



Research article

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IT SHALL BE OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, DEUTERONOMY 6:25: A SUGGESTED TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

The term righteousness in Christian tradition has always been understood as bearing a moral nuance. At time this Christian thinking influences the understanding the term in certain contexts where the nuance could be different. This article explores the meaning of the term righteousness in Deuteronomy 6:25. The study attempts to undertake a contextual study of the term righteousness as used in Deuteronomy 6:24-25. The cluster of verbs used in Deut 6:24-25 reveal a word field within which the phrase “our righteousness” is situated, which is a context of the blessing of life, especially physical life. The parallel between the term *sedaqah* (righteousness) and *tob* (good) in the phrases “it shall be our righteousness” and “it shall be good to us” is pivotal for understanding the usage of the term righteousness in this passage. This relationship reveals that these two terms, *righteousness* and *good*, mirror each other. The clause “it shall be good to us” in 6:24 is a used in connection with the clause “to preserve your life.” The term good in this passage refers to the preservation of physical life. Because these two terms, righteousness and good are employed in the context of preservation of the physical life, it can be deduced that the term righteousness points to the blessings of physical life. Lexically, *sedaqah* conveys the nuance to justify, vindicate, deliver and prosper. Though the term righteousness may have a moral connotation, in this context it is not used in connection words that could suggest a moral aspect. Therefore, translating *sedaqah* as prosperity is congruent to the thoughts expressed in the rest of Deuteronomy 6.



Introduction

The translation and the interpretation of the statement “it will be our righteousness” in Deut 6:25 has been problematic. The statement is used in the passage as a result of obedience to the commandments of God.¹ The fact that obedience to the commandments results in righteousness stands in an apparent contradiction to the concept of righteousness by faith. The problem of understanding the term “righteousness” is reflected in the early translations of the Old Testament. The LXX renders the passage “there shall be mercy.”² The Targums translate it as “our merit” a translation followed in the Vulgate.³ English translations have either followed the LXX or translated as righteousness with a few variations.⁴ Defining the term righteousness in the passage has been equally difficult. According to Martin Luther the term is to be perceived in the context of righteousness by faith, thus he saw no contradiction.⁵ Wesley regarded it as the same as sincerely obeying the laws.⁶

Among many modern commentators on Deuteronomy the phrase is usually taken to denote a right relationship with God within the covenant context. A view advocated by von Rad and followed by many.⁷ According to McConville obedience in the context of the

¹Syntactically the statement is the apodosis with the protasis specifying obedience as the term of the condition.

²John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 126

comments that notion underlying the translation of “merit” in late Hebrew. came to mean mercy, or deeds of mercy, and so alms giving, this apparently influenced the translator, so that the translation of the whole passage would have been “we will have mercy”.

³See Bernard Grossfield “The Targums Onkelos to Deuteronomy” *Aramaic Bible* vol. 9(Wilmington: Michael Glazier Inc., 1988), and the Vulgate on Deuteronomy 6:25.

⁴The Douay Rheim American version translates the word as merciful, in JPS Tanakh it is merit, NAB renders it justice, several English versions such as; ESV, Darby Bible, NIV, KJV, NAS, NAU, translate it as righteousness, slight variations occur in NJB which translates it as “we will be in the right”

⁵Jaroslav Pelikan, “Lectures on Deuteronomy” *Luther’s Works* vol. 9 (Saint Louis; Concordia Publishing House, 1960)76. Luther views the phrase in the context of the first commandment which deals with love, faith and the fear of the Lord in these the whole law is fulfilled. He argues that righteousness in the text is imputed righteousness by God appeals to Psalms 24:5 to support the view.

⁶G. Roger Schoenhals, *Wesley Notes on the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press,1987), 138.

⁷Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, Old Testament Library, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 65. It is interesting to note that von Rad accepts the fact that the word for which the word righteousness is translated is just an approximation that denotes a correct attitude towards the claim of another or others. Therefore, he who accepts the commandments or believes is regarded as righteous that is to say his right relationship with God is in order. See Mayes A.D.H. *Deuteronomy*, New Century Bible, (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1976), 181, Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary of the Old Testament(NICOT)(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1976), 175, interestingly he interpreters with the element of imputed righteousness “we shall have righteousness”, Daniel Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, Word Biblical Commentary vol. 6A, (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 152, Eugene Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol.4 Broadman & Holman Publishers,1994), 175, he argues that the law provides for faith. J. A Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, (Leicester; Inter-varsity press,1974),127, views the phrase as denoting conformity



covenant was accepted by God as righteousness.⁸ However, Schmid views righteousness referred to in Deut 6:25 as having less to do with behaviour than to the wider state of affairs produced by the term *sedakah* (righteousness).⁹ His argument on the parallels between *sedakah* and *tov* (good) is valuable and needs to be explored further. The attempt by MacConville to view this parallel as moral order does not adequately see answer how best to render the term “our righteousness” in the passage.¹⁰

From the above review of the translation and the interpretation of the phrase “our righteousness,” it is apparent that translations and various interpretation of the phrase have been influenced by the linguistic and ideological contexts under which they were done. The earlier translations were influenced by the later use of the term in Hebrew which meant merit.¹¹ The understanding of the phrase has also been influenced by a fixation to look at the text from the perspective of the concept of righteousness by faith.¹² Therefore an attempt should be made to study the word in its immediate context and observe the influence of the words surrounding it, then translate the term within that context.¹³ The study and analysis of the immediate literary and historical context is essential for understanding the phrase our righteousness.

The phrase “our righteousness” in 6:25 has been difficult to define. Attempts to respond this difficulty have not adequately addressed how the phrase should be understood. The term righteousness due to its various uses in the Old Testament needs to be understood in

to God’s covenant. J. G. McConville *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary vol. 5 (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 144 argues that it indicates a standing before God.

⁸Daniel I. Block, “The Grace of the Torah; Mosaic Prescription of Life (Deut 4:1-8, 6:20-25)” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 Jan-March 2005, 19.

⁹H.H Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, Tubingen, 1968 quoted in J. G. MacConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy*, Journal for the study of the Old Testament Supplement series 33, (Sheffield; JSOT Press, 1984),14. He argues that righteousness would refer to reward a view which MacConville correctly disapproves as incorrect, however Schmid’s view of the connection between righteousness and good is intriguing.

¹⁰J. G. McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy*, Journal for the study of the Old Testament Supplement series 33, (Sheffield; JSOT Press, 1984),14.

¹¹See Wevers,126, on the notes on the translation of in the LXX.

¹²See Schullion J. J., “Righteousness in the Old Testament” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ABD),ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992)5:724, cautions against reading the Old Testament Texts through the eyes of the later understanding of the term righteousness, the Old Testament writers were not aware of the problems of church about righteousness in the first and sixteenth century.

¹³*Ibid*, the various nuances and its cognates shows that the Hebrew language conveys different meanings in different contexts. Therefore, the context within which the word is used and the other words or a word parallel to the term should be taken into consideration.



the context in which it used.¹⁴ It is therefore essential to look at the immediate literary and the historical context of the phrase in order to understand its meaning. The study is intended to assist in four areas. First to understand the meaning of the phrase “our righteousness” in Deut 6:25. Secondly, to demonstrate that the process of exegesis is to allow as far as possible for the text to direct our interpretation. The third purpose is to show that the Bible does not contradict itself. Finally, the study intends to highlight the motif of obedience and blessing in Deuteronomy.

The study employs a grammatical historical approach to the text, in which the grammar and syntax is analysed within the literary and historical context. In this study rhetorical features of the passage are explored to see how the structure assist in the understanding of the passage. The verbal distribution in the passage, and the occurrence of the same cluster elsewhere in the book is studied in order to observe the intended motif and its relevance to word righteousness. Finally, a word study on the term *sedakah* (righteousness) is done and its relationship with the term *tov* is also undertaken in order to observe how best to translate *sedakah* in Deut 6:25. The theological and practical application of the term are also explored.

The study proceeds as follows: The first section provides the background to the problem, the problem, significance and purpose, and methodology and procedure. The second section deals with exegesis of the passage, the items such as translation and the delimitation of the passage are undertaken. It is also in this section that analysis of the linguistic features of the passage is done, in order to observe how the rhetorical features enhance the understanding of the term righteousness, the verbal distribution in the passage is identified and the cluster of these verbs in the book is studied to see the purpose of the author in their use. In the third section word study is done on the term righteousness, its relationship with the motif expressed in the cluster of the verbs and with the word *tov*. In the final section is the summary and conclusion with the theological and practical application of the study.

¹⁴B. Johnson, “Sadaq” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*(TDOT) ed. G. Johanness Botterweck, Helmer Ringgen and Heinz-Josef Febry, trans. Douglass W. Stott.9: :253



Delimitation of the Passage

There are several features in the text that mark 6:20-25 as a unit. The *setuma* in 6:19 and 6:25 is an indication that 6:20-25 could be a unit. There is also the use of the phrase “just as the Lord spoke” in 6:19, and the statement, “as he commanded the Lord” in 6:25 marks the end of the unit (6:20-25).¹⁵ The other feature that designates 6:20-25 as a unit is the distant future time for the fulfilment of the actions as opposed to near future of the preceding section (6:13-19). The thrust of the message of the preceding section (6:13-19) involves activities in the near future or even the present. The imperfect verbal forms “you shall fear” “you shall serve in 6:13 and “you shall not follow” in 6:14 reminds of the Commandments in chapter five, probably a call to perform the actions in the present, or in the immediate future. However, the actions in 6:20-25 are rhetorically placed in the distant future by the use of the adverb particle *mahar* which denote tomorrow or the time to come.¹⁶

The rhetorical question-response feature of the section (6:20-25) is also another indication that the passage is a unit. The introductory statement “if your son asks you in the future” (6:20) leads to what can be treated as a rhetorical reported speech. The *qal* infinitive construct “saying” in 6:20 marks the question of the children, while the statement “then you shall say to your son in 6:21, marks the response of the parent in 6:21-25. The section can therefore be regarded as a rhetorical question-answer unit, concluding chapter 6.¹⁷

Linguistic Analysis

1. Analysis of the Context

The rhetorical question-response in Deut 6:20-25, concludes the discussion on the undivided, loyalty and faithfulness in Deut 6. The passage on the Ten Commandments in chapter 5 and the nature of the relationship between God and Israel in chapter 6 forms the first major section in the second of the three addresses found in the book of Deuteronomy.¹⁸ The

¹⁵See Deut 1:11-19; 2:1 10:5; 26:19 are the other places where the phrase is also used to limit the passage.

¹⁶Francis Brown, with R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with Appendix Containig the Biblical Aramaic*. Based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius. Oxford: Clarendon, 1952. S.v *mahar*, 563.

¹⁷David I. Block, “How Many Gods. An Investigation in the Meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4-5” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June 2004):207

¹⁸Opinions differ on the sources behind the final form and the structure of the book of Deuteronomy. Nevertheless, it is generally held that the final form consists of three addresses. This study approaches the text from the perspective of a final form. The three speeches are, the first 1:4-4:43 the second 4:44-28:68, the third is



second address (4:44-28:68) could be divided into two major sections. The first section (5-11) lays the foundation for the discussions on the various laws usually known as the Deuteronomic Laws in the second section (12-26).¹⁹ At the beginning of the second address is the repetition of the Ten Commandments in chapter 5. In chapter 6 there is an explanation of the principles of the covenant and their transmission to subsequent generations.

The explanation on the essence and the transmission of the principles of the covenant in Deut 6 forms the link between the Commandments and the other sections in the book. The uniqueness of Israel as a nation expressed in 6:3-5 is elaborated in chapters 7-11. The laws of their well-being and prosperity in 6: 3,18, are further elaborated in the discussion on the Deuteronomic laws, laws that would govern them as a people in the land that they were to possess (12-26).²⁰ It is therefore significant that in this chapter the call to the transmission of the principles of the covenant forms a critical component.

The concluding section of chapter 6 (6:20-25) underscores the basis of obeying the commandments in the life of the community of Israel. The question of the son, “what *is the meaning* of these statutes and commands” could serve as the title of the unit. The response of the parents(6:21-25) captures the motive and the purpose of obedience.²¹ This unit is important to the study undertaken in this paper because of the problem in understanding the use of the phrase our righteousness in 6:25.

2. Analysis of Deut 6:25

There are several linking particles in 6:20-25 that are significant in the understanding of the passage. The use of the connective particle *waw* is critical in this respect. The unit begins with the rhetorical device of an anticipated question introduced by the circumstantial particle *ki* making the phrase to be translated “when your son asks you in the future”.²² The rest of vs. 20 is the question of the son. The anticipated response is introduced by the imperfect verb

29;1- 30:20 the rest (31:34) are regarded as appendices. 5-11 the third 12-26 the fourth 27-30 the postscript 32-34.

¹⁹The principles outlined in 5-11 are expounded in 12-26

²⁰See Block, ‘How many Gods’,207, on the influence of Deut 6 on the entire second address in the book of Deuteronomy.

²¹The response of the parent to the child points both to the past and the future acts of God as the motives for obedience.

²²Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, Guide to Hebrew Syntax(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005),151-152, he observes the use of the particle in introducing conditional sentences and its circumstantial use.



“you shall say” and should be understood in the context of the circumstantial particle in vs.20, thus translated “then you shall say to your son”.

The response of the parent to the son constitutes the rest of the passage (6:21b-25). The response of the parent can be divided into two major sections. The first can be viewed as the motivation (6:21b-23). The second is the inferential statement in regard to obedience and its results.

The first section of the response presenting the motivation consists of four statements. The first deals with the status of the Israelites before their deliverance from Egypt, “and you were slaves to Pharaoh”. The second beginning with the *hiphil wayiqqtol* could be understood as contrasting their state in slavery. The connective particle *waw* could be translated as “but”, thus “but the Lord brought us out from Egypt with a mighty arm”. The third is a further explanation of the phrase “the mighty arm of God”, expressed as “great and terrifying signs and wonders against Pharaoh and against the Egyptians, so the Lord brought them from there” (vs.22-23a). The forth and last statement of motivation is introduced by the adverb *lemaan* (vs.23b). It presents the purpose of the deliverance which is the entrance into and possession of the promised land.

The motivation ties both the deliverance and inheritance of to the covenant. The phrases “but He brought you out” and “He brought us in” together with the statement ‘is giving to us’ are connected to the covenant, which is expressed in the relative clause “which He swore to our fathers.” The deliverance and possession of the land, both the past and the present acts are attributed to God and the present generation can feel part of the covenant community.²³

The last section of the response (vs. 24-25) can be regarded as inferential. The section is introduced by the imperfect verb the connective *waw* attached to the verb renders the statement “so the Lord commanded us.” Understood as such, makes the command to be perceived in the context of the motivation stated in vs.21-23a. The motivation is rooted in their deliverance from Egypt and possession of the land both activities the author intends to be understood in the context of covenant. The command of the Lord is complimented by two

²³Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 107.



infinitive phrases; “to observe all these statutes” (vs.24b), and “to fear the Lord” (vs. 24c). The last two clauses (24 d, e) function as the purpose of the command and its infinitive complements in 24 a, b, and c. Therefore “well being and being kept alive” is the purpose of the statement “the Lord commanded to observe the statutes and the judgements and to fear the Lord God”.

3. Parallel Features

The inferential section concludes with a conditional statement “if we shall carefully observe all these statutes before the Lord our God just as he commanded us, then it shall be righteousness to us”. The apodosis of this conditional statement appears first in the Hebrew text probably the intention is to emphasize the connection between the conditional statement and vs.24.

a. The Play on Words

The last infinitive phrases of vs.24 form a play on words with the apodosis of 25a.

24d. *letob lanu kal hayamayim (so it will be well with us always)*

24e. *lehayotnu kehayom hazeh (and it will preserve us today)*

25a. *wusedaqah tiyeh lanu (ant it will be our favor/ prosperity)*

The play on words in 24 d, e and 25 a shows the connection between vs. 24 and 25. It is probable that the verb “He commanded” in 24a and its infinitive complements in 24 b, c together with the purpose clauses in 24 d e are expressed in the conditional statement in verse 25. There are several words and phrases that are repeated in both vs. 24 and 25. The statement “so the Lord commanded us” 24a is reflected in the phrase “Just as He commanded us in 25 d. The statement “to observe all these statutes” is almost exactly mirrored in the statement “if we carefully observe all these statutes” The major difference is in the purpose clauses. The purpose of observing the commands in vs24 is for the “well-being always and to be kept alive” while the purpose expressed in the apodosis in 25a is “righteousness shall be to us”. The difference and similarities show that the understanding of the meaning of the phrase “our righteousness” should be explored within this context.

**b. A Chiasm**

The relationship between vs.24 and 25 can be illustrated in form of a chiasm. The clauses in v. 24 are reflected in a reverse order by the ones in vs. 25. the infinitive purpose clause stands at the center of the chiasm.²⁴ The chiasm illustrates a key motif in the book Deuteronomy, which can be described as command- obedience-life.²⁵ This relationship is explored in this section in order to observe its influence on the phrase “our righteousness”.

A And the Lord commanded us 24a

B to keep all these statutes to fear the Lord our God 24 b, c

C to be well to us always 24d

D to preserve us as today 24e

C' and it shall be righteousness to us 25a

B' if we shall carefully observe all these statutes before the Lord our
God 25b,c

A' just as he commanded us 25 c

C. Parallel Features and the Term Righteousness

The parallel features of the passage are helpful in understanding motifs intended in the passage and how that can help in understanding the use of the word “righteousness”. The motif command-obedience and life seems to be the emphasis of the structure. Each of these is analysed in order to understand their implication on the passage.

1. Command-Obedience

The sections AB and A'B' of the chiasm show the element of command and obedience. The obedience to the commandments is essential in the preservation of life. The chiasm in the balancing of the verbs in BB' helps in understanding the nature of obedience required. The verbs “keep” and “fear” are paralleled with the verbs “carefully keep”. These verbs denote a

²⁴See Mcconville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy*, 14, also observes a concentric structure with slight variations in the clauses for example he splits 24 b, and c into two separate clauses in the structure, the centrality of the verb to preserve life is also omitted, however the parallel between the phrases “to be well with us and “it will be our righteousness” See also Mayes, 181, he alludes to the chiasm by mentioning the parallel between the words righteousness and good.

²⁵Block, “The Grace of Torah...” 181, describes this motif as Hearing-Listening-Obedience-and life.



wholehearted devotion, which is the theme of the whole chapter. The verb “to fear” is also used in 6:2 and introduces the concept of loving the Lord wholeheartedly.

The parallel between the phrase “to fear the Lord” and the prepositional phrase “before the Lord” in the B, B’ of the chiasm could inform the meaning of both phrases, there is a connotation of service, which carries the nuance of a wholehearted service stated at the beginning of the chapter. Therefore, observing the commands is a heartfelt devotion to God within the covenant relationship of love. The point stressed in the section BB’ of the chiasm is that the preservation of life is a result of keeping the covenant relationship.

It is significant therefore to see the verbal distribution in the passage and observe how this cluster is used in other parts of the book of Deuteronomy. The cluster of the verbs to be identified are; command, observe, fear, to be well, and to preserve. This is intended to see the nuance they carry in the different contexts in which they appear this can lead us to appreciate the meaning of the term righteousness as implied in the passage.

2. Verbal Distribution in the Passage

The distribution of the verbs in the passage indicates a movement from the command expressed in the verb “he commanded us” to the expected response by man in the verbs to observe and fear. The purpose is expressed in the infinitives *to our good* and *to preserve us*. In this section a study is carried on the verbs which express command and obedience.

A. The Verb “To Fear”

The verb “he commanded” is complemented by two infinitive phrases “to observe all these statutes” and “to fear the Lord our God”. These two infinitive phrases are used to complete the verbal idea “He commanded”. The parallelism implied in the two infinitive phrases is that observing the commandments is fearing the Lord.²⁶ Therefore it is significant to understand the use of the verb fear in the context of observing the commandments in the passage and in the broader context of the book of Deuteronomy.

²⁶George Braulik, “Law as Gospel, Justification and Pardon According to Deuteronomical Torah” *Interpretation* 38 (1964), 7. Argues that though the verb fear in the passage comes after the verb obey, there are several incidences in the book of Deuteronomy (5:29; 10:12; 17:19; 31:12) where the verb occurs before the verb obey. Therefore, the *lamed* attached to the verb fear should be taken as the *lamed* of reference.



The word fear appears three times in Deuteronomy 6. The first occurrence is in 6:2, where it is coupled with the verbs “observe” and “command” in the context of the instruction of the children in the future with the same expected result of their well-being. Immediately after the text there is a call to Israel to obey v.3 and to love the Lord wholeheartedly vs 4, 5. In the second occurrence in 6:13 the verb fear is used with the verb “serve.” In the chiasmic structure of 24-25 the two infinitive phrases, “to observe” and “to fear” are balanced with the statement “to carefully observe all these statutes, to serve the Lord our God”.

It is therefore apparent that both the ideas captured in the first occurrence of the phrase “observing the commandments” in 6:2, and the idea of serving in the second occurrence of the word fear in 6:13 is emphasized in the last unit 24-25 by the parallel of B, B’. The implications are the command and the anticipated obedience is to not to be understood as a legalistic observance of the commands but as a wholehearted response to the Lord. This response does not only evoke a physical response but wholehearted response carried in the phrase “serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”.

The broader use of the term fear in the book of Deuteronomy (10:12; 10:17; 13:4) emphasizes this aspect of obedience. The verb fear relates with other words such as, love, serve indicating devotion. The fact that the obedience called for is not legalistic but a heartfelt devotion to God is carried in the use of the word.

The parallel between the statement “to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God” 24 b c with the statement “if we carefully observe all these statutes before the Lord our God” 25 b is significant in understanding obedience. It seems that the phrase “to fear the Lord our God” corresponds the phrase “before our Lord”. The word before our Lord has the connotation of service.²⁷ The emphasis in all these words is to point out that the activity of man in obeying the commandments is a devotional service.

B. Verb Cluster

The verbs of whose cluster is significant in helping to find the word-field within which the phrase “our righteousness” is situated are studied in this section. These are the verbs used in

²⁷Brown, BDB, s.v *Lipine* 816.



Deut 6:24-25. These are verbs such as: obey, observe, command, fear, keep, serve, walk, and do. The cluster of these words are identified in the various contexts of their use in Deuteronomy in order to assess the purpose.

The Text	The Verbs	The Purpose
4:1-2	obey, do, observe, command	so that you may live, and possess the land
4:5-6	command, observe, do	for that is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the people
4:13-15	command, do observe	in the land you are passing over to possess
4:40	observe command	go well with you, live long
5:32-33	observe, command,	that you may live, be well with you, prolong your life
6:2	fear, keep,	prolonged days
6:17-18	keep (diligently) command	maybe well, go in and possess
6:24	keep, do, fear, command	for our good, to preserve
6:25	keep, do, command	for our righteousness
7:11-15	keep do, command	God will love bless you, increase your number



8:6	keep, walk, fear,	God bringing you into the good land
10:12-13	Fear, love, walk, serve, do	for your good
11:8	keep, command	be strong, go in to possess, your days to be long
11:13	obey(diligently), command, love, serve	He will give rain, grain grass, wine, and you will be satisfied



The Text	The Verbs	The Purpose
11:22	keep(diligently), do, love, walk, cleave	the Lord will drive away
12:28	obey (diligently), command	that it may go well with you
15:5-6	obey(diligently) keep, do, command	the Lord will bless you, you will lend many nations and rule them
26:16-19	keep do, walk, obey	declared God's people, His possession, high above other nations
28:1	obey(diligently), keep, do, command	God will set you high , all these blessing will overtake you.
28:15	obey(not), keep, do, command	Curses will overtake you
28:45	obey(not), keep, do, command	curses will overtake you
30:2	obey, return, command	restored and gathered
30:8	obey, do, command	prospered abundantly



30;16	love, walk, keep	live, increase, blessed
32:46	obey diligently	life, prolong life
34:4	commanded	possession

C. The Verb to Live

There are several observations that can be made from the table above. The first one is that obedience to the commandments results into blessings of life.²⁸ The theme of preservation of life which is central in the concentric structure of 6:24-25 is expressed throughout the book as the table above indicates. The verb expressed in the infinitive phrase “to preserve us alive or to keep alive” seems to be the purpose of the commands that the Lord had given.²⁹ Keeping the commandments results in what is expressed in the infinitive purpose clauses in 24 d, e. The phrases “to be well with us and “to preserve us” serves as the purpose of the command “to carefully observe these statutes and to fear the Lord our God”.

In the chiastic structure above the infinitive purpose clause “to preserve us alive” appears at the center of the structures. The implication is that the preservation of life is the central purpose of the obedience to the commands. The motif of good life or long life occurs throughout the book of Deuteronomy.³⁰ The preservation of life could be the main thrust of the book.³¹ It is in this context of keeping the commandments and the preservation of life that the word righteousness is used. It is therefore important to look at the significance of the theme of preserving life in Deuteronomy.

²⁸The theme of the law preserving life is found at the beginning of the book(4:1-4) and at the end of the book (30:15-20)

²⁹The first three clauses in 24 a, b, and c express the command of the Lord as complemented by the infinitives “to observe” and “to fear”

³⁰See Deut. 1:14, 25, 35, 39; 3:25; 4:21f; 5:33; 6:10f, 18, 24; 8:7, 10, 12; 9:6; 10:13; 11:17; 12:28; 15:16; 19:13; 23:17; 26:11; 28:11f, 47; 30:9, 15;

³¹At the opening of the address in 4:1-4 and at the end in 30:15-19 this theme is given.



The verb “to live” is used several times in the book of Deuteronomy.³² The verb appears 4 times in 6:24; 8:1; 20:16; 32:39, which implies preservation of life.³³ Observing the commandments in most of the passages in Deuteronomy results in the preservation of life, the verb *lehayyotenu* expresses this thought³⁴. The concept of the law preserving life is well expressed in Deut 8. Three times the word “life” appears in the first section of the passage, which invites the Israelites to recall God’s providence for them.³⁵ The first section of the chapter has a chiasmic structure. This chiasm emphasizes the centrality of the preservation of life as the purpose of the commands of God.³⁶ The chiasm below illustrates the significance of the commandments in the preservation of life.

A Carefully obey, so that you may live in the land the lord promised your fathers (8:1)

B The Lord led you to test you (8:2)

C Fed you on Manna (8:3a)

D So that you may know that man does not live by bread alone (8:3b)

C. Clothed you (8:4)

B As a man disciplines his child so the Lord disciplines you (8:5)

A. Observe the commands of the Lord fear Him for he brings you to possess the land (8:6-7)

The above structure shows that the purpose of the commands is to preserve life, nevertheless obedience is based on the covenant theme is called for from the Israelites. The theme of the preservation of life in Deut 8: 1-7 parallels the one of the text or study in Deut 6:24-25. This understanding informs our interpretation and understanding of the phrase “our righteousness” in 6:25 by showing that the context of the usage of the word has the theme of physical well-being or prosperity.

³²Deut 4:1, 33, 42; 5:24, 26, 33; 6:24; 7:22; 8:1, 3; 16:20; 19:4f; 20:16; 30:16, 19; 32:39; 33:6;

³³Norbert Lohfink, “Deuteronomy 6:25 ‘To Maintain us’” in *Shama’aree Talmon. Studies on the Bible and Near East Presented to Shamayahu Talmon*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 112

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Christensen, *Deuteronomy* 1-11, 120 observes a structure of remember and forget in the passage, the first section of the passage remember is structured in a chiasmic form

³⁶There has been some debate on the translation of the word to mean creating of life in the sense of spiritual life. However, Block, “Grace of Torah...”, 15 opines that it should be seen as physical life the structure of chapter 8 confirms this



d. The Parallel between Good and Righteousness

The relationship of the phrase “our righteousness” and other phrases in the passage can assist in directing how best to render the word in this context. The phrase is in parallel in the chiasm with the infinitive phrase “It shall be well with us always” In this section an attempt is made to explore the use of the term righteousness in relation to the parallel word “good.” First a brief survey of the term *sedaqah* is done, then its parallel with *tov* is undertaken.

The Hebrew word for righteousness in Deuteronomy 6:25 *sedaqah* has several other cognates in the Old Testament. The word is derived from the verbal root *sadaq*, which in the *qal* form means to be just (Ps. 19:20), a just cause (Job 38: 26) upright behaviour or conduct. (Job 15: 14; 23:3). In the *Piel* form it carries the meaning of absolving from guilt. In the *niphal* form it could mean to justify vindicating the cause or to save.³⁷ The masculine form of the word *sedeq* carries the meaning of what is righteous 25:15 33:19, it could refer to the righteousness of the government its laws, (Lev 19:15; Deut 1:16), the word can also refer to the attributes of God Ps 89:15 85:11, or righteousness as ethically right (Job 35:8 Eccl 7:15). The word can also carry a nuance of justifying, vindicating, deliverance and prosperity.³⁸

The feminine form which occurs in the passage of study, is used 157 times in the Old Testament. It denotes justice of the king or the ruler (Is 9:6 Amos 5:7, 2Sam 8:15) or God’s attribute of justice (Is 1:27; Daniel 9:7). The word can also denote truthfulness (Isaiah 48:1; Zechariah 8:8), or ethical right (Gen 30:33, Isaiah 33:5, Ezekiel 14:14). There is also a connotation in the word of vindication, justification salvation, in the sense of God’s righteousness (Isaiah 45:8; 46: 13), in terms of the people the word *sedaqah* means prosperity (Joel 2:23: Prov. 8:18). Finally, it can also refer to righteous acts i.e. Gods act of vindicating his people and also man’s moral conduct acts³⁹

The word *sedaqah* appears in the Pentateuch 10 times and is found only in the books of Genesis and Deuteronomy. It occurs six times Deuteronomy. It has been suggested that in most of the occurrence the word has a legal nuance in Deuteronomy.⁴⁰ This could be probably so, however given the fluid nature of the term righteousness each usage needs to be

³⁷Brown, BDB, *sedaqah* 843,

³⁸Ibid,

³⁹Brown, BDB s.v *sedaqah*, 844

⁴⁰Scullion, 5:727



analysed.⁴¹ Block's assumption that because in Deut 33:22 the word is used with justice thus this meaning governs the usage in the whole book needs to be taken with caution.⁴²

In the passage under study the word *sedaqa* is used in parallel with the word *tov* in the context of command-obedience-life. Both words are used in the context of preservation of life, especially physical life or prosperity.⁴³ Both words are used syntactically as purpose clauses. The word *tov* in this context is a reference to life, thus "well-being" and does not necessarily carry an ethical nuance.⁴⁴ The word is used several times in the book of Deuteronomy, as an adjective describing the good land, and as a verb describing the well-being and long life of the Israelites, it has also been used as a noun to indicate a state. The use in this context is most likely that of noun expressing a state.⁴⁵

The parallel between *sedaqah* and *tov* probably indicates that it could mean prosperity.⁴⁶ This is because of the immediate context and the broader context of the book of Deuteronomy, in which the motif of obedience leading to good life in the promised land is expressed in the cluster of the verbs used in 6:25. It is also noteworthy that most commentators observe suzerainty treaties of the Hitites as a background to this text.⁴⁷ In the suzerainty treaties a king would pronounce favor upon a vassal the same background is observed for the term righteousness in Genesis 15:16. This understanding supports the translation of the word as favor.

Summary and Conclusion

The phrase "our righteousness" has been problematic to understand and interpret.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, understood in the context of 6:24-25 the phrase carries forward the thought expressed in the infinitive purpose clauses "to be well with us" and "to preserve us" the term our righteousness could be understood as "our prosperity" or "our favor" in 24 d, and e.

⁴¹Ibid

⁴²Block, "The Grace of Torah...",15.

⁴³Lohfink, 112.

⁴⁴See Block, "Grace of the Torah...",16, observes that parallel indicates the ethical nuance of term "good" and McConville, *Law and Theology*, 14, argues that the term relationship could refer to moral order. It is interesting that he see synonymity between the two terms.

⁴⁵See Brown, BDB, S.v *tob* 373

⁴⁶Scullion, ABD, 734 suggests that a combination *sedaqah* and *tov* of and could mean prosperity.

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⁴⁸Various translation i.e LXX renders it mercy, Targums merit, Chaldee, reward. A few English follow the LXX AND Targums while many translate it as righteousness.



There are several reasons for this kind of interpretation. First the positioning of the phrase in the sentence is significant the noun “righteousness” precedes the verb. And the apodosis appears before the protasis, this could be because the author intends to connect the phrase with the previous phrase in 24 d, and e. Probably he intends that the clauses “to be well with us, “to preserve us” and “to be our righteousness” to be understood in the same way.⁴⁹ The relationship of these three clauses indicates that the probable translation of the phrase “our righteousness” as “our prosperity”.

The cluster of verbs found in Deut 6:24-25 indicate a word field within which the phrase “our righteousness” is situated. It is a context of the blessing of life, especially physical. This theme is emphasized in the chiasm of 6:24-25 and throughout the book in the places where this cluster of verbs are found. The motif of command- obedience- life(blessings) is the thematic context of the word “righteousness” in 6:24-25.⁵⁰ The term righteousness in this context is synonymous with the blessing and thus could be rendered prosperity or favour.⁵¹

The parallel between *sedaqah* and *tov* is significant in the understanding of the meaning of the phrase “our righteousness. The use of the word *tov* in 6:24 can be better understood relation to the clause “to preserve your life” These two clauses are parallel and so have the same meaning. Though the term *tov* may have a moral connotation. In this context it is not used in connection words that could suggest moral aspect.⁵²

Therefore translating *sedaqah* as prosperity is congruent to the thought expressed in the rest of chapter 6. The theme of prosperity as a result of observing the covenant relationship is expressed throughout the passage. At the very beginning “that your sons and grandsons ...may live long” 6:2, Again “that it may be well with you and prosper you” in 6:18. The last section of the passage 6:20-25 discusses this thought in the form of question-answer. And captures well the motif of command obedience and life in the context of the

⁴⁹See Mayes, 181 and McConville, *The Law and Theology*, 14, both underscore the significance of this parallel in understanding the term righteousness.

⁵⁰The parallel between blessing and righteousness is also made in Ps 24:5

⁵¹Rendering *sedaqah* as prosperity is not unique to this text it is also found in Prov 8: 18 and probably, Joel 2:23, both are contexts of blessing.

⁵²Block’s “Grace of the Torah...” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 16, observes the parallel between *sedaqah* and *tov* but views *tov* as carrying the connotation of morality. However, viewing the context as having a connotation physical well-being would lead to rendering it prosperity.



covenant. The covenant is both the theme and the context of the passage. The Suzerainty treaties state the role of the king declaring the vassal righteous that is declaring favor towards him. Therefore, the literary and the historical context indicates that the most probable rendering of the term *sedaqah* could be prosperity.

The debate on the term righteousness as carrying a nuance of legalistic righteousness is therefore irrelevant. This is because, first, the context connotes covenant setting of whole hearted love and loyalty. The motivation of obedience is God's acts of delivering them from Egypt and giving them the land of Canaan "as He swore to their fathers." Secondly the literary context, the parallels of the word *sedaqah* and the historical context king-vassal treaties suggest the word prosperity would be a fitting translation.

The study therefore shows that the understanding of the term righteousness is determined by the context. The meaning of the term in 6:25 indicates how God in various terms expresses his attitude toward men. The three clauses in 6:24-25 "It shall be well with us always," "to preserve your life," and "righteousness to us" shows how in different terms God is expressing the end result of keeping the covenant. For the Christians in the world today the passage is a perpetual reminder on how God intends to prosper us.

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