the Church

The mission of the Church is the mission of God. This mission seems to be the same in all ages since the plan of God for humanity does not change. Niemandt explains that God himself is mission stressing that the Triune God, being a God of love, is showing his love for all creation and inviting them into a renewed relationship with him.[36] In his own words, Goheen states that the mission of God is "to restore the creation and the life of humanity from the ravages of sin."[37] Andrew Tompkins shares this view. He asserts that "God's mission is often described as His desire to bless humanity through His work of salvation/redemption."[38] In the beginning, God reveals himself as a missionary. When Adam and Eve sin, he searches for them. And consequent upon their sin, there is an alienation between God and humanity. However, God's heart yearns for the people whom he creates in his image. From that time on, the mission of God has been redemptive in nature and universal in scope.[39] Tompkins, buttresses further that God's mission of salvation and redemption to all the nations is entrenched in the blessing promised to Abraham in Genesis 12 – "and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (v.3).[40] So, God desires that all

[35] Smith and Niemandt, 3.

[36] Nelus Niemandt, "Rediscovering Joy in Costly and Radical Discipleship in Mission," *HTS Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 2, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3831.

[37] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues*, 19.

[38] Andrew Tompkins, *God's Mission to the Nations: An Old Testament Study Applied in the Hindu Context*, ed. Richard McEdward (Global Mission Center for South Asian Religions, 2015), 14.

[39] Tompkins, 15.

[40] Tompkins, 19.

peoples would recognize Him as the one God, come to know Him, and that the broken connection would be repaired.[41]

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ continues with the mission of redemption. Jesus' mission statement is evident. He affirms, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10). Earlier, Jesus sees himself as fulfilling Isaianic prophecy. He states, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19). Ultimately, he is to achieve his mission through his vicarious death. That is why he says, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45).

In addition, before the ascension of Jesus Christ, he commits the redemptive work to his followers. Specifically, in Acts 1:8, Jesus says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8). In obedience to this command, the disciples carry on the mission of Jesus Christ. Christoph Stenschke opines that "involvement in mission was an essential task and characteristic of early Christian churches. Indeed, the portrayal of the mission of the church in Acts continues to challenge the mission of the church today."[42] He explains that "the mission activities of prominent figures such as Paul were deeply embedded in churches. This is where Paul himself, his support and co-workers came from; this is

[41] Tompkins, 20.

[42] Christoph Stenschke, "Mission in the Book of Acts: Mission of the Church," *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 103, no. 1 (2010): 78.

where he returned regularly, reported and ministered and where he was."[43] In light of this, Kim observes that, "both theologically and empirically, it is impossible to separate the church from the mission. Indeed mission is the very life of the church and the church is missionary by its very nature the Spirit of Christ breathed into the disciples at the same time as he sent them into the world."[44] Wright says, "Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation."[45] Similarly, Rene Padilla submits that the purpose of the Church is to proclaim and present the Kingdom of God via action and social service, as an outgrowth of the mission of Jesus.[46] Tawfik maintains that the church is not ignorant of its mission which is to reveal Jesus Christ to the world, serving, preaching, teaching and guiding through conduct, actions, and words.[47] This mission of the church is achieved through the propagation of the gospel, serving the community, and promoting love, justice, and compassion.

It is argued that there is no specific command in the Old Testament for Yahweh's followers to preach to other nations.[48] In response to this, Moskala explains

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[43] Stenschke, 77.

[44] Kirsteen Kim, "Mission Theology of the Church," *International Review of Mission* 99, no. 1 (April 2010): 39–55, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2010.00035.x.

[45] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 23.

[46] C. René Padilla, "The Mission of the Church in Light of the Kingdom of God," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 1, no. 2 (April 1984): 18, https://doi.org/10.1177/026537888400100206.

[47] Wedad A. Tawfik, "Discipleship Transforming the World: A Coptic Orthodox Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 106, no. 2 (2017): 268–79, https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12185.

[48] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 41. See also; Michael Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 24.

that the mission in the Old Testament is discussed using language and imagery from the Bible that differs from modern usage. Hebrew Scripture has some explicit pronouncements that reveal God's people's mission, but it also contains stories that offer clues and observations rather than clear commandments to carry out. These unintentional statements provide insight into the mission plan, which is not as clear-cut as one might hope.[49] He asserts that "God's universal purpose is the basis for the missionary message of the Old Testament. God has a mission, and the believers in Him are to participate in it."[50]

Through Moses, the LORD informs the children of Israel:

> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deut 7:6-8)

Israel is chosen through grace to exemplify their calling to be a kingdom of priests in their ministry to other nations.[51] In Isaiah 46:10, the Bible says, "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. (Isa 43:10)

In the New Testament, one of the explicit means of fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ is by preaching or teaching the gospel. This is demonstrated by Jesus himself when he comes. He says, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of

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[49] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 42.

[50] Moskala, 42.

[51] Walter Jr, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 58.

God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea. (Luke 4:43-44). Matthew 4:23 seems to summarize all aspects of Jesus' ministry. It says, "And he went throughout all Galilee, *teaching* in their synagogues and *proclaiming* the gospel of the kingdom and *healing* every disease and every affliction among the people." (Emphasis mine, cf. Luke 9:6)

Jesus emphasizes the necessity of propagating the gospel to prepare the world for his second coming (Matt 24:14). The New Testament apocalyptic writing also stresses the need for preaching the gospel in the end time. It says, "Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. (Rev 14:6). The Acts of the Apostles records how the disciples take the gospel commission mandate seriously, traveling extensively to spread Jesus' teachings. The apostle Paul, for example, dedicates his life to preaching and establishing churches throughout the Roman Empire.[52]

The gospel is shared not only through preaching and teaching but also through acts of service to the community and the then world. With these tangible expressions of love, compassion, and service, the disciples are able to fulfill the mission of God as they are commissioned. Following the example of Jesus (Mark 10:45), the disciples incorporate service into their mission, realizing that their actions could speak louder than words. The early church, led by the apostles, stresses the significance of caring for the needy and vulnerable. Acts 6:1-7 reports the appointment of seven deacons who are charged with the task of taking care of the widows in the community who are neglected in the daily distribution of food. This act of service addresses a practical

[52] Dana Lee Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion Series (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 12.

need and help to maintain unity within the early Christian community. It also gives room for the apostles to focus on prayer and the ministry of the word, highlighting the balance between spiritual and practical ministry.

Later, Apostle James writes, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” (James 1:27). This underscores the significance of serving the needy as an expression of true religion. The commitment of the disciples to serving and helping the less privilege is a direct reflection of the teachings of Jesus and an important part of their missionary efforts (See Matt 25:31-46).

In addition, just like their Master Jesus, the disciples also spread the gospel through the acts of miracles which serve as powerful testimonies to the truth of the gospel. For example, Peter and John’s healing of the lame man at the temple gate (Acts 3:1-10) not only restore the man’s physical health but also provide a platform for Peter to preach about Jesus’ resurrection. Through this miracle, many people believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:4). Likewise, Paul’s evangelistic work is characterized by many miracles, such as healing the sick and casting out demons (Acts 19:11-12). These acts of service reveal the power of God and captivate many people to the faith, illustrating how service and proclamation of the gospel are interwoven.

God’s Disciples as Agent of Mission

God’s scheme always involves His followers playing active parts in His mission to redeem and restore the fallen creation. Thus, discipleship is intertwined with mission and has implications on it. God purposes that his mission on earth will be carried out by the people whom he has saved and called for that purpose. God calls Abram with a promise and mission (Gen 12:1-3). The purpose of his calling is not

only for him but the whole earth. God's mission is often intending to extend beyond a single individual or group.

The Lord also chooses Israel, the descendants of Abraham (Exod 19:5-6). God's choice of Israel is intentional decision which is integrated into His redemptive plan. In the context of Israel, Election highlights a divine initiative that comes before any human response or merit.[53] The children of Israel are called by God to be a mediator between him and other nations of the earth, manifesting His values and laws and consequently drawing other people to Him. This priestly function affirms the missional nature of Israel's existence, illustrating that they are chosen not for privilege but for purpose. Moskala affirms that,

> When God calls His people into existence, He gives them a mission. There were no Old Testament people of God without a mission; there is no election without a commission. God's call presupposes a call for action….. *The Hebrew Scripture knows nothing about an election for salvation but knows an election for missio*n (Exod 3:7 –10; 7:1–2; 19:5 –6; Jer 1:5, emphasis supplied)[54]

As the children of Israel are about to enter the Promised Land, the LORD instructs them repeatedly to live in obedience to the commandments. This serves as a living example to the surrounding nations, and they would be attracted to their God. They are expected to be a model, a living example to the transformative power of a relationship with the LORD. Deuteronomy 4:6 encapsulates this by stating that if Israel keeps and does the statutes and judgments, it will show their wisdom and understanding to the nations (NIV).[55]

More so, Kaiser Jr. posits that Israel is called to be God's missionary to the

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[53] Douglas Youvan, *The Theology of Election in the Old Testament*, 2023, 3, https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.11508.73605.

[54] Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," 40.

[55] Youvan, *The Theology of Election in the Old Testament*, 21.

world as well as those who believe in this same message.[56] He maintains that "the 'people of God' in all ages have become one. Together they have all been called to the same privilege of service and ministry on behalf of the coming Man of promise.

All were to be agents of God's blessing to all on earth."[57] The LORD desires that the children of Israel to be a compelling example to all nations, reflecting his original intentions and the ultimate aim of restoring all creation and human life from the effects of sin.[58] The Lord chooses his people to glorify him, fulfill His mission, and serve others who are the focus of His mission. God chooses them in order to play a particular role in His mission to restore creation and glorify Himself, however, this choosing is for the benefit of the world. The people called by God serves as the beginning point for His work of restoration and as a conduit through which salvation reaches all people.[59]

The book of prophet Isaiah also mentions the role of God's people in His mission. For instance, Isaiah 42:6 say, "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations." This servant, understands to be a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, is depicted as an agent of God's redemptive mission.

Further, Goheen observes that the calling of Israel is the foundation of the church's missionary character. The story of Israel and their calling in the midst of the nations develops the interaction between the people of God and those who are not part

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[56] Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, 12.

[57] Ibid., 16.

[58] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues*, 25.

[59] Ibid., 26.

of their society.[60] James Butler reasons that "mission is primarily God's, and the church is invited to participate in the mission of God."[61] So, apart from the individuals, the church as a body is also the agents of God's mission.

In the New Testament, Jesus calls His disciples to follow Him and in both the Old and New Testaments, the call is for the purpose of service, and disciples, in particular, are called to participate in Christ's mission. Brueggeman explains that the invitation to follow Jesus Christ is a call to discipleship, encouraging people to devote their lives to Him and be united with Him. Jesus' call to mission is essentially a call to discipleship, urging believers to follow God's presence, purpose, and promise, embracing the lifestyle and disciplines needed for a life of obedience and praise.[62]

Furthermore, the explicit injunction for the disciples as agents of mission emanates from Jesus Himself (Matt 28:18-20). Jesus instructs His followers, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (vv.19-20). Mark also records this command. "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. (Mark 16:15) And Luke also reports the command in Acts 1:8, where Jesus tells His disciples, "… and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Besides, John records Jesus' command also. He says, "…as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

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[60] Goheen, 23.

[61] James Butler, "Human Agency in the Missio Dei and the Problem of Discipleship," *International Review of Mission* 112, no. 1 (May 2023): 112, https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12455.

[62] Walter Brueggemann, "Evangelism and Discipleship: The God Who Calls, the God Who Sends," in *The Study of Evangelism. Exploring a Missional Practise of the Church*, ed. P.W. Chilcote and L.C. Warner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 219–20.

(John 20:21). These texts affirm the disciples' role as active participants in God's mission, charged with the responsibility of spreading the gospel, baptizing, and teaching people to follow Christ's teachings.[63] The scope of the mission is global, reflecting God's original promise to Abraham and the universal reach of His redemptive plan.[64]

Luke narrates in the book of Acts how the early disciples act as agents of God's mission. There are records of Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2), Philip's meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), Peter's encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10), and Paul's missionary trips (Acts 13-28). These evangelistic activities explain the dynamic and expansive nature of the mission. These disciples of Jesus propagate the gospel via preaching, teaching, healing, and establishing communities of believers.

It could be inferred that Yahweh's followers are called to be agents of His mission. This function is consistent from the call of Abram through the early church. This mission is all-encompassing as it includes proclamation, teaching, and acts of service. And the mandate for mission work is not exclusive, it includes all disciples of Jesus Christ. Those who have received the light of the gospel are called to be the agents of the mission.[65] Hence, by responding and following God, the disciples are empowered to live lives of obedience, bringing others into the redemptive plan of God.

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[63] Howard Baker, "The Place of Mission in Johannine Discipleship: Perspectives from the Motif of Agency," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 6, no. 1 (2013): 45.

[64] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 278.

[65] "Conference on World Mission and Evangelism Report: 'Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship' Arusha, Tanzania, 8-13 March 2018," *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 2 (December 2018): 554, https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12250.

The Example of the Early Church

The early Church fulfills the mission mandate. Acts of the Apostles shows records of the activities of the disciples of Jesus Christ as they propagate the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. The early believers are committed to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer, resulting in a community that draws others to the faith.

The apostle Paul plays a significant part in the missionary expansion of the Church. His writings reveal a profound commitment to the mission. For example, in Romans 15:20, Paul expresses his desire to preach the gospel where Christ is not known. This demonstrates his dedication to reaching the unreached people.

The Church's Ongoing Mission

The mission of the Church continues in this contemporary time, and it is rooted in the same biblical principles. The Church is called to be a witness to the world, exemplifying Jesus' love and truth in every aspect of life. This includes evangelism, discipleship, social justice, and service (James 1:27).[66]

The mission of God to save the world continues till the end of time. The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church accepts this as its mandate to preach what is termed the everlasting gospel. Michael Onyedikachi Akpa affirms that this SDA mandate has a prophetic root in Revelation 10:1-11. He explains that the SDA is a remnant church with a unique mission and "has a specific time-bound mission: to boldly and unapologetically preach God's final warning messages contained in the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12… to the world, undiluted."[67]

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[66] Julius Muthengi, "On the Work and Worship of the Church," *East African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 5, no. 1 (1986): 10.

[67] Michael Onyedikachi Akpa, *Decoding the Apocalypse of John: Making Sense of the Book of Revelation* (Ikeja, Lagos: Dykpat & Associates, 2025), 90.

Further, Kleber D. Gonçalves states:

> The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting gospel embraced by the three angels' messages (Revelation 14:6-12), and to prepare the world for Christ's soon return - including emerging postmodern generations.[68]

So, God's mission will continue till the end of time. As Christ puts it in the Gospel of Matthew, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Mat 24:14)

How Discipleship Enhances Mission Effectiveness

It has been established that discipleship and mission seem like Siamese twins; they are inseparable. Discipleship is a mission, even though mission includes making disciples (Matt 28:19). Being a disciple extends beyond merely receiving teachings. It is to serve as a witness by imitating the life of Jesus, or by walking in his footsteps.[69] Drissi Ani observes that "a Christian disciple is a person who accepts and assists in the spreading of the good news of Jesus Christ."[70] This implies that when a disciple is made, he grows to become another disciple-maker. In other words, he gets involved in a mission. So, this section considers the impact of discipleship on mission effectiveness. This will be drawn largely from the book of Deuteronomy.

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[68] Kleber D Gonçalves, "Transforming Discipleship: Opportunities in Following the Master in a Postmodern World" 12, no. 2 (2016): 11.

[69] Emmanuel M Jacob, "Discipleship and Mission: A Perspective on the Gospel of Matthew," *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 360 (January 2002): 107.

[70] Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, "What Is Transforming Discipleship?," *The Ecumenical Review* 71, no. 1–2 (January 2019): 217, https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12421.

Training and Equipping

The book of Deuteronomy provides a theological and practical guide for the children of Israel and the Christendom. The book presents a structure for the instruction and training of God's people, stressing the need for continuous education in the faith. Glanville Mark states that "Deuteronomy seeks to shape Israel to be a display community living in the sight of the nations."[71] This shaping seems to entail training and equipping them to be Yahweh's faithful followers and witnesses.

Deuteronomy places a significant emphasis on the teaching of the laws and commandments of God to Yahweh's followers. In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, Moses commands the children of Israel to keep the commandments in their heart, impress them on their children, and talk of the commandments everywhere and every time. The text emphasizes the significance of ongoing and thorough instruction. The commands are not only to be learnt but also integrated into daily life, ensuring that every aspect of living is permeated with God's teachings. Likewise, in the New Testament, Matthew 28:18-20 brings out the dual parts of discipleship: the primary act of making disciples and the continuous process of teaching them to obey all things which Jesus commands. This ongoing teaching needs a structured and thorough approach to ensure that disciples are fully equipped for their mission.

The integral approach to training in Deuteronomy is apparent in its call for both individual and communal engagement with the word of God. In Deuteronomy 11:18-20, Moses instructs Israel to internalize God's words deeply within their hearts and souls, and to keep them constantly in mind by wearing them as visible reminders. They are to teach these words diligently to their children, discuss them in all aspects

[71] Glanville, "A Missional Reading of Deuteronomy," 127.

of daily life, and display them prominently in their homes. This injunction shows that the commandments are always present in their lives, influencing both personal devotion and public conduct. Disciples' conduct should manifest the character of their Master by manifesting their internal holiness in the heavily secularized public spheres as a form of mission.[72]

Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus Himself patterned comprehensive training during His ministry. In his three years with the disciples, he imparts knowledge, demonstrates righteous living, and provides firsthand ministry experience for them. Mark 3:14 says, “And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him, and he might send them out to preach.” This passage shows Jesus’ method of training, which includes relational proximity (“that they might be with him”) and practical ministry skills (“send them out to preach”). This approach helps the disciples not only to have theoretical knowledge but also practical skills needed for ministry. As Jesus discipled them by his example, they received living training which later guided them in their missionary endeavors.

Correspondingly, the early believers exhibited the significance of continual training for disciples. Acts 2:42 says that the early believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer.” This commitment to the apostles’ teaching shows a planned approach to learning and spiritual growth.[73] Besides, Apostle Paul’s letters are filled with admonitions to teach and train believers. For example, in 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul instructs Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable

[72] Jun, “Missional Discipleship in the Public Sphere,” 118.

[73] Scott W. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 288.

people who will also be qualified to teach others." This verse underscores the importance of passing on sound teaching to ensure the continuity and growth of the body of Christ.

Furthermore, continuous training is important for sustaining covenant faithfulness. Deuteronomy always stresses the need for the children of Israel to remember and obey God's commandments to stay faithful to the covenant. In Deuteronomy 4:9-10, Moses instructs, "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children - how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so." This passage affirms the generational aspect of training, ensuring that the knowledge of God's mighty acts and laws is transmitted, preserving the covenant relationship across generations.

Also, Deuteronomy highlights the role of leaders in providing training. For example, Moses plays this role in the lives of the Israelites dedicating his final speeches to repeating God's commandments and urging obedience. In Deuteronomy 31:12-13, Moses instructs, "assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess." He emphasizes the need to

hear, learn, fear the Lord, and observe the law.[74] One can observe that religious leaders are charged with organizing the community for instruction and teaching, ensuring that everyone, including future generations, understands and adheres to the LORD's commandments.

True discipleship training has a deep impact on the effectiveness of the mission of the disciples. Ephesians 4:11-13 elucidates that Jesus Christ gave "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." This text shows that comprehensive training equips the disciples for service, promotes unity, and leads to spiritual growth and maturity.

Lastly, Deuteronomy links training with obedience and the resulting blessings. Moses "explains the benefits of covenantal keeping and the dangers of covenant breaking."[75] In Deuteronomy 28:1-2, Moses says, "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God." Obedience, which comes from comprehension and adherence to the commandments of the LORD, results in divine blessings. This principle underlines the significance of comprehensive training in ensuring that disciples live in accordance with God's will and experience His blessings. In congruent with this view, Stromsmoe asserts that "a disciple is one who lives a life of

[74] Nichol, *SDABC*, Vol 1, 1063

[75] Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 191.

loyal obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ and imitates his righteous character. The presence of such disciples in the church has great implications for missions."[76]

Spiritual Growth and Maturity

Through discipleship, believers grow spiritually into maturity.[77] A mature disciple fulfils the gospel commission. Marriot James opines that "the object of discipling is to transform lives though growth toward maturity (Heb 6:1) in order to bear fruit (John 15:8)."[78] He explains that the promise of the new Spirit promised in Ezekiel 36 becomes a reality in the lives of the believers aiding their spiritual growth.[79] It is believed that "discipleship activities are expected to support the formation of the spiritual growth of the church."[80] This implies that the process of discipleship helps to build responsible relationship with Jesus Christ with the aim of leading one to spiritual growth in Christ.[81] Following are the process and things that aid spiritual growth of the disciples:

First, the starting point of a spiritual growth begins with a relationship with God. The LORD first calls the children of Israel into a covenantal relationship. Then, he continues to guide them and nurture them in their relationship. He guides them

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[76] Stromsmoe, "Making Disciples," 42.

[77] Purnomo Adi, "The Impact Of Discipleship And Empowerment Of The Laity To The Growth Of Church Betesda Indonesia Gateway, Sidoarjo," *Journal Kerugma* 4, no. 2 (October 29, 2021): 79, https://doi.org/10.33856/kerugma.v4i2.229.

[78] James Marriott, "How the Redeemed World Is Done: Charting the Relationship between Liturgy, Discipleship, and Mission," *Lutheran Mission Matters* 30 (2022): 109.

[79] Marriott, 109.

[80] Stefanus Sugianto, Andreas Nugroho, and Rulli Jonathans, "Relationship Discipleship Activities and Implementation the Great Mandatory Based on Mattew 28:19-20 with Spiritual Growth in Congregation of the GBI Manna Bengkulu," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis* 06 (July 29, 2023): 3298, https://doi.org/10.47191/ijmra/v6-i7-57.

[81] Sugianto, Nugroho, and Jonathans, 3299.

through his statutes, prophets and priests. Likewise, in the New Testament, Jesus metaphorically explains, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (Joh 15:5). This affirms the need to remain connected to Christ for spiritual vitality and fruitfulness. Hence, the growth of the disciples depends on this abiding relationship, where constant nourishment and strength are drawn from Christ. It is the consequence of this growth that brings about mission productivity.

Another important element of spiritual growth is the word of God. The Bible serves as the primary source of divine instruction (2 Tim 3:16-17), guiding disciples in godly living and equipping them for mission. Constant study and meditation on the Bible are sine qua non for deepening one’s understanding of God and His purpose.

Also, prayer is another element for spiritual growth. Through prayer, disciples have a direct line of communication with the Lord, expressing their needs, thanksgiving, and worship. This communion engenders closeness with God and dependence on His guidance and provision. In addition, the role of the Holy Spirit plays in the growth and maturation of the disciples is expedient. For instance, the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) are evidence of the Spirit’s transformative work within a believer, shaping their character to reflect Christ. Also, Jesus promises that the Spirit would guide the believers into all truth (John 16:13). This suggests that the Holy Spirit leads disciples to a deeper understanding of truth, convicting them of sin and empowering them to live a godly life. So, essential to the growth of the disciples are prayer, fasting, worship, Bible study, and meditation.[82]

[82] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014), 272.

Spiritual growth is also strengthened within the context of community (Heb 10:24-25) Fellowship with other believers brings about mutual encouragement and opportunities for collective worship and service. The communal aspect of faith helps disciples to grow through shared experiences, teachings, and support. More so, the spiritual growth of the disciples is achieved as he gets involved in witnessing, sharing his faith with another person. Through fellowship in the body of Christ, the disciples are guided to be deepen in their relationship with God, discover their spiritual gifts and become more productive.[83] So, as the disciple grows into maturity, he becomes equipped for mission. Such a disciple grows to understand God's plan of redemption and serve God better.[84]

Strategies for Effective Discipleship

The Old and New Testaments provide strategies needed for effective discipleship. In the Old Testament, these strategies are grounded in covenantal relationships, communal living, and an unwavering commitment to God's laws, and dependence of the Holy Spirit.

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[83] Van Rheenen, 245.

[84] Adi, "The Impact Of Discipleship And Empowerment Of The Laity To The Growth Of Church Betesda Indonesia Gateway, Sidoarjo," 79.

Teaching and Memorization of God's Laws

One of the primary strategies for discipleship in the Old Testament is the careful teaching and memorization of the Torah. Moses points out this fact in Deut 6:6-9 where he instructs the children of Israel on the importance of committing the commandments to heart in order to integrate it into their daily living. This strategy ensures that discipleship begins at home and permeates the entire community.[85]

Role of Community and Worship

Community plays a crucial role in the discipleship process in the Old Testament. The Israelites are a covenant community, and their collective identity is strengthened through shared worship and communal activities. Nehemiah 8:1-8 gives a clear example of this communal approach. When the children of Israel return from their captivity, Ezra gathers all the people and reads the Book of the Law to them. The Levites then help explain the law so that the people could understand and apply it. It appears that this corporate reading and interpretation of Scripture fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose. Effective discipleship depends on the support and encouragement found within a faith community. The record shows that the early believers practice communal worship, teaching, and mutual support, creating an environment where discipleship could thrive (Acts 2). It provides a model for communal discipleship where everyone, regardless of their social status, participates in learning and growing together in faith. [86] This could be adopted in contemporary time.

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[85] Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory*, 291.

[86] Sunquist, 282.

Mentorship and Leadership Training

The Old Testament also underscores mentorship and the training of future leaders. An example is that of Moses' relationship with Joshua. The Bible says, "So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey." (Num 27:18-20) Moses serves as a mentor to Joshua by providing him with practical guidance and experience in leadership. In the New Testament, Paul demonstrates mentorship in his relationship with Timothy. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul advises, "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Tim 2:2) The strategy of Apostle Paul involves a multi-generational approach to discipleship, ensuring that the teachings are faithfully passed on and multiplied through successive leaders.

Accountability and Covenant Renewal

Regular accountability and covenant renewal ceremonies are crucial for maintaining spiritual commitment and community integrity. For example, Joshua 24 records a covenant renewal at Shechem, where Joshua gathers all the tribes of Israel and reminds them of God's mighty acts and faithfulness in all their journeys their duties under the covenant. The children of Israel reaffirm their commitment to serve the LORD, and Joshua sets up a stone as a witness to their pledge. These ceremonies provide opportunities for reflection, recommitment, and communal accountability. They strengthened the collective identity and shared values of the community, ensuring that each member remained aligned with the covenantal relationship with God.

Reliance on the Holy Spirit

Both Testaments stress the need for depending on the Spirit of God for effective discipleship. As a matter of fact, "a disciple of Christ can only grow in the truth of the Word when guided by relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit."[87] In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God empowers leaders and prophets. The empowerment of the Spirit is expedient for the proclamation of the gospel and guiding of God's people (Isa 61:1; John 14:26; Acts 1:8).

The foregoing discussion shows how central mission is in God's plan of redemption and the role of discipleship in achieving this mission. It is observed that "the church's mission flows from the mission of God."[88] Disciples are called to participate in the mission of God. In other words, "the missional identity of a congregation is understood as taking part in the mission of God."[89] According to Rheneen, "mission is to the church what blood is to the body." This underscores the necessity and significance of mission to the Church. And it appears that the essence of this mission is redemption. Hence, the mission of the Church is derived from the teachings of both the Old and New Testaments. Essentially, it aims at propagating the gospel of salvation for the purpose of redemption.

As earlier stated, the mission of the Church originates from the Old Testament, starting from the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). The LORD makes a covenant with Abraham promising to make him a great nation and that all the people on earth will be

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[87] James Kwang Jin Kim, Hertina Soerjaman, and Maricel Samuel, "The Role of The Holy Spirit in Discipleship," *SAINT PAUL'S REVIEW* 3, no. 1 (May 3, 2023): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.56194/spr.v3i1.36.

[88] Stromsmoe, "Making Disciples," 18.

[89] Frederik R. L. Coetzee, Malan Nel, and Johannes J. Knoetze, "Evangelism as an Invitation to Missional Discipleship in the Kingdom of God," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44, no. 1 (2023): 2, https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2708.

blessed through him. The promise is later repeated twice to stress its universality (Gen 18:18; 22:18). Concerning Israel, prophet Isaiah says, "…. I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Isa 49:6). This text suggests that the salvation plan of God includes all the nations of the earth.

In the New Testament, the Great Commission spells out the essence of the Church's mission: "…. *make disciples* of all nations, *baptizing them* in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*…." (Matt 28:19-20). This directive affirms the primary task of the Church: to evangelize, baptize, and teach.[90] This idea is reechoed in the Gospel of Mark. It says, "And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16 cf. Acts 1:8) This command also underscores the inclusivity of the gospel message. Hans Kasdoft observes that this Great Commission is not about information for the Church, but it requires obedience and action till Jesus comes.[91]

Integration of Covenantal Principles from Deuteronomy in Mission

Having studied the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy, this section will make an application of the discipleship concept and lessons derived from the book of Deuteronomy to the mission of the Church. The book of Deuteronomy emphasizes the covenantal relationship which exists between Yahweh and the children of Israel. The covenant is one of the ways of expressing the actual

[90] Knud Jørgensen, "The Emergence and Challenge of the Missional Church Concept in the West," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 92, no. 4 (2004): 563.

[91] Hans Kasdorf, "Teaching the Great Commission," 1980, 138, https://fpuscholarworks.fresno.edu/bitstream/handle/11418/705/Called_Kasdorf.pdf?sequence=1.

relationship between both.[92] This covenant affirms Israel as God's chosen people and equally spell out their duties to live as a witness to the surrounding nations. In the context of mission, the covenantal principles derived in Deuteronomy present deep perceptions into how individuals and communities can incorporate and communicate Yahweh's redemptive purposes to the world. The following are principles from the book of Deuteronomy:

Covenant as the Foundation of Mission

The core message of Deuteronomy is the covenant, that is, a divine pact which institutes a relationship between Yahweh and His people. This covenant establishes the foundation for Israel's mission, as they are called to be a "holy people" (Deut 7:6) and a "light to the nations" (cf. Isa. 49:6). Paul House posits that their willingness to serve the LORD stems from their established relationship.[93] The covenantal principles emphasize Yahweh's sovereign initiative, the call to obedience, and the mandate to represent His character among the nations.

In mission, this covenantal structure stresses the need for a relationship-centered approach. Mission is not only a task or duty; it is an outflow of a living relationship with Yahweh.[94] As Deuteronomy frequently emphasizes the themes of love, loyalty, and obedience (Deut 6:4-9), God's missionaries are reminded that their work must be established in their own covenantal relationship with Yahweh, reflecting His love and faithfulness to those they serve.

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[92] Łanoszka, "The Relationship between God and Israel as a Biblical Portrayal of the Bond between God and the Person in the Light of Deuteronomy 1," 9.

[93] House, *Old Testament Theology*, 175.

[94] Christopher Beard, "Missional Discipleship: Discerning Spiritual-Formation Practices and Goals within the Missional Movement," *Missiology* 43, no. 2 (2015): 175–94.

Covenantal Relationship and Faithfulness

The Old Testament's discipleship model lies in the covenantal relationship between God and Israel (Gen 13:15). The nation in covenant with God serves as the ultimate discipleship model for Israel. This covenantal relationship can manifest in "following God" and "walking in his ways" (Deut 4:1-14; 10:12-13; 1 Sam 12:14). The book of Deuteronomy affirms the significance of complete loyalty and devotion to the LORD which seems to be a foundational aspect of discipleship.[95] For instance, the Bible says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:4-5). This is a summon to a covenantal faithfulness which is significant to the understanding of biblical faithfulness. This command to love the LORD completely goes beyond an individual. It is a communal one.

Deuteronomy's insistence on covenantal faithfulness forms the foundation for discipleship in the Old Testament. Israel's faithfulness is a reaction to the LORD's grace and redemption, as recorded in Deuteronomy 5:6-21, where the Decalogue is restated. These commandments are integral to the identity and mission of God's people. Upholding the LORD's commandments by Israel will demonstrate their commitment and distinctiveness as God's people. This is what the disciples are called to do, living in obedience and setting examples to the world. This helps to fulfill the mission.

[95] Peter T. Vogt, "Religious Concepts in the Theology of Deuteronomy: A Re-Appraisal of Deuteronomic Theology and the Significance of Torah" (PhD Thesis, University of Gloucestershire, 2003), 27.

Character Formation through Teaching and Learning

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses stresses the importance of the teaching and transmission of faith, which is essential components of discipleship. In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, he instructs the children of Israel to absorb God's commandments and impress them on their children. He says, "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

The text stresses the significance of continuous, generational teaching. A lifetime of learning and teaching is required of disciples, as the community of faith actively participates in dispensing the wisdom of God and His commands. The repeated act of teaching is necessary for preserving faith across generations and for equipping God's disciples to participate in his mission. It should be noted that the role of teaching goes beyond only knowledge transmission; it helps to form character and conduct. Repeatedly, Deuteronomy stresses the need to saturate the mind with the words of God (Deut 11:18-21). This method aims to integrate faith into every aspect of daily life, creating a pervasive culture of discipleship that prepares individuals to fulfill their divine mission.

Worship and Witness

Chennattu explains that "the Israelites were supposed to pass on what they had seen, heard, and experienced, viz., God's intervention in their history, to future generations (Deut 6:20-25; 11:1-9).[96] This idea of bearing testimony of one's experience is found in Jesus' discourse with his disciples. Jesus insists that his

[96] Channattu, 47.

"disciples should bear witness to him."[97] Also, Deuteronomy emphasizes the fundamental importance of worship in the life of the people of God. The Shema (Deut 6:4-5) summarizes this by calling Israel to love the LORD their God with all their heart, soul, and strength. This unswerving devotion to the LORD becomes the basis for their witness to the nations. Their worship, both as individual and a community, serves as a testimony to the character and greatness of God (Deut 4:6-8).

In mission, this principle presents the significance of genuine worship as a form of witness. Missionaries and missional communities are called to demonstrate a God-centered life that attracts others into the worship of the one true God.[98] This also involves addressing idolatry in all its forms, as Deuteronomy repeatedly warns against embracing the practices of surrounding nations (Deut 12:29-31). By living differently and pointing others to the worship of Yahweh, mission shows the covenantal call to bear witness of the true God to the heathen nations.[99]

Justice and Compassion

A crucial characteristic of the covenant in Deuteronomy is its ethical dimension, especially the call to justice and compassion.[100] The covenantal laws provide for the protection of the vulnerable, including the poor, widows, fatherless, orphans, and foreigners (Deut 10:18-19; 24:17-22). These commands show the LORD's character as a God of justice and mercy and establish a framework for societal ethics rooted in His covenant.[101]

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[97] Ibid.

[98] Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*.

[99] Nichol, SDABC, Vol 1., 977.

[100] House, 86.

[101] Ibid., 182

In mission, these ethical principles are essential for addressing social injustices and integrating the gospel in tangible ways. Missional efforts must go beyond proclamation to include advocacy, service, and holistic transformation. By prioritizing justice and compassion, mission harmonizes with the covenantal vision of a community that shows God's righteousness and care for all people.

Practical Applications in Mission

The covenantal principles of Deuteronomy also offer practical guidance for mission strategy and practice. For instance, the call to teach and transmit the covenant to next generations (Deut 6:6-9) pinpoints the significance of discipleship and education in mission. Training individuals to know and live out Yahweh's covenant equips them to participate in His mission and multiply its impact. Moses points out the role of the parents in this matter.[102]

Further, the stress on the community in Deuteronomy points to the collective nature of the mission. Israel's identity as a covenantal nation shows the Church that mission is not an individual undertaking but a communal responsibility. This fosters partnership, mutual support, and accountability in missional work, as communities live out their covenantal calling together.

Mission Strategies in the Book of Deuteronomy

In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, some terms such as teaching, obedience, love, worship, and communal responsibility are established as discipleship terms. These offer a foundation for mission strategies that seem pertinent for the Christian church today. Thus, through the covenantal principles in Deuteronomy, some essential

[102] Francis D. Nichol, ed., "Teach," in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary,* Vol 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 978.

approaches can be developed which will help in fulfilling the Church's responsibility of disciple-making. Following are some of these timeless strategies as derived from Deuteronomy:

Teaching as a Fundamental Method

Moses presents the teaching of Yahweh's laws as one of the basic themes in Deuteronomy.[103] For example, in Deuteronomy 6:7, he instructs the children of Israel to teach statutes of the LORD to their children and make them a central part of daily life: He says, "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (cf. Deut 4:9, 11:19). Teaching guarantees the perpetuity of faith and the covenantal values.

For the mission of the church to be accomplished, education and discipleship need to be prioritized. Through in-depth Bible study programs and mentorship drives, members could gain a deep understanding of God's Word. When the Bible is studied, it makes people wise unto salvation (2 Tim 3:13-15).[104] In addition, incorporating biblical teaching into family life and community activities also aids to nurture a culture of learning and spiritual growth. Paul says, "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2Tim 2:2). When someone who is discipled grows to become a discipler, it helps to perpetuate the cycle of teaching and learning.

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[103] Noh Ibrahim Boiliu, "Educational Aspects in the Book of Deuteronomy," *PharosJournal of Theology* 104, no. 4 (2023): 7, http//: www.pharosjot.com.

[104] Reuben A. Torrey, *The Importance and Value of Proper Bible Study: How to Properly Study and Interpret the Bible* (Aneko Press, 2022), 9–22, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=U2BMEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP9&dq=role+of+bible+study+in+the+church+pdf&ots=9yhC_BN9st&sig=g6xWZ1Q79-GvZlGXR7KFikAzBho.

Living Out the Covenant Relationship

In Deuteronomy, Moses continually reminds the children of Israel of their identity as Yahweh's chosen people (Deut 7:6-8; cf. 4:37, 10:15, 14:2, 28:9). This identity comes with responsibilities which include living in a manner that shows Yahweh's holiness and love. In this way, one can infer that the covenant relationship is not merely about personal faithfulness but also about people bearing witness to Yahweh's glory among the nations.[105]

Today, contemporary Christian Church can embrace mission strategy that emphasizes identity and purpose. By stressing on the believers calling as God's chosen people (1Pet 2:9), the Church can inspire a sense of mission and responsibility.

Following or Walking After God

Repeatedly, Moses in Deuteronomy admonishes the Israelites to walk in God's ways (Deut 10:12; 30:16). This requires a daily walk with the LORD through the help of the Holy Spirit, in pursuit of a perfect character.[106] This imagery presents a dynamic, continuing relationship depicted by obedience and harmonious with God's character. In the New Testament, one finds the imagery also. For example, apostle Paul exhorts believers to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" (Eph 4:1).

In mission strategy, the church can adopt this idea by encouraging members to embrace spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and service, which promote a

[105] Michael A. Grisanti, "Israel's Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40–55: An Update," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 9, no. 1 (1998): 54.

[106] Francis D. Nichol, ed., The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 5 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 987.

lifestyle of following Christ.[107] Hence, discipleship programme needs to focus on holistic transformation, enabling members to "walk" faithfully in every aspect of life.

Promoting Love and Worship

Another key element of the covenant is the command to love God with all one's heart, soul, and might (Deut 6:5). Hess posits that this love requires faithfulness and exclusive loyalty to God.[108] Wenham opines that "love for God is the proper response to God's love for Israel."[109] Worship seems to be an expression of this love and a way of harmonizing the community with God's will. Part of education is to do the law of God with love. Often, Moses in Deuteronomy summons the Israelites to gather for worship, offer sacrifices, and celebrate Yahweh's faithfulness (Deut 12:5-7; 11; 16:2; 26:2). This worship requires total commitment on the part of the believer.[110] The method of mission could include cultivating an energetic worship culture that attracts people into God's presence.

Fostering a Fear of the Lord

Deuteronomy calls the Israelites to "fear the Lord your God" as part of their covenantal relationship (Deut 6:13; 10:12). As earlier explained, this fear excludes terror but includes reverence and awe that leads to obedience and humility. Reverence is required as a basic principle in the heart of God's people.[111] Church mission

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[107] Jim Howard et al., *Discipleship Handbook* (USA: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2018), 3.

[108] Hess, *The Old Testament*, 142.

[109] Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch*, vol. One (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 131.

[110] Andor and Quaye, "Wholistic Adventist Education and the Shema Creed (Deuteronomy 6," 144.

[111] Nichol, *SDABC*, Vol 5, 987.

strategies can encourage a healthy fear of the Lord by teaching about God's holiness, justice, and mercy.

Creating a Culture of Witnessing

Deuteronomy emphasizes the significance of bearing witness to God's works and faithfulness: Moses says, "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children" (Deut 4:9 emphasis supplied, cf. Exod 12:26; 13:8, 14; Josh 4:21). The Israelites were urged to remember and proclaim Yahweh's mighty works. "The call to share God's word is given to every disciple of Christ."[112] So, witnessing include sharing the Bible truths and how it has affected one's life. Hence, the church's mission strategies could include sharing testimonies of God's goodness and stories of his faithfulness.

Building Strong Communities

Deuteronomy highlights the communal element of the covenant, calling the children if Israel to care for the vulnerable, uphold justice, and live in unity (Deut 15:7-11). The welfare of the community is vital to their faithfulness to God.[113]

In Christendom today, mission strategies should place emphasis on community-building efforts by establishing support systems for those in need, provide opportunities for fellowship, and engage in social justice drive. It appears that a strong, united community is a powerful witness to the world of God's love and redemption.

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[112] *Discipleship Handbook,* 55.

[113] Noh Ibrahim Boiliu, "Educational Aspects in the Book of Deuteronomy," *PharosJournal of Theology* 104, no. 4 (2023): 4, http//: www.pharosjot.com.

Keeping God's Commandments

It has been earlier affirmed that obedience to the LORD's command is essential to covenant faithfulness: "Keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today for your good" (Deut 10:13; cf. 6:24). Jesus re-emphasizes this in John 14:15: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." This is in line with the Old Testament covenant relationship. "Jesus describes discipleship in terms of a relationship characterized by mutual love, fidelity, and obedience to the covenant commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23-24).[114] By application, the church's mission strategies might include teaching ethical living, promoting community engagement, and addressing social justice issues, which shows in tangible ways what it entails to live out God's commands in the modern society.

The above-mentioned strategies are established in the covenantal relationship between God and his chosen people. If employed, they can help the church to fulfill its mandate to make disciples and advance God's kingdom

Conclusion

This chapter has been able to affirm the correlation between the discipleship and mission and the implications of discipleship for mission. People are called into a relationship with the Lord. One's positive response to the Lord's call is an enlistment into mission work. For the follower of God to be effective and productive in this assignment, he/she needs to be nurtured and empowered, thereby enhancing the missionary endeavor. Hence, the call to discipleship is a call to mission.

Also, the covenantal principles in Deuteronomy offer profound theological and ethical foundations for mission. Integrating these principles into the mission not

[114] Chennattu, 111.

only aligns with the biblical narrative but also establishes that the mission remains relational, transformative, and faithful to God's covenantal vision. As the Church is involved in mission today, the perpetual importance of Deuteronomy challenges believers to live as a covenantal people, proclaiming and demonstrating the love and redemption of God to all the people.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

This final chapter provides a general synopsis of the research and a synthesis of the lexical and syntactical conclusions regarding the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research on the concept of discipleship in the Old Testament.

In Chapter 1, the need for the analysis of the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy is established. The methodology employed is Qualitative Content Analysis. This chapter reveals that adequate attention seems not to have been given to the contribution of the Old Testament to the concept of discipleship. This could be because of the presumed absence of the discipleship terms in the Old Testament canon. Thus, efforts are made to examine the dictionaries/encyclopedias, theological dictionaries, and some other Old Testament literatures in other to understand the earlier scholarly contributions to the subject matter and the gaps in literature. The research questions explored in this dissertation include: What are the key linguistic and conceptual markers of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy? How do the identified markers inform the understanding of the discipleship dynamics and formation processes within the Old Testament context? Beyond the word level, are there discipleship motifs in some narratives in the book of Deuteronomy? What is the nature of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy? What contributions does the book of Deuteronomy provide to the understanding of the concept of discipleship?

And what is the contemporary significance of the understanding of discipleship language in the book of Deuteronomy?

Chapter 2 surveys the discipleship language. The researcher makes effort to examine the biblical discipleship terms used in both the Old and New Testaments. Some lexical terms as well as themes of discipleship are studied. This leads to the development of a coding frame at the end of this chapter and a working definition.

In Chapter 3, the coding frame developed in Chapter 2 is applied to the book of Deuteronomy. This chapter is divided according to the structure of the book of Deuteronomy. An analysis of each pericope is done with a view to discovering how the discipleship term is developed and understood. Each section is followed by the discipleship language. This draws out and affirms the discipleship terms in the section which reveals the contribution of Deuteronomy to the biblical concept of discipleship.

Chapter 4 covers the implications of discipleship on the mission of the church. Hence, mission strategies in Deuteronomy are studied together with how discipleship could enhance the mission effectiveness.

Synthesis

This section discusses each of the discipleship terms/themes examined in Deuteronomy to show a picture of how the concept of discipleship is developed in the book. A brief analysis of the frequency of specific themes and their location in Deuteronomy is provided.

It is observed that the occurrence of the discipleship terms varies throughout the sections of the book. The highest concentrations of the theme of discipleship happen to be in the first two sections of the book, that is, Deuteronomy 1: 1-4:43 and 4:44-26:19. This could be as a result of the focus of the first section on the historical overview of Israel's journey and the emphasis on the covenant relationship between

Yahweh and the children of Israel. The second section gives a detailed presentation of laws that govern the life of the children of Israel. This part highlights the commandments and statutes that the people of God must follow, underscoring the significance of upholding Yahweh's instructions as a foundational aspect of discipleship.

The two subsequent sections of the book of Deuteronomy, that is, 27:1-28:68 and 29:1-30:20 have the second highest concentration of the theme of discipleship. Deuteronomy 27 and 28 highlight the blessings for keeping and obeying Yahweh's commandments and the repercussions for disobedience, thus stressing the significance of following the LORD's command as a fundamental aspect of discipleship, demonstrating the repercussions of one's choices about faithfulness to Yahweh. The communal aspect of discipleship is also reinforced when the community jointly admits their obligations to the LORD.

In Deut 29:1-30:20, Moses summons the children of Israel to renew their covenant with Yahweh. This affirms the continuous nature of discipleship, illustrating that faithfulness is not a one-off occasion but an unceasing commitment to live according to the covenantal stipulations. The call to choose life in Deut 30:19-20 stresses the personal responsibility that each Israelite has in their discipleship journey. Each is expected to be actively engaged in following Yahweh, making deliberate decisions in harmony with the LORD's will.

The fewest occurrences of the concept of discipleship are found in Deuteronomy 31:1-34. However, in this final pericope, Moses highlights the need to continue to follow the LORD's commandments and reassures the children of Israel of the LORD's presence and faithfulness as they prepare to enter Canaan. These chapters deal with leadership, encouragement, the significance of commandments, and warning

against disobedience. These are all pivotal for the Israelites' ongoing relationship with the LORD.

Furthermore, there are some aspects of the coding frame which occur more in some sections than the others. Among the discipleship language found in the book of Deuteronomy, the ones that occur in every section of the book are covenant, fellowship, and obeying/keeping the commandments. Their frequency also underscores the fact that discipleship in Deuteronomy is covenant-based, requiring obedience and brings about fellowship with God and man.

Another set of coding frames that appear often but with slightly less frequency than the first group include learn/teach, worship God, membership election, bear witness and love the LORD. Finally, the last set of the coding frame which occurs less often is fear God and walk after/follow the LORD.

Discipleship Language

Karl H. Rengstorf posits that in as much as the specific discipleship terms are not mentioned in the Old Testament, the concept of discipleship is absent.[1] This dissertation challenges such a position and concludes otherwise. Having studied the book of Deuteronomy, it is discovered that discipleship language is not only present in the Old Testament, especially, in Deuteronomy, it also provides the foundation through which the concept is developed thereafter. This study agrees with Wilkin's submission that the Old Testament's discipleship model lies in the covenantal

[1] Karl H. Rengstorf, "μαθητής," TDNT, IV, 427. For similar view, see also; Silva and Tenney, "Disciple/Discipleship," 145.

relationship between Yahweh and Israel.[2] Therefore, the nation in covenant with God served as the ultimate discipleship model for Israel.

In addition, scholars such as Katharine Doob Sakenfeld opine that the absence of the discipleship terms in the Old Testament is not tantamount to the absence of the concept in the Old Testament.[3] So, this study reveals that the discipleship language used in Deuteronomy is distinct and, whereas the term disciple is not used, the book provides the foundational work for what it means to follow the Lord. The synopsis of the discipleship themes and terms observed from the book of Deuteronomy is presented below.

Covenant

The book of Deuteronomy emphasizes the covenant between Yahweh and the children of Israel and covenant is the most frequent discipleship theme in the book of Deuteronomy.[4] This study shows that the journey of Israel's discipleship with the Lord is engendered by his covenant with them. This serves as a Master's call to the prospective disciples. This agrees with Wilkin's position that "the roots of biblical discipleship penetrate deeply into the fertile soil of God's calling."[5] Brueggemann also affirms that "the God who calls is the God of discipleship."[6] He calls people into

[2]Michael J. Wilkins, "Disciple, Discipleship," in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 176.

[3] Katharing Doob Sakenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 128; see also; Luther H. Martin, "Disciple," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1979), 947.

[4] Thompson, "Book of Deuteronomy," 274.

[5] Michael J. Wilkins, "Disciple, Discipleship," in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 175

[6] Walter Brueggemann, *The Word That Redescribes the World : The Bible and Discipleship*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 95.

a relationship with him. In the case of the Israelites, the covenant was divinely initiated. “The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb.” (Deut 5:2). This forms the basis of the Israelites’ relationship with Yahweh. Most often, Deuteronomy refers to Israel as the Lord’s chosen people who are connected to him by a covenant. Hence, Moses warns them not to forget the covenant (Deut 4:23) since God himself will not forget the covenant he made with them (Deut 4:31). He is faithful and keeps his covenant (Deut 7:9). The prosperity of Yahweh’s followers is dependent on their attitude to the covenant (Deut 29:9 cf. 24-25).

This covenant goes beyond a legal contract, it is relational. This is viewed as a formative process - a form of discipleship that requires learning, obedience, and faithfulness. Israelites are required to strictly adhere to the commandments given at Sinai (Deut 4:1-2). Their adherence to the covenant’s stipulations would serve as a manifestation of their loyalty and commitment to Yahweh and his covenant.[7] This obedience appears necessary for maintaining the covenantal relationship and ensuring the well-being and prosperity of the people of Israel. Hence, discipleship in the context of covenant is about living in faithfulness to the covenant stipulations.

Learn/Teach (למד)

The term למד plays a significant role in the understanding of the discipleship concept in the book of Deuteronomy. This term which means “to learn something” (Deut 5:1; 17:19) or “teach someone something” (Deut 4:1,5, 10, 14; 5:28; 11:19; 14:23; 31:19) stresses the responsibility of a disciple in the discipleship experience. In addition, the use of למד in Deut 5:31; 6:1, 7: 11:19; and 20:18 affirms the importance of instruction, particularly in the context of the covenantal relationship that exists

[7] Thompson, “Book of Deuteronomy,” 274.

between Yahweh and the people of Israel. Hence, teaching is a foundational component in the religious and social life of the people of Israel.

It was earlier mentioned that the growth of a disciple depends on learning. Discipleship involves lifelong learning and teaching to sustain covenant faithfulness. The children of Israel are obligated to learn the character and way of Yahweh to grow. למד first occurs in chapter 4, verse 1, and often in connection with the commandments. More so, ordinances and judgments are to be learned, understood and obeyed. Hence, the emphasis is on learning and understanding the Torah. The goal of learning the law of God is for the Israelites to fear the Lord (Deut 4:10).

The LORD could serve as the teacher (Deut 4:1, 10, 14) or the father (Deut 11:19) and even a godly person who understands God's will. Deuteronomy affirms that the teaching responsibility was assigned to Moses (see Deut 4:14 and 5:28). Also, the use of למד in Deuteronomy 14:23 and 17:19 stresses the need for an undivided loyalty to YHWH. However, the two subsequent occurrences of למד discourage following other gods and learning their abominable practices (Deut 18:9; 20:18). The purpose of this instruction is to ensure that Israel does not follow or imitate the pagan practices of non-Israelites, thereby avoiding the worship of other gods and remaining faithful to YHWH.

According to the usage of למד in Deuteronomy, the discipleship concept is viewed as YHWH teaching Moses and the people how to follow him in complete obedience and devotion. This affirms how pivotal learning is in the covenant relationship between the LORD and his followers. This aligns with Bill Hull's perception that discipleship means, "learning from and following a teacher."[8] The

[8] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 24.

covenantal relationship in Deuteronomy involves continuous instruction. Israel was commanded to teach God's laws to the next generation (Deuteronomy 6:7). Diligent teaching of the commandments reveals that discipleship is not only about following but also about passing down covenantal faithfulness to future generations. Wisdom literature also emphasizes learning from God (Prov 1:7). In addition, Jesus was called a teacher, and discipleship entails learning from him (Matt 11:29). In the Great Commission, Jesus commands the disciples to teach all nations (Matt 28:19-20). This is significant because learning deepens love, obedience, and service, while teaching ensures continuity of covenantal discipleship.

Obey (שׁמע)

The word שׁמע is frequently used in Deuteronomy and is crucial in understanding the obligations and relationship that should exist between the Master and his disciples, that is, Yahweh and his followers—the Israelites. As discussed in Chapter 3, this term has nuances of meaning that include to hear, to listen to, and to pay attention. Moses also uses this term to mean obey (Deut 4:30 cf. 1:43). In essence, the followers of Yahweh are required to pay attention to and obey the stipulations of the covenant just like Israel is commanded to obey God's laws as an act of love and faithfulness (Deut 28:1-2). Meanwhile, disobedience results in covenant curses (Deut 28:15).

Sometimes, when שׁמע is used, it shows a sense of urgency in the speaker's attitude, which denotes hearing and also calls for obedience. Thus, in the context of discipleship, Moses, as the teacher sent by God, calls the attention of the Israelites and instructs them to hear and obey the commands of the Lord (Deut 4:1). The usage of שׁמע in connection with the commandments affirms that obedience is a mark of discipleship (Deut 5:1; 6:4). Hearing the LORD's command is necessary for

maintaining their covenantal relationship with the LORD. Moses establishes the rationale for hearing and obeying the Lord – the Israelites have become the people of the Lord. This is God's initiative which comes with responsibility. It is a call to obedience. Also, the context of Deut 6:4-9 implies that hearing is connected to loving and obeying God, integrating belief and action.

Moses emphasizes that the children of Israel would perish if they would not obey (שמע) the voice of the LORD (Deut 8:20). As a matter of fact, they would be blessed as long as they obey the commandments (Deut 11:13 cf. 11:27-28; 13:8; 15:5). So, Deuteronomy connects obedience to God's commandments with discipleship (Deut 8:3). The commandments given are not arbitrary but function as a way of life that reflects Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh.

In the New Testament, Jesus equates love with obedience: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15; cf. 15:14). Discipleship requires following Jesus' teachings (Matt 7:24-27). Obedience flows from love and maintains the covenant relationship.

Membership and Election of the People of God

The idea of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel is predicated on choices: Yahweh's choice of Israel and Israel's choice of God. The basis of the divine selection is love (Deut 4:37). So, the Yahweh-Israel relationship is based on divine love. Moses further explains that Israel's deliverance by the Lord is for them to be his people (Deut 4:20). Therefore, becoming Yahweh's disciples begins from the call and election; that is, the children of Israel become the LORD's disciples by being chosen by Him. Consequently, they become Yahweh's followers, expected to live in obedience to his commandments.

This divine choice articulates the unique relationship between God and the children of Israel, establishing their special status and responsibilities as the LORD's chosen people (Deut 4:20; 7:6–7; 9:26–29; 10:15; 14:2; 21:8; 26:17–18; 29:13).

More so, the selection of children of Israel is grounded in the covenant the LORD makes with their forebears which has everlasting implications on them (Gen 17:7). The covenant with Abraham sets forth the beginning of a special relationship where the LORD promises to be the God of Abraham's descendants, establishing them as His people. This covenantal relationship is eternal and establish the perpetual bond between God and the chosen people.

Nonetheless, Israel's chosen status is conditioned upon their perpetual loyalty and obedience to God's covenant. It also involves a call to holy living and service, differentiating Israel from other nations and assigning them a priestly role (Deut 7:6 cf. Exod. 19:5-6). Israel's election serves as a motivation for observing Yahweh's commandments (Deut 14:21). So, being chosen by God brings both privileges and responsibilities, requiring Israel to live in a way that reflects God's character and purposes.

Fear of God

In Deuteronomy, the phrase, "fear God" is frequently used. It expresses the nature of the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The usages of the Hebrew term יָרֵא is used to denote being afraid as well as having a profound reverence for the Lord, which climaxes in obedience and fidelity to him by his disciples (Deut 13:4). Deuteronomy 5:29 affirms God's desire to have people who fear him. Again, Moses connects the meaning to obeying God (See also, Deut 6:2, 24; 10:12), and in Deuteronomy 6:3, it connotes wholehearted commitment and service to God. Moses links fearing God to obedience.

In its denotation as “to be afraid” יָרֵא is used to express God’s willingness to create the fear of Israelites in the heart of the people around them (Deut 11:25).

In a nutshell, it can be inferred that fear of God is a basic principle that shapes the relationship between the LORD and his people, ensuring that his followers conduct themselves in a way which showcase God’s holiness and justice. Fear of God fosters obedience, worship, and service, ensuring faithfulness to the covenant.

Worship

One of the vertical dimensions of discipleship in Deuteronomy is worship and Moses emphasizes this concept in his speeches. This emphasis seems to be needed since the first generation was prohibited from entering Canaan because of worshipping other gods. In Deuteronomy 4:15 – 43, Moses admonishes the Israelites to remain faithful and loyal to God and avoid idolatry. From this pericope, some insights are derived which explain the principles of true worship and service to God.

One of the emphases centres on the call to exclusive worship. So, idolatry in all its forms is forbidden (Deut 4:15-18). Thus, by avoiding idolatry, the children of Israel, as disciples of Yahweh, would maintain the purity of their worship, acknowledging the LORD’s uniqueness and incomparability as the one true God who cannot be encapsulated by human constructs.

The holiness of God appears to be the basis for why He must be worshipped exclusively and the reason his commandments should be followed by his followers (Deut 4:24). This imagery conveys His absolute purity and the high devotion He requests from His people. The holiness of the LORD is not just a matter of moral perfection but an all-encompassing reality that consumes anything impure. Consequently, Yahweh’s disciples are called to reflect this holiness in their lives,

distinguishing themselves from the practices of surrounding nations and dedicating themselves completely to the worship of their LORD.

Love (אהב)

A distinguishing characteristic of a disciple is love, which in Deuteronomy is established as a crucial part of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel. This love is shown through commitment, exclusive devotion, and a reflection of divine love in human actions. Love for God is connected to obedience to His commandments (Deut 5:10). This makes the Hebrew word אהב a tangible commitment demonstrated through faithful adherence to the Lord's commandments. Love seems to be the central motivation for discipleship, as seen in both divine commitment and human response.

The term אהב could mean Yahweh's love for the people or the people's love for God. Deut 6:5 refers to people's love for God. For example, the imperative to love the Lord (Deut 6:5) summarizes the duties of the people of God in their covenantal relationship. The bond of love involves fearing the LORD (Deut 4:10; 5:59; 6:24; 8:6; 10:12; 14:23; 17:19; 28:58; 31:13), serving the LORD (Deut 10:12; 11:13), and clinging to the Lord (Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20) and obeying the LORD and walking in His ways (Deut 19:9; 30:16; 13:3–5) as established in Deuteronomy.

Divine love is demonstrated in God's choice of Israel (Deut 7:7; 9; cf. 10:15). In turn, Israel is required to love God (Deut 10:12). Deuteronomy 10:12-13 links discipleship to love, service, and wholehearted devotion, which is the essence of covenantal faithfulness. Also, Israel is admonished to imitate Yahweh's love by loving strangers, thus extending divine love into social ethics (Deut 10:19). In a nutshell, the call to love the Lord is often accompanied by actions such as serving him (Deut 10:12; 11:13), obeying his laws (Deut 11:1), and walking in his ways (Deut

11:22). It is noted that love is a logical response to God's character. This highlights the act of discipleship, which is following or imitating the Master. In the New Testament, love defines the disciple's relationship with Christ (John 14:15) and fellow believers (John 13:34-35). Also, love propels obedience, worship, and fellowship, making it the crux of discipleship.

Walk After/Follow (אחר הלך)

One essential command for a disciple is "follow," and entrenched in the covenantal responsibility is the action of following the Lord. The term אחר "follow" is used figuratively in the prologue of Deut 1:1–4:44 (Deut 4:3), three times in "The Command" of Deut 6–11 (Deut 6:14; 8:19; 11:28), twice in the "Statutes and Judgments" of Deut 12–26 (Deut 13:2, 4), and one final time in the blessings of Deut 28:1–14 (Deut 28:14). The act of following the Lord implies obedience for the covenant people, which manifests in keeping the laws of God (Deut 33:3-4; cf. 1 Kgs. 14:8).[9] Thompson also agrees that discipleship is expressed in following God and being loyal to him exclusively.[10]

So, the use of אחר הלך (follow/walk after) in the book of Deuteronomy has two forms—negative and positive. When it is used positively, it calls the people of God to an exclusive worship of God, loyalty, and commitment to his way. For instance, Deut 10:12 explains that walking after or following the Lord entails wholehearted devotion, which includes loving service to God (cf. Deut 13:4a). This agrees with Wilkin's view that "the abstract covenantal relationship with God finds concrete expression in

[9] Floyd, 58.

[10] Thompson, 277.

following God and walking in his way."[11] Besides, walking after or following the Lord also brings blessings to the followers (Deut 5:33). However, the idea of following or walking after could also be used negatively. This happens when the Lord forbids following other gods. (See Deut 6:14; 8:19; 11:16, 28; 13:2-3; 28:14). This injunction aims at prohibiting the Israelites from negative discipleship.

The rationale for asking the Israelites to follow only Yahweh is that Yahweh is declared as their God (Deut 26:17). Given this, following the LORD signifies an intentional, public commitment to live according to the LORD's commandments. By preventing the Israelites from following other gods, invariably, the LORD calls them to follow him.

Fellowship

The study reveals that the word fellowship does not appear in the book of Deuteronomy, but the concept permeates the entire book. Fellowship is the relational bond among disciples within the covenant community. This fellowship appears to be predicated on the understanding of the fundamentals of the connection between the Lord and people as well as the dynamics within the covenant community. It is observed that fellowship is relational and covenant centered. Relationships within the community are also shaped by Israel's fellowship and relationship with the Lord as his covenant people.

In Deuteronomy, fellowship appears to be a key component of the biblical idea of discipleship. It highlights how Yahweh's covenant calls for a shared life. Moses emphasizes the importance of commitment to God, obedience, and memory in his first speech (Deut 1:1-4:43). It highlights Israel's shared identity, experiences, and

[11] Wilkin, "Disciple." 176.

responsibility to keep the covenant. As a reminder that they are covenant people who must walk unitedly in obedience, Moses recounts their past. In this context, fellowship is demonstrated by the oneness of Israel's experiences, including both their shortcomings and God's benevolent direction. Moses confirms that their journey was both collective and personal by narrating their resistance in Kadesh-Barnea (Deut 1:19-46).

It is also important to highlight that the covenant bond between Yahweh and the children of Israel is the foundation of biblical fellowship. Moses exhorts Israel to follow the LORD's instructions as a nation united by a covenant, not as separate individuals (Deut 4:1 14). Therefore, it is clear from this context that fellowship means keeping the covenant together, supporting one another in obeying, and making sure that future generations continue to follow Yahweh's instructions. According to the book of Deuteronomy, fellowship and the covenantal bond between Yahweh and Israel are inextricably linked. Moses emphasizes the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, highlighting Israel's obligation to obey as a manifestation of their relationship with God.

This is also emphasized in the Shema (Deut 6:4 9), which calls Israel to unwavering love and loyalty to the LORD and ensures that fellowship is demonstrated by constant obedience and adherence to God's instructions. Deuteronomy 12-26's regulations emphasize several aspects of community life that maintain fellowship. According to Deuteronomy 16, Israel's feasts foster spiritual ties by bringing people together to commemorate God's deeds of supply and rescue. The horizontal dimension of fellowship is also maintained through some ethical behaviour (Deut 19–26). So, fellowship strengthens discipleship by fostering love, learning, and service in a communal setting.

Bearing Witness

Israel's call confers some responsibility on them, which includes bearing witness to the strangers and surrounding nations. Deuteronomy attests to this obligation (Deut 4:6; 14), and it is a foundational aspect of Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh. Moses's exhortatory speech to Israel, when he stressed the importance of obedience to God and His law (Deut 4:5-8), implies the visibility and some kind of missionary activities of Israel. The witnessing activity of Israel is crucial in revealing the distinctiveness of Israel's relationship with God. The wisdom and understanding showcased in their obedience serve as preaching to the nations, prompting recognition of the greatness of Israel's God (Deut 4:14). This outward display of God's wisdom through Israel's conduct is a form of bearing witness that extends beyond oral proclamation. Israel is called to be a spiritual light to other nations (see also Isa 42:6-7; 44:8; 49:6). For instance, their observance of the Sabbath commandments includes their servants and the sojourners in their house (Deut 5:14).

Furthermore, the identity and mission of Israel are interconnected, and their lifestyle would lead other nations to acknowledge their unique status (Deut 4:6). So, Israel's faithful adherence to the laws is aimed at attracting and bringing others to the knowledge of God, which would make them fulfil their role as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:6). As God's chosen people, bearing witness via obedience to God's decrees is a communal task. The collective conduct of the Israelite community is what will be observed by other nations. So, an individual's faithfulness plays a role in the overall testimony of the community. This communal aspect emphasizes the importance of mutual accountability and support in adhering to the covenant stipulations. Hence, witnessing is a divine mandate for his disciples. Hull

refers to bearing witness as “bearing fruits”, which includes, righteous conduct by the disciples.[12]

Bearing witness could be traced to the call of Abram. The LORD said, “… and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen 12:3). Paul later alludes to this by saying, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8).

To this end, it is essential to devote time to study the rich principles and languages of discipleship discovered in Deuteronomy. This will impact the understanding of the concept and help the Christian Church as well as the scholarly world to utilize the knowledge of discipleship entrenched in Deuteronomy. It is observed that some textbooks on the Pentateuch and commentaries on Deuteronomy seem to ignore the theme of discipleship in the book. This study provides insight into this significant theme of the book.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, some biblical scholars dispute the idea of discipleship in the Old Testament canon. This study, however, demonstrates that the concept of discipleship is not only present in the Old Testament but also provides the framework for the discipleship concept in the New Testament. Nonetheless, this study affirms the unique nature of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy, which is covenant centered.

Also, discipleship in the Bible is not a set of isolated principles but an interconnected way of life shaped by the covenant. The covenant, in which God

[12] Hull, 43.

establishes a relationship with Israel and calls them into his divine plan of redemption, is shown to be the cornerstone of Old Testament discipleship. To ensure that God's instructions are passed down through the generations, the covenant people are asked to learn and teach Yahweh's instructions to the future generation. This knowledge results in a dedication to obey and uphold the LORD's commands, demonstrating loyalty to him. As God's people become more obedient, they follow and walk in his way, aligning their lives with his will. Their membership and election are confirmed by their obedient conduct, which sets them apart as the LORD's people.

Being in this position gives God's followers a sense of obligation to fear God, which involves living in awe and veneration of God's holiness, which directs all facets of life. Since covenant people respond to God's faithfulness with respect and devotion, fear of God seems to lead to worship. As obedience is demonstrated by unwavering devotion, true worship fosters love for the LORD and others. The disciples then begin to witness, sharing Yahweh's truth with the world as they become more obedient and loving.

Consequently, discipleship is connected to mission and has implications for it. God plans that his mission on earth will be carried out by the people whom he has saved and called for that purpose. Thus, Israel, the chosen people, is integrated into God's redemptive plan. As Israel learns and understands God's will, they get involved in witnessing to other nations. Therefore, the book of Deuteronomy provides a structure for the instruction and training of God's people to be equipped for the mission. Deuteronomy reveals that mission is not only a task or duty, but an outflow of a living relationship with Yahweh. Therefore, Israel, as a "holy people" (Deut 7:6) is called to be "light to the nations" (cf. Isa. 49:6), a call that is extended beyond the

Old Testament to God's people in all ages (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 2:9). This is the essence of discipleship.

Recommendation for Further Studies

Having conducted the analysis of the concept of discipleship in the book of Deuteronomy, the following suggested topics are recommended for future research endeavours in the subject of discipleship:

1. The Influence of Deuteronomic Discipleship on New Testament Discipleship Models. This research will help to know how the concept of discipleship in Deuteronomy shapes the understanding of discipleship in the New Testament. This research should investigate questions such as what key themes of Deuteronomic discipleship (such as covenant faithfulness, obedience, teaching, and fellowship) are reflected in the discipleship models of Jesus and the early church? In what ways does Deuteronomic discipleship influence Jesus' teachings on following Him? How do New Testament discipleship models expand, reinterpret, or reinforce Deuteronomic discipleship principles? What implications does the connection between Deuteronomic and New Testament discipleship have for contemporary Christian discipleship?

   This study can adopt a qualitative, biblical-theological method, incorporating exegesis, comparative analysis, and historical-theological research. This study will help to see the continuity and connection between Old Testament covenantal discipleship and New Testament patterns.
2. The Role of Covenant in Biblical Discipleship: A Thematic Analysis from Deuteronomy to the New Testament. This research should explore how the concept of covenant forms the framework of discipleship in Deuteronomy

and the Old Testament. There is a need to delve into questions like; how does covenantal theology influence Jesus' call to discipleship in the New Testament? In what way do the themes of covenantal obedience, relationship, and mission emerge from Deuteronomy to the New Testament? What similarities and differences are found between Old Testament covenantal discipleship and New Testament discipleship patterns? How do Paul and the early church leaders understand, interpret and apply the covenantal themes of discipleship in their teachings and practices? And what are the theological and practical implications of a covenant-based understanding of discipleship for contemporary Christian communities?

The nature of this kind of research will require a thematic, biblical-theological approach, integrating exegetical analysis, intertextual study, and historical-theological evaluation. The study can establish a theological continuity of discipleship as a covenantal commitment to God.

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VITA

OLADOSU, Opeyemi Tunbosun

ezemarg2001@gmail.com, oladosuo@babcock.edu.ng
+2347036070495

BIODATA:

Date of Birth:	**16/11/79**
Marital Status:	**Married**
State of Origin:	**Osun**
L.G.A	**Ifelodun**

EDUCATION:

PhD (in view), Old Testament and Theological Studies
Adventist University of Africa, Kenya.

Masters of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies, 2016
Adventist University of Africa, Kenya.

B.A (Hons) Theology, (First Class Division), 2008
Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State.

National Diploma in Mass Communication (Upper Credit), 2002
Federal Polytechnic Offa, Offa, Kwara State.

Senior School Certificate, 1998
Coker Memorial School, Ikirun, Osun State

WORK EXPERIENCE:

Lecturer (2019 till date)
Department of Religious Studies, Babcock University, Ilisan, Ogun State

Church Pastor (2019 till date)
Pioneer Seventh-day Adventist Church, Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State.

Head Chaplain/Church Pastor, (2016-2019)
Babcock University High School/SDA Church, Fountain of Grace Chapel, Ilisan-Remo.

Part-Time Lecturer (2016-2018)
Religious Studies Department, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo

Associate Church Pastor, Pioneer Church (2014-2015)
Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo.

Church Pastor (2010-2013)
SDA Church, Oke-Ode, Kwara State.

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), School Teacher, 2008
Junior Secondary School, Laraba, Jigawa State

PUBLICATIONS:

1. **Opeyemi T. Oladosu** (2024), "Women's Prohibition from Teaching in Worship: An Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 2:8-15" Insight: Journal of Religious Studies
   Volume 17 (2024) 1-26. https://journal.babcock.edu.ng/article/2d7bdc6e-0257-4e2e-9921-e129da46ab61
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10. **Opeyemi T. Oladosu** (2021) "Did A Witch Bring Samuel Back From The Dead? An Exegetical And Literary Analysis Of 1 Samuel 28:3-25" *African Journal of Biblical Studies* (AJBS), Volume 36 Number 1&2.
11. **Opeyemi T. Oladosu** (2019) "Death of A Soul: An Exegetical Study Of Ezekiel 18:1-4" *Insight: Journal of Religious Studie*s, Department of Religious Studies, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria Vol. 15: 157-179.
12. Nwosu Jonathan C, Amanze Samuel U, **Opeyemi T. Oladosu** and Adewumi Elijah (2017) "Corporal Punishment: Perceptions and Adoption in Nigeria Secondary Schools." *Education Research Journal* Vol. 7 (8): 200-204. http://resjournals.com/journals/educational-research-journal_html ISSN: 2026-6332
13. Tunde Ojewole, David Abioye & **Opeyemi T. Oladosu** (2016) "Worship Experiences of Private University Undergraduate Students: A Case Study of Pioneer Seventh-day Adventist Church, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria. *Emerging Discourses on the Future of Higher Education in Africa*. 2016.
14. **Opeyemi T. Oladosu** (2016), "The Meaning and Function of זכר in Genesis." *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*, Vol 18 (23).
15. **Opeyemi T. Oladosu** and Caleb Alu (2016), The Use of Old Testament in the Book of Revelation: *American Journal of Biblical Theology*, Vol. 17(8).
16. **Opeyemi T. Oladosu** (2014), "The Baptism of Jesus" in Jesus the Messiah: A Fresh View of His Life and Ministry. Eds., Efe M. Eghioghae, Sunday D. Audu and Theodore U. Dickson. *Positive Press*: Ibadan, Nigeria.
17. Sampson Nwaomah and **Opeyemi T. Oladosu** (2008), "The Contemporary Significance of the Biblical Imagery of the Sheepfold and the Shepherd," *Insight: Journal of Religious Studies*, Department of Religious Studies, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria Vol. 4: 66-77.

CONFERENCE ATTENDED:

1. Leadership Certification Programme (2024), Columbia Maryland.
2. International Conference of Adventist Teachers (2023), Kenya.
3. Sustainable Collaboration and Grant Writing Workshop (2023) Babcock University.

4. Postgraduate Teaching and Supervision for National Development and Global Relevance (October 2023), Babcock University.
5. International Conference on Adventist Theology and Mission in Africa (2015), Kenya
6. International Conference of Integration of Faith and Learning (2019), Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State.
7. National Conference of Nigeria Association of Biblical Studies (2019), Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State.
8. 3rd Theological Seminary Conference on Adventist Mission and Major Non-Christian Religions in Africa (2019), Kenya.

CONFERENCE PAPER PRESENTATION

1. African Indigenous Churches and The Bible: Exegetical Concerns (2019, NABIS)